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Is Truth Addictive?

Monday, December 14, 1998; Page A22

THE NATION'S largest tobacco company, Philip Morris, just concluded an agreement to buy three brands of cigarettes from its smaller rival, the Liggett Group. The brands, assuming the deal goes through, will be accompanied by a minor problem.

Liggett, an industry maverick, put a warning label on its cigarettes in 1997 that "smoking is addictive." No other cigarette company does so, and Philip Morris has resisted such an acknowledgment, an advocacy group, the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, observed the other day. In congressional testimony in 1994, a Philip Morris executive denied that smoking is addictive. In testimony last year, the company's chief executive would say only that "under certain circumstances," smoking may be addictive.

The brands are Lark, L&M and Chesterfield. If Philip Morris takes them over, does it retain the warning on them, extend it to its own brands or drop it? Not an unimportant question if you believe, as we do, that over time such warnings have a cumulative effect and do deter people from smoking.


Philip Morris declines to discuss its deal with Liggett on grounds that it is under review by federal regulators. The company has, however, announced that it will mount a new ad campaign meant to deter young people from taking up smoking. That would argue for acknowledging that tobacco is addictive whether the Liggett deal goes through or not.

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