

**"The ideal product to sell online would be easy to pack and ship, be much cheaper than what's charged at the retail counter, and be craved by tens of millions of people every day. Cigarettes, the internet was made for you."**  
David Streitfeld, *Washington Post*, 2000

Cigarette vendors are very easy to locate online by the simplest search mechanisms.

This mode of purchase translates into global penetration of tobacco products, unprecedented access of cigarettes to minors, cheap cigarettes through tax avoidance and smuggling, and unfettered advertising, marketing and promotion.

It is often impossible to identify the country of origin of such vendors. The majority appear to be in Europe and the USA, but countries as varied as Cyprus and Panama also offer internet sales. Strangely, some vendors take credit card details from prospective purchasers but then neither charge nor dispatch any cigarettes.

The internet is also used by tobacco interests to undertake sophisticated public relations, to denigrate pro-health organisations and individuals, to undermine the science of tobacco, and to attack tobacco control legislation (see map 20). Legislation has not yet caught up with this new threat to health.

Sales of cigarettes and other forms of tobacco over the internet started in earnest in the mid-1990s, and are predicted to rise in future.

### WHERE ARE THE GOODS?

Test ordering from **12** websites which claim to offer low price cigarettes to the UK market 2001

- 3** sites sent cigarettes
- 1** site charged but did not send cigarettes
- 8** sites took no money and sent no cigarettes

Prices quoted for 200 cigarettes	<b>£10 - £27</b>
Retail price in UK	<b>£38.60</b>
Price in UK if intercepted by Customs	<b>£38.15</b>

**"Most sites offering cheap cigarettes are a rip off. All cigarettes bought via the Internet must bear UK taxes. There are no allowances or loopholes. Cigarettes bought from sites that do not arrange payment of UK taxes are liable to forfeiture. In the last year Customs have destroyed over 10 million such cigarettes."**

HM Customs and Excise, UK 2000

**"Philip Morris admits being behind Wavesnet website, an internet company set up to run fashion parades and rave parties where cigarettes are sold at a discount."**

Australian Associated Press, 2000



**"Wow!!!!!!!!!!!!!!  
What a great website for cigs. I can't believe I have been looking all over the web for cheap cigs and here you were all the time.....with a complete list of companies. Thanks a lot!"**

User comment posted on discount cigarette site, 2002

### INTERNET CIGARETTE SEARCH Google, 2002

Search term	Results found
<i>discount cigarette</i>	9,070
<i>cheap cigarette</i>	5,510
<i>tax free cigarette</i>	1,540
<i>mail order cigarette</i>	374

### INTERNET CIGARETTE VENDORS, USA 2000

internet cigarette vendor sites	<b>88</b>
sites with Surgeon-General's warning	<b>24%</b>
sites selling bidis	<b>8%</b>
sites with special promotions	<b>33%</b>
sites with age warning	<b>81%</b>
types of age verification required:	
customer self-reporting they are over 18	<b>49%</b>
typing in a birth date	<b>15%</b>
entering driving license information	<b>9%</b>
US teenagers with internet access	<b>over 50%</b>