

DEVELOPING THE 2008 SUNSMART CAMPAIGN

Summary findings of qualitative research with young people, into motivations and perceptions surrounding getting a tan, sunbeds, and skin cancer, and exploring communication channels, and ideas for impactful campaign formats and creative concepts.

1. Background, Method and Sample

Research was required to help develop the 2008 SunSmart campaign, which aimed to focus on young people.

CM Insight were contracted by Cancer Research UK to conduct a qualitative investigation among 12-24 year olds to

- identify motivations for seeking a tan and using sunbeds, and factors that will deter this age group from using sunbeds, and encourage them to stay safe in the sun
- investigate awareness of the link between excessive exposure to UVR and the associated health risks
- explore the perceived relevance of skin cancer to this age group
- identify communication channels to reach the target audience most effectively
- explore ideas and options for impactful campaign formats and creative concepts

The research took place in February/March 2008.

Eight 90 minute groups with between four and eight respondents in each, and six 60 minute depth interviews, were conducted, across four different locations. The groups were as follows:

- Girls aged 12-13, BC1
- Boys aged 12-13, C2D
- Girls aged 14-15, C2D
- Boys aged 14-15, BC1
- Girls aged 16-18, BC1
- Boys aged 16-18, C2D
- Women aged 19-24, C2D
- Men aged 19-24, BC1

The depth interviews were with female sunbed users under 18. All respondents were interested in getting a tan, and some in the groups had used sunbeds.

Findings and recommendations contained in this report are derived solely from this investigation.

2. Conclusions

- A tan is considered very desirable for many young people. It is believed people look 'better', which can lead to a sense of greater confidence and well being.
- Rather than try to counteract the desirability of a suntan, it is more realistic to try to change behaviour such that tans are achieved more safely.
- Sunbeds offer an accessible, convenient and relatively quick fix, and their usage may be encouraged by mothers who use them.
- Young people are not ignorant of the connection between sun/sunbeds and skin cancer, but tend to pay it lipservice only. Their

desire for a tan is stronger than their fear; moreover, they justify their behaviour by pointing out the greater risks they do **not** take. Some simply feel that whether or not they get skin cancer is out of their control.

- The task is to bring young people's latent awareness of the danger of sun/sunbeds to the fore, and encourage re-examination. This is best done by **increasing their fear of the worst, helping them to understand just why sunbeds/the sun are dangerous, and stressing that they can and should take responsibility for their skin.**
- A drip feed approach is envisaged, with the result that irresponsible tanning becomes culturally frowned upon over time, and behaviour shifts gradually. For some this will be increasing the carefulness they have already begun; for others stalling a possible future desire to go on a sunbed; and so on.
- Key target groups suggested are:
 - Diehard, less responsible tan seekers
 - Children at school – to deter them from ever going on a sunbed
 - Mothers who are sunbed users themselves

3. Specific recommendations for the SunSmart campaign

- **Message content should ideally**
 - Frighten/shock; mention cancer; have clear CR-UK endorsement
 - Explain what damaged/burnt skin actually is
 - Be youth specific
 - ...and emphasise preciousness of young skin, and importance of 'responsibility'
 - Stress the 'ugliness' consequences of damaged skin; a tan is about physical beauty – showing something that counteracts beauty therefore has particular force
 - Exploit the idea of something sinister lurking beneath the superficially un concerning; skin cancer's beginning is by definition 'on the surface'/small and ordinary looking; but cancer by definition invades, expands and spreads, and the contrast inherent here is a potentially impactful one
 - Include hard facts and figures
 - Use case studies
- **In relation to sunbeds specifically:**
 - The message should be about discouragement, aimed primarily at girls
 - Of those explored in the research, a specifically compelling message is: *'the intensity of UV rays from a sunbed can be up to 10-15 times as powerful as the midday sun'*
 - Other powerful messages are: *'using a sunbed once a month or more can increase your risk of skin cancer by more than*

half and *'using sunbeds before the age of 35 increases your risk of developing skin cancer by up to 75%'*

- The idea of 'paying for cancer' could be played on
- 'Before and after' scenarios (highlighting negative changes) have impact
- **Visually:**
 - Communication should major on the visual, with minimal copy
 - Graphic, ugly, shocking images are recommended, the more real (photographic, ideally), the better
 - Contrasts/comparisons work well
- **Tone:**
 - Serious, no nonsense
 - Punchy, snappy
 - Not humorous
- **Channels/vehicles**
 - Posters/billboards recommended – relatively cheap; different contexts; good for visual material
 - Also consider press advertising and POS material
 - Comprehensive drive via school PHE lessons with KS3 pupils

4. Additional findings and insights from the research

- There is a prevalent belief that 'skin heals itself'.

"It always repairs." (Boy 14-15, Kent).

"You think of it as sunburn, not damage; you burn and it heals."
(Girl, 17, London)

There is a lack of appreciation about what constitutes 'damaged' skin generally, and the idea that **irreversible** damage is done via the sun/sunbeds is a revelation, and could prompt a re-think.

- Reported use of sunscreen suggests it is often inadequately applied, with low factors being used, or application taking place post burning.

"Mum tells you to put it on, you're going to get burnt. If she wasn't there, I couldn't be bothered to put it on."
(Boy, 14-15, Kent)

- 'Ageing' of skin is acknowledged as an issue for women – but for these young people is something their mothers are preoccupied with, not them.

- Fake tanning options appear to be on the increase, and there are some satisfied users. However, there is also an association with unnatural 'orange' look.
- The 'rules' in sunbed establishments appear to have a great degree of flexibility, for example in terms of age, time spent there, use of goggles, etc

"They don't ask your age or explain the risks. There's one person on the desk to give change."

(Girl, 16, Cardiff)

- With respect to skin cancer, many feel it is not the most serious of cancers, and in any case associate it more with older people.

"I think it would affect older people more – they've been in the sun more"

(Boy, 12-13, Cardiff)

- Young people experience a tide of health cautions and advice; hard hitting messages are needed to cut through to their consciousness and have impact on behaviour.