

TO: Suzanne LeVan

DATE: April 23, 1993

FROM: Shari Teitelbaum/Norma Suter

SUBJECT: Qualitative Research on Merit Direct Mail Campaigns - Final Report

The following provides a summary of findings from qualitative research conducted in Chicago, IL on April 16, 1993. The objectives of the research were to gauge consumer response to three proposed direct mail pieces for Merit and to provide input into determining which mailing is most appropriate for an August 1993 drop. The three mailings shown were "The Lighter Side of Lighting Up", "The Lighter Side of Music", and "The Lighter Side of Cookin' Out". A total of seven mini-groups (3-5 respondents per group) were conducted among female and male Merit and Merit Ultra Light smokers, ages 25-49.

KEY FINDINGS

- Consistent with previous research, "The Lighter Side" theme immediately communicated the low tar positioning of Merit. The flavor message was secondary, at best. However, some Merit smokers commented that they were already aware of the "good taste" of Merit and therefore did not "need" reinforcement of the taste message.
- "Cookin' Out" received the most favorable response of the three mailings, evoking an image of "good time with friends". Imagery was viewed as consistent with Merit. This mailing was appealing to both men and women as everyone easily related to the enjoyment associated with barbecuing. The cooking out theme was particularly relevant and attractive given the fact that the barbecuing season is approaching. Few expressed any objections to linking smoking and eating.
- "The Lighter Side of Lighting Up" was also well received as it was very straightforward. Those who had difficulty interpreting the other mailings felt comfortable with this because the offer was directly related to smoking. "Upper end", "sophisticated" lighters were liked the best, as they were more in line with these smokers perceptions of Merit.
- "The Lighter Side of Music" prompted thoughts of "easy listening" music. This image was associated with "older" adults and was not appealing to the Merit smokers we spoke with, regardless of age. The mailing was also confusing; most felt that the visuals conflicted with the theme. The items offered did not generate much appeal as they are probably too upscale or "high tech" for our audience. Note that the colors used in this mailing prompted very favorable responses.
- Once again, those items which were viewed as practical or useful were liked best --- i.e., barbecue and accessories and classy, sleek lighters. These items were perceived to fit with the Merit image.

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- Many consumers noted that appropriate items for future "The Lighter Side" offers would be lightweight items, such as light jackets, windbreakers, etc. In addition, for "Lighting Up", many thought functional items such as cigarette cases, smokeless ashtrays or coffee mugs would be appropriate.

DETAILED FINDINGS

Overall, "The Lighter Side" themes immediately brought the low tar heritage of Merit to mind, a meaningful benefit to Merit smokers. The flavor message was seen as secondary by some, while others did not comment on it at all. The copy point, "Great flavor at every level of low tar", was very appealing and easily understood. It reminded Merit smokers of the three low tar Merit brands. The taste message within this statement was appreciated by some; however, other Merit smokers commented that they were already aware of Merit's good taste and therefore did not need to see it here.

"Cookin' Out"

Imagery communicated by this campaign was appealing and very consistent with Merit smokers' image of the brand. Imagery conveyed included fun, outdoor activities, relaxed casual times with friends and an activity which appeals to "everyday" people. Most focused on the good feelings associated with outdoor barbecues. Few expressed any objections to linking smoking and eating. In fact, some suggested that cigarette smoking tends to be "socially acceptable" at an outdoor event and could see themselves relaxing at a barbecue, smoking a Merit.

Both men and women responded favorably to the recipes within the mailing. Recipes were seen as an "immediate" reward and were of interest because they are useful. These smokers readily linked the theme of "lighter cooking" with the image of Merit as a lighter cigarette.

The premiums offered in this mailing were appealing to both men and women. Each of the items featured was seen as useful or practical, something "most people" would like to have.

"Lighting Up"

This mailing immediately communicates the low tar positioning of Merit in a straightforward manner. In addition, the items featured directly relate to smoking, increasing comprehension among all smokers.

Lighters as premium offers were generally appealing to Merit smokers. Those that fit with these smokers perceptions of Merit as a more sophisticated brand were liked best. Most felt that the thinner and sleeker lighters shown best represent Merit's image -- a "lighter" look for a quality brand, a brand with a somewhat "classy" touch (though not "out of reach").

- Lighters routinely noted as most appealing included the gold and black lighter, marbled blue/gray lighter and the red and black lighter.
- The Zippo lighter with the fisherman was often rejected because its bulky and heavier looking appearance contradicted the lighter message.

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- Mid range lighters attracted some attention, due to the bright colors. These lighters were seen as fun, consistent with the mailing. Some felt that these lighters may be offered for a "few" UPC's, while the upper end lighters would likely require more proofs of purchase.
- The "novelty" lighters (juke box, stop light, microphone, spark plug) appealed to some who like to collect "fun" items. However, most felt that these items contradicted the more "classy" image associated with Merit.

"Music"

This mailing immediately brought to mind "light" music heard on easy listening FM stations or classical music. Merit smokers in their twenties saw light music for the 30+ crowd, while those who were over 30 didn't want to identify themselves with "old people's" music. There was no connection between the lightweight electronic offers and Merit's low tar positioning.

Note that the colors used on this mailing prompted favorable responses. The blue tones suggest a sense of "lightness" readily associated with low tar brands.

However, the mailing itself was perceived to be somewhat contradictory as the visuals conflicted with the theme. For example, the young adult male on the cover suggests a fun, outdoor activity appealing to younger adults. However, few believed that he would be listening to light music on the headphones.

Few were impressed by the sweepstakes grand prize, a state-of-the-art Sony MiniDisc player. Some responded favorably to the FM Walkman continuity offer. In general, though, most of the smokers associated the items offered in this mailing with adults who listen to "current music", not "light" music. These items are probably more suitable for young adults (early 20's).

NEXT STEPS

The next steps involve mapping out Merit's Direct Mail schedule for the remainder of 1993 and early 1994, maximizing the effectiveness of existing creative. The current schedule is as follows:

Lighter Side VI	August 1993
Lighter Side VII	October 1993
Lighter Side VIII	November/December 1993

- Leo Burnett will recommend an alternate theme for the August mailing, taking "seasonality" into account (i.e., "The Lighter Side of Fall"). "The Lighter Side of Cookin' Out" will be used in the Spring on 1994, prior to the prime barbecue season.
- Agency will revise "The Lighter Side of Lighting Up", possibly for the October mailing. The graphic treatment should be lighter in color/tonality and softer overall.
- PM Purchasing will begin sourcing/pricing lighters, ashtrays, coffee mugs, etc. for the "smoking related" bounceback incentives.

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- Agency will explore alternate themes for the November/December mailing. "The Lighter Side of Lightening Up" will be explored using lightweight bounceback offers such as nylon jackets and sweatpants. "The Lighter Side of Winter" will also be developed using seasonally appropriate items such as a fleece pull-over.
- An additional theme to be explored will be "The Lighter Side of Saving", using U.S. Savings Bonds as incentives.

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