

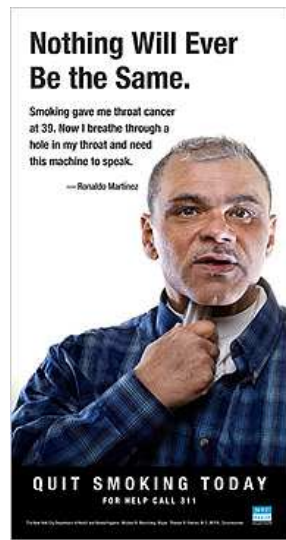
ADVERTISING

Missing a Larynx, He's Become the Voice of Antismoking Efforts

By CLAIRE ATKINSON Published: July 17, 2007

THE image of Ronaldo Martinez, a smoker who had his larynx removed and speaks through an artificial voice box, was scary enough to prompt thousands of New Yorkers to quit cigarettes last year.

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Ronaldo Martinez in one of the print ads in New York City's campaign against smoking.

Multimedia



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His description — in his synthesized voice — of how he can no longer swim because he would drown if water got into his throat hole helped bring about a threefold increase in calls to the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene from people interested in smoking cessation.

Despite its effectiveness, the future of the campaign, officially entitled "Nothing Will Ever Be the Same," hangs in the balance as the city health department reviews its anti-tobacco advertising strategy. The city is planning a new television effort against tobacco in the fall, with a projected ad budget of \$8 million.

Dr. Thomas R. Frieden, the city's health commissioner, acknowledged the success of the spots, but on the subject of their future would say only, "We're looking at all the options."

The scared-straight campaign — which recalled a California health department ad from years past in which a larynx cancer patient was shown smoking a cigarette through her tracheotomy tube — was only one component of Mayor Bloomberg's antismoking efforts. Others included higher taxes on cigarettes and smoking bans in bars and restaurants.

These efforts combined to help lower rates among New Yorkers by 19 percent from 2002 to 2006, the city health department said, for an average annual decrease of 5 percent. Nationally, the average annual decline in smoking across the United States was 3 percent during that period, according to a report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

And Mr. Martinez, a 53-year-old Bronx resident who has lived in Puerto Rico, has become something of a local hero. In a telephone interview, he said that he was currently seeking a job and was prepared to go anywhere to stay involved with the antismoking campaign.

On the street, "people run and call after me, everybody wants to spend a day

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with me so they can see how I live," he said. "To the tobacco companies, I have nothing to say except that they are responsible for the pain and consequences of smoking."

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In 2006 alone — the year that the "Nothing Will Ever Be the Same" campaign was introduced — the percentage of New York City residents who smoked declined to 17.5 percent compared with 2005 when it was 18.9 percent, the health department said.

Perhaps because of Mr. Martinez, the statistics were particularly striking among men (who showed an 11.6 percent decline in smoking rates in the city in 2006) and Hispanics (a 15.2 percent decline). The figures were released by city researchers writing for a C.D.C. publication.

Although Mr. Martinez, who appears in four television spots and several print ads, became the most famous person in the campaign, other spots showed a variety of ordinary people telling their stories of suffering caused by smoking.

In New York, the spots ran throughout 2006 as part of a \$10 million television blitz and went back into rotation, from April to May this year, as part of an additional \$1.2 million in spending. The spots appeared on all the main broadcast networks in addition to Telemundo and Univision, the cable networks TBS and TNT, and on [Time Warner Cable](#) and [Cablevision](#) systems.

The campaign's online component encouraged people to send others an e-mail message with an audio download of Mr. Martinez's unmistakable voice. The message was sent 5,000 times.

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The spots featuring Mr. Martinez are not homegrown, nor are they new. They were created by Geovision, a multicultural ad agency in Watertown, Mass., and were originally produced for the Massachusetts Department of Public Health in the late 1990s.

Despite proving their mettle, they were discontinued in 2001 after Massachusetts, along with many other states, redirected its tobacco settlement funds elsewhere. The landmark tobacco settlement of 1998 involving 46 states and the tobacco companies gave those states some money to spend in antismoking efforts.

Gregory Connolly, a professor at the Harvard School of Public Health, was formerly the director of the Massachusetts Tobacco Control Program, which commissioned the campaign. "We ran ads using athletes, politicians, rock stars and they don't work," he said. "We used the U.S. women's soccer team. And people said, 'I'm never going to win gold, but I could be Ronaldo.' "

Mr. Connolly praised New York City's efforts and criticized the administration of Gov. [Mitt Romney](#) of Massachusetts for cutting the campaign's funds earlier in the decade. According to a report in The Boston Globe, the Massachusetts health commissioner, John Auerbach, will decide over the next two weeks whether the state will return its antismoking messages to television.

Geovision's president and creative director, Juan Mandelbaum, said that he hoped the ads would return, not just for professional reasons.

"I'm from Argentina, and there was always a lit cigarette in the house," he said. "I can't tell you how much this means to me. My mother died from smoking aged 71. That is why it is so frustrating that we don't run the campaign here anymore."

Even as New York City grapples with the future of its antismoking efforts, Dr. Frieden of the health department praised the "Nothing Will Ever Be the Same" campaign.

"We scoured the world for the best anti-tobacco ads and we ran a variety from Australia, California and some from Massachusetts," he said. "When we compared ads, Ronaldo made the most impact."

One of the television ads opens with a doctor snapping on rubber gloves as he prepares to inspect the hole in Mr. Martinez's throat. In the ad, the cancer survivor tells the viewer how he has to visit the doctor every 12 weeks to see if the cancer in his throat has come back: "I'm always afraid of bad news," he says, "I will have to do this for the rest of my life."

A 2006 city report found that 57 percent of smokers who saw the ads said that they were more likely to quit. Ninety-two percent of New Yorkers had seen at least one of the ads, while 78 percent had seen two or more.

After seeing one of the ads, more than half of the smokers interviewed said they had talked to someone about quitting smoking, the report said.

The ads have provoked a strong reaction from smokers and nonsmokers alike.

"They are disgusting, horrible and distasteful and they helped," wrote one poster to the antismoking Web site bulletin board, www.trytostop.org.

Bill Mora, a former smoker who lives in Queens, said in a telephone interview that the ads might have kept him from going back to smoking. "They present a very powerful image that I identified with. I recognized him as if I knew him."

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