

## Persuasive Memo Assignment

### Case\*

According to the Centers for Disease Control, the adverse health effects from cigarette smoking account for nearly 1 of every 5 deaths each year in the United States. Now that juries across the country have begun to hold the cigarette industry responsible for the cost of smoking-related illnesses, some of the same people who successfully sued tobacco companies are raising concerns about Kraft Foods, Inc., McDonalds, and other companies they see as responsible for the nation's obesity rate.

Kraft Foods, Inc., one of the biggest marketers of high-fat, high-calorie foods such as Oreos, Velveeta Cheese, and Oscar Mayer Hot Dogs, states on its website that its vision is “. . . about meeting consumers' needs and making food an easier, healthier, more enjoyable part of life.” As part of that commitment, Kraft announced it would package smaller servings, put nutritional guidelines on all products, eliminate lucrative in-school marketing and form an advisory council to provide healthy alternatives to products high in saturated fat.

*In an announcement that stunned the \$1 trillion (U.S.) food industry this week, Kraft vowed to reduce portion sizes, develop healthier products and scrap its extensive in-school marketing programs. Kraft Foods, whose products include Oreo cookies and Velveeta, announced last week that it would cut back on sugar and fat in some of its products and take other health-conscious steps. It's Kraft's response to the "obesity crisis," an effort to get ahead of its rivals and position itself as the industry leader in encouraging healthier diets. And to preempt a nascent but potentially devastating consumer, legal and regulatory assault on Kraft's perceived culpability in America's penchant for living large.*

*5 July 2003, Toronto Star; 6 July 2003, The Boston Globe.*

*Kraft Foods Inc. has stepped up defensive efforts against obesity lawsuits by establishing health initiatives and advisory councils. Kraft said the company would form an advisory council to provide healthy alternatives to high saturated-fat products. An Altria Group Inc. subsidiary, Kraft had been sued in May by a California lawyer for not warning consumers about trans fat in its Oreo cookies. The suit was dropped and Kraft now plans to add the information to its cookie packages. Kraft [will market] a trans fat-free Oreo and reduce single-serving portion sizes of such snacks as Chips Ahoy and Nutter Butter.*

*3 July 2003, The Washington Times.*

Critics say Kraft may merely be co-opting the language of health activists to escape having to pay damages like the \$246 billion paid by tobacco firms to settle prosecution by U.S. state governments that alleged Philip Morris withheld from the public what it knew about tobacco-related health risks.

*While it's encouraging to see food industry giant Kraft Foods announce policy changes to help curb the national "obesity problem," it's missing the point. It may help if Kraft stops marketing to youth, but youth aren't spending money in grocery stores. "Portion reduction" sounds great but won't change the amount people eat, any more than the U.S. government's lowered obesity standards helped overweight people feel motivated to lose weight.*

*Obviously, Kraft is acting now to avoid eventual lawsuits. But it will ultimately benefit from the higher prices required to package more, smaller, environmentally irresponsible portions. If Kraft wants to help, it should consider manufacturing healthier "convenience" foods that can be sold at prices commensurate with their fat-laden counterparts. In a country where McDonald's sells dinner salads for \$3.99, but double cheeseburgers for \$.99, Kraft has the opportunity to usher in true reform by addressing the costs, conditions and lifestyles that contribute to obesity, not merely fringe issues like marketing.*

*16 July 2003, Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*

\*Adapted from an original case submitted by Gayle Vogt, PhD, California State University, Fullerton, CA.

## **Assignment**

You are an assistant to the Vice President of Public Affairs for Kraft Foods Inc. Given the unfavorable media attention from special interest health advocates and their representatives, you have been asked to draft a memo in which you recommend a strategy for how Kraft should respond to the unfavorable media attention regarding nutrition. Once the Vice President of Public Affairs approves your strategy, your message will go to Kraft's CEO.

As an assistant to the Vice President of Public Affairs for Kraft Foods Inc., write a one-page memo in which you persuade Kraft's CEO to adopt your strategy to mitigate the impact of negative media attention on Kraft and Kraft's products. You may conduct research to assist you in developing your response.

## **Criteria**

The memo will:

- Exhibit a clear understanding of the audience, use an appropriate tone and style, establish the desired relationship, and motivate the desired outcome.
- Accomplish the purpose of the message by stating a clear position on the issue and supporting that position with logical points/sub-points, insightful reasoning and/or persuasive examples.
- Be well organized and easy to follow, include appropriate headings/bullets/lists, and use smooth transitions.

- Demonstrate superior mastery of vocabulary and superior facility with conventions of standard written English (grammar, usage, and mechanics).
- Use an appropriate format and document design.

Case and Assignment from [http://www.businesscommunication.org/awards/student/2006\\_student\\_case.html](http://www.businesscommunication.org/awards/student/2006_student_case.html).