

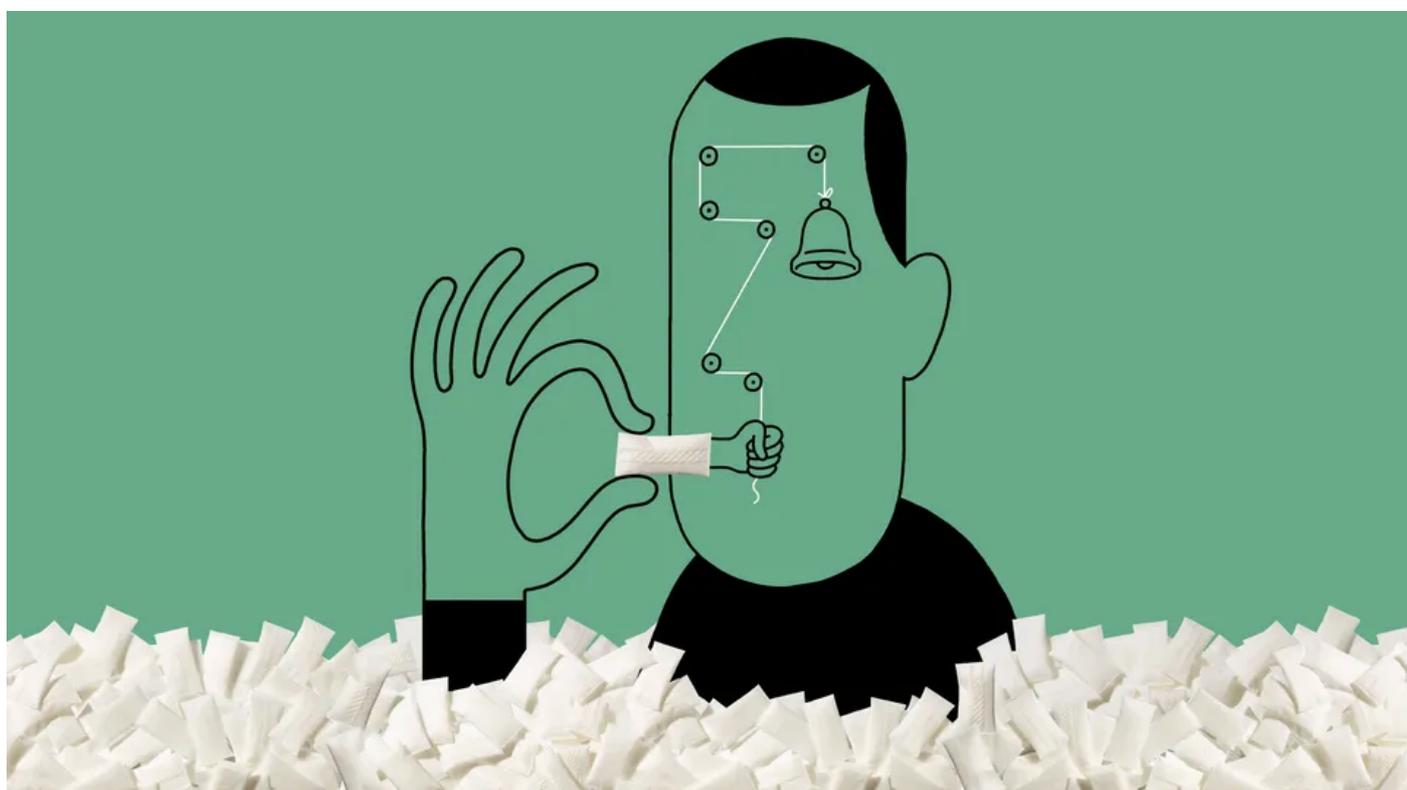
LETTER FROM SWEDEN

ZYN AND THE NEW NICOTINE GOLD RUSH

White snus pouches were designed to help Swedish women quit cigarettes. They've become a staple for American dudes.

By Carrie Battan

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"If you see another guy popping a Zyn, there's an almost immediate camaraderie," a thirty-five-year-old who works in mergers and acquisitions told me. Illustration by Christoph Niemann

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To visitors, Sweden is as remarkable for what is absent as for what is present. Walking around Stockholm, you hear little noise from traffic, because Swedes have so aggressively adopted electric vehicles. (They also

seem constitutionally averse to honking.) Streets and sidewalks are exceptionally free from debris, in part because of the country's robust anti-littering programs. And the air bears virtually no trace of cigarette smoke. During five days I spent in Sweden this January, I could count the number of smokers I encountered on one hand, and I saw no one pulling on a vape. In November, 2024, Sweden was declared "smoke-free" because its adult smoking rate had dipped below five per cent. As smoking has declined, so have related illnesses, such as emphysema; Sweden has one of the lowest rates of lung cancer in the E.U. This shift is broadly described in academic papers as "the Swedish Experience."

And yet the Swedes have an immense appetite for nicotine, the addictive chemical found in tobacco. About a third of Swedish people consume nicotine, and they mostly get their fix from snus—small, gossamer pouches that look like dollhouse pillows, which users nestle in their gums. Snus pouches deliver nicotine to the bloodstream through sensitive oral membranes; Swedes refer to the resulting buzz as the *nicokick*.

"Snus is the first thing I take every morning when I wake up," Niklas Runsten, an energetic thirty-three-year-old podcast producer, told me. "It's the last thing I take out before I brush my teeth." We were sitting in his office, in Stockholm, and he was fondling a brown, hockey-puck-shaped tin. "I'm awake approximately seventeen hours a day, and I probably have a snus in my mouth for sixteen hours and thirty-two minutes," he said.

Scandinavians have a proud history of snus usage. During the mid-seventeenth century, ground-up sniffing tobacco became popular in the French royal court and made its way to Sweden. Later, working-class Swedes started adding liquid to the powder and placing it against their gums, as a claylike paste. The preportioned pouches that are common today were introduced in the nineteen-seventies, as more people turned to snus in order to stop smoking. In the early nineteen-nineties, when Sweden held a referendum on whether to join the E.U., which had a bloc-wide snus ban,

voters adorned their cars with bumper stickers that read, “E.U.? Not without my snus.” Ultimately, Sweden was granted an exemption from the ban in exchange for stricter warning labels.

The most committed Swedish snus enthusiasts sometimes talk like sommeliers, capable of detecting subtle differences in tobacco quality and flavor. Before he shut down Fäviken, his two-Michelin-star restaurant, the renowned Swedish chef Magnus Nilsson was known to offer patrons a portion of snus at the end of their meal. In Skansen, a part of Stockholm that’s home to a children’s petting zoo and farmstead tours, there is a Snus and Match Museum, funded in part by the tobacco company Swedish Match. Snus has also served as an economic engine: in 1915, Sweden nationalized its tobacco production to generate revenue for the military and a universal pension system for its citizens.

Runsten started snusing at eighteen, as soon as he was legally allowed. He remembers what drew him to it. “A friend told me that the best thing about snus is that you get a present every day,” he said. “When you finish your meal, you take a little present. It’s like a gift you give yourself, and without the consequences of smoking. It was the romantic part of snus.”

Until recently, the word “snus” referred solely to a pungent product made of tobacco leaves. But, over the past decade, the earthy brown substance has been joined by white snus, a new product with a characteristically Swedish design elegance. White snus, which consists of pure nicotine mixed with filling agents, has little natural odor and does not stain the teeth the way that the traditional kind can. It was developed by Swedish scientists to appeal to women, a constituency that hadn’t historically taken to brown snus. The creators also had ambitions to eventually reach Americans.

“From a branding perspective, the white snus is, like, a genius thing,” Runsten continued. He pulled out one of his own pouches, which was brown. “*This* couldn’t reach Los Angeles, because it’s something that tastes

like shit!” He surveyed two of his colleagues, Jonatan Peterson and Hugo Lavett. “Your dad snused?” he asked Lavett. Yes. “Your dad?” he asked Peterson. “No, but all of my friends’ dads,” Peterson replied. “But no mothers whatsoever. Our mothers’ generation never would have.”

White snus pouches have become popular in the U.S., though American mothers don’t seem to have adopted them, either. Zyn, the nicotine pouch launched by Swedish Match, was introduced to the U.S. market in 2014 and, thanks to champions such as Joe Rogan and Tucker Carlson, became a fixture of the so-called manosphere. The tobacco company Philip Morris International, which acquired Swedish Match in 2022, said that it shipped 131.6 million cannisters of Zyn to the U.S. in the first quarter of 2024—an eighty-per-cent increase from the same period the previous year.

Swedish Match estimates that about seventy per cent of cannisters in the U.S. are purchased by men. “I’m sure we have women who buy Zyn. I’m sure we do,” Tom Allen, the western-region director at Smoker Friendly, the large chain of tobacco stores where the product was first tested in the U.S., said. “I just don’t remember if I’ve ever seen a woman buy them in any of our stores.”

In certain settings, Zyn is ubiquitous: the imprint of a cannister in a pair of khakis is a signature of the finance sector; golf courses have posted signs imploring patrons not to dispose of their pouches in urinals. Carlson has used the product to incite a masculinity arms race: after Philip Morris disputed a joke he made about Zyn being a “male enhancer,” he decried it as “not a brand for men” and launched a competitor pouch, called ALP—the brand that Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., was said to be using during his confirmation hearing. The actor Josh Brolin told the podcaster Marc Maron that he keeps a Zyn in his lip twenty-four hours a day. “I’m not fucking lying,” he said. He popped open a cannister. “My wife would hear this in the middle of the night. I don’t even know I’m doing it. I’m asleep.”

In Sweden, the white pouches are not exactly an emblem of virility. “When I

was working in Stockholm, the group of girls on my team, we all snused through every meeting,” Verona Farrell, a columnist for *Vogue Scandinavia*, told me. You can buy pouches in highly curated nicotine depots, and the white snus flavors—apple mint, jasmine tea, pomegranate melon—appeal to refined, diet-conscious tastes. “In Sweden, the Tucker Carlson thing was a laughingstock,” Runsten said. “Everything they talk about is related to masculinity,” Peterson, his colleague, added. “And they’re doing the most girl thing I know.”

In 2008, three Swedish scientists gathered in a laboratory in Helsingborg to test white snus. Two of them, Thomas Ericsson and Per-Gunnar Nilsson, had backgrounds in pharmaceuticals—they had worked on antibiotics and aspirin, among other drugs. (The third scientist was Thomas’s son, a chemical engineer named Robert.) Their new venture was “a dynamic institute of fun,” Ericsson, who is now seventy-four, told me recently. When testing various nicotine concentrations, the trio used one another as lab rats, referring to a rather vague measuring stick: “Tell me when you get dizzy.” Ericsson was already a regular snus user, while his son and Nilsson were not. They tended to get dizzy much faster than Ericsson did.

In the eighties and nineties, Ericsson had worked at LEO, a Swedish pharmaceutical company whose flagship product is Nicorette, the nicotine-replacement gum. He had also developed and patented tobacco-processing protocols that helped lower carcinogenic chemicals in traditional snus. (By the twenty-tens, the level of harmful chemicals in snus had been significantly reduced.) At one point, Ericsson was tasked with raising the nicotine levels in Nicorette, but the higher concentrations led to side effects like hiccupping and stomach pain. As an alternative, his team conceived of the white nicotine pouch, a cleaner riff on the traditional product. Because it would be lodged in the gums, it would produce less saliva than chewing gum, and the digestive side effects could be avoided. Ericsson began to experiment in his

garage, and by 1990 he and some colleagues were working on a patented white snus product.

“You always have a philosophy,” he told me. “We said, ‘It must satisfy an important medical need.’ ” We were sitting in a loud, dark restaurant in Helsingborg, which is home to so many nicotine-related companies that Ericsson calls it Nicotine Valley. Ericsson is a meticulous speaker, and throughout the conversation he produced diagrams in a notebook. “How many people in the United States die yearly due to smoking?” he asked. I said half a million. In Sweden, it was just a few thousand, Ericsson told me, scribbling in his notepad. “Who was smoking?” he asked. He had a hypothesis based on industry data: “Swedish females between the ages of eighteen and thirty-six,” he answered, drawing the female-gender symbol. Among Swedish men, brown snus had already provided a compelling alternative to cigarettes. Ericsson hoped the white pouches would appeal to women, and to a U.S. market that had largely rejected traditional snus.

“If I go back then, we think, *Snus: brown, smelly, bitter, not sexy*,” Ericsson continued. “So how do you make this attractive for females between the ages of eighteen and thirty-six?” In business presentations, he has often used a metaphor: If cigarettes are standard gasoline-powered cars, brown snus is diesel—an effective alternative, but not different enough to shift the paradigm. White snus, on the other hand, is an electric vehicle. “The big car manufacturers, they will only change if they have an alternative,” he said. “The cigarette companies will not change if they don’t have competition.”

Many iterations of Ericsson’s project were thwarted. At one point, a group of investors who had financial interests in traditional tobacco products decided not to compete with the industry, and halted development. He and his colleagues also had to choose whether to sell their product as a pharmaceutical, like Nicorette, or as a life-style product, like traditional snus. Ericsson did not want to pursue the pharmaceutical path. After working on Nicorette, he had become skeptical of medicalized smoking-cessation efforts.

“I didn’t like for pharmaceutical products to create dependencies. It’s more ethical that a person decides by themselves,” he said. “We knew that consumers would like to be free and not go to a pharmacy. They are not sick.”

In 2009, President Obama signed the Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act, bringing regulation of tobacco products under the purview of the federal government for the first time, with stricter rules around marketing. The law was a headache for many in the tobacco industry, but it wasn’t clear to Ericsson how it would affect white snus pouches: the nicotine is often derived from tobacco, but the product contains no biological parts of the plant. He decided that having his invention regulated as a recreational tobacco product was still preferable to having it regulated as medicine. With Nilsson, his colleague, he argued for the F.D.A. to count white snus as a tobacco product. In 2012, they were granted a U.S. patent for the “free nicotine salt” that fills the pouches.

In the past, cigarette alternatives had represented a threat to tobacco companies. But, after the passage of the tobacco bill, the industry began to embrace them. Americans were well aware of the hazards of smoking, and adult smoking rates had been in steady decline, from forty-two per cent in 1965 to about fifteen per cent in 2015. These new offerings could save their business—and help Big Tobacco remedy decades of reputational woes. Companies such as Philip Morris International began to evoke visions of a “smoke-free future.”

In 2009, Philip Morris launched a joint venture with Swedish Match to promote snus products in the U.S. Swedish Match approached Ericsson about finally bringing his white nicotine pouches to market. The plan was contentious: some within Swedish Match wanted to keep pushing brown snus on the global market to preserve tradition. Ultimately, white snus won out. Ericsson purchased an industrial mixing machine from a bankrupt bakery in the north of Sweden for production.

It took a while for American consumers to feel the *nicokick*. Originally, white snus was tested in the U.S. market under names such as Stockholm Ice and Chill of Sweden. It arrived in Colorado's Smoker Friendly stores in 2014 as the much pithier Zyn. Sales were slow at first: customers didn't understand what the product was, and many Americans still associated oral nicotine products with oral cancer. Zyn eventually gained fans, because it seemed more like candy than like cigarettes: it had appealing flavors; a circular, palm-size package; and a loyalty program through which users could accrue points to exchange for items such as grills and AirPods.

In 2019, after five years of selling in select shops, mostly in the Southwest and Pacific Northwest, Swedish Match took Zyn national. Three years later, sales of nicotine pouches had increased by six hundred and forty-one per cent, and Philip Morris acquired the company for sixteen billion dollars. By this point, Zyn was a mainstay for a growing variety of users: purple-state early adopters, hockey and baseball players, Wall Street guys, medical students, truck drivers, and anyone who could use a quick jolt.

Zyn's populist appeal made it the perfect target for ineffectual liberal outrage and gleeful right-wing trolling. In early 2024, Senator Chuck Schumer, recalling the scores of American teens who had taken up vaping just a few years prior, called Zyn "a pouch packed with problems," and urged the F.T.C. and the F.D.A. to crack down. G.O.P. lawmakers seized on this effort as an irritating nanny-state gambit. The Georgia congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene, who has never spoken publicly about using nicotine herself, declared that a "Zynsurrection" was in order. "Democrats are idiots," she said. Schumer has said little about the subject since.

Zyn users often feel like they're in on a shared secret. Unlike cigarettes or vapes, the pouches can go undetected in meetings, on flights, or at the gym. (And, unlike American chewing tobacco, no spitting is required.) "If you see another guy popping a Zyn, there's an almost immediate camaraderie," Logan Jeffs, a thirty-five-year-old who works in mergers and acquisitions,

told me. The nicotine entrepreneur Bengt Wiberg went as far as to say that pouch usage gave Ukrainian fighters an advantage in the war with Russia, where snus is banned—according to one of his friends, a volunteer in the Ukrainian army, Russian soldiers are more easily detected by the glow of lit cigarettes.

Yet Americans have found ways to make their allegiance known: fans identify with their preferences for “upper deckys” or “lower deckys” (referring to pouch placement in the gums), and ornately punny nicknames for the pouches—Declaration of Zyndependence, Zyndaya, Osama Zyn Laden—have become a tic of frat-boy patois. By last summer, Zyn had gained such traction in the U.S. that shortages broke out across the country. (The crisis was dubbed the “Zynpocalypse.”) As wildfires raged in Los Angeles this January, Zyn was one of the most sought-after “essentials” collected for firefighters.

In “The Easy Way to Stop Smoking,” a cult-favorite book among those trying to ditch cigarettes, the British accountant turned self-help author Allen Carr describes the bizarre logic that often turns people into smokers. “The thing that springs the trap is not that cigarettes taste so good; it’s that they taste so awful,” he writes. “Because that first cigarette tastes awful, our young minds are reassured that we will never become hooked, and we think that because we are not enjoying them we can stop whenever we want to.” This was certainly my experience when, in high school in 2005, some friends and I sneakily purchased a pack of cigarettes from a vending machine in a twenty-four-hour diner. That first cigarette—smelly, awkward, improperly inhaled—was so unpleasant that I declared, with a little disappointment, that I could never become a smoker.

In college, I took puffs of other people’s cigarettes at parties, smug in the knowledge that I did not enjoy them. Gradually, though, I started smoking more during late-night study breaks with friends. I began to see cigarettes as

an essential stress reliever during breakups or exam periods. By the time I graduated, I was smoking a pack of Camel Lights per day. I never thought of myself as a nicotine addict. I was a smoker, and I loved cigarettes.

I continued smoking heavily for a few more years, until an elective tonsillectomy forced me to quit. (I had suffered frequent bouts of strep throat since I was a small child.) After my surgery, I enjoyed the occasional cigarette, but never fully returned to the habit. Then, during a weekend beach trip with a group of friends in 2018, I fell prey to the vape. My early puffs of a friend's Juul seemed like such a perverse and pathetic imitation of cigarettes that I figured, once again, there was no chance it could become a habit.

Within a few months, the Juul had a hold on my waking hours in a way cigarettes never did. My vape began to feel like an eleventh finger; I started referring to it, half jokingly, as my adult binky. Most reputable sources agreed that vaping was much safer than cigarettes, but the potential long-term health effects were unclear. And the desperation I felt when I didn't have my Juul was demoralizing. I quit many times over the years—during vacations abroad, while on a temporary health kick, while pregnant and postpartum—and always found my way back. Still, I didn't think of myself as a nicotine addict: I simply loved vaping.

Last December, I noticed that my vape of choice—an elegant, mint-flavored device called Mega—had disappeared from my local bodega. Rather than switch to a new type, I decided to stop altogether, and placed a bulk order of Nicorette. The gum was rubbery and almost flavorless, and the first few times I chewed it the nicotine produced a peppery sensation that made me cough. I longed for the familiar lung hit of the vape, and for the low-grade rebellious thrill I felt blowing clouds into my sweater in the back of a cab.

In “The Easy Way to Stop Smoking,” Carr makes the persuasive argument that all the benefits smokers claim to derive from smoking—stress

management, relaxation, focus, social bonding—are illusions. The only benefit smoking provides is relief from the discomfort of a nicotine craving. When I read the book, during one of my attempts to quit vaping, I thought, *Well, yes—that’s the entire point*. Nicotine addiction is a nuisance, but it also gives you a pleasurable sense of direction: amid the vast, hazy cloud of competing desires and woes that fill up any given day, you have at least one problem—a nicotine craving—that can be solved easily.

Some medical and public-health institutions have settled into an uneasy détente with smoking alternatives. Scott Gottlieb, a physician who served as the F.D.A. commissioner from 2017 to 2019—the golden age of Juul—once emphasized the need for safer options, including vapes, in order to get Americans to quit cigarettes. As it turned out, Americans were too enthusiastic: Gottlieb would soon lament an “epidemic” of youth vaping. In 2020, the F.D.A. banned many of the candy- and fruit-flavored vapes that may have drawn in adolescents. Two years later, the F.D.A. ordered Juul to stop marketing its devices. (The ban was reversed only this past June.)

Nicotine can have cardiovascular effects, including heightened blood pressure, heart rate, and cholesterol. Some pouch users complain of mouth lesions from long-term use. Yet more figures in addiction research are acknowledging the importance of smokeless tobacco products in the fight against cigarettes. In a recent interview, Ann McNeill, a pioneering scholar of tobacco addiction, said she’d started to see the benefit of adopting a harm-reduction approach—getting people to trade one dangerous habit for another, significantly less dangerous one. “I thought it was prudent to study the evidence,” she said. “And that’s what drew me to also studying what was going on in Sweden.”

More bullish noises are coming from the corner of the internet that’s concerned with amateur biohacking and self-optimization. In 2022, the wellness podcaster Andrew Huberman said that the effects of nicotine create almost “the optimal state for getting mental work done.” Medical researchers

are beginning to explore the potential cognitive benefits: an ongoing study at Vanderbilt's medical center investigates whether nicotine patches could alleviate memory loss in people with mild cognitive impairment.

When I was in Sweden, my supply of Nicorette ran low. To get my fix, I bought a mountain of white snus tins in various flavors—tangerine spritz, cappuccino, chili lime—with strengths ranging from light to “Xtra” strong. Since I was already accustomed to nicotine, I didn't experience the dizziness, nausea, or euphoria that some people report when they try snus, but the pouches made my gums sting. And I felt that something was missing: I needed my Nicorette. As with cigarettes and vaping, my brain had mistaken my nicotine addiction for an attachment to the vessel that the nicotine came in. I suddenly wished that someone would find a way to deliver nicotine via leafy green vegetables.

If the term “Big Tobacco” evokes an image of shadowy executives shredding secret documents, “New Nicotine” calls to mind the well-lit entrepreneurialism of Silicon Valley. Lately, upstart companies have been trying to distinguish themselves on the white-pouch market. Wiberg, the Swedish entrepreneur, patented a nicotine pouch with a membrane on one side that prevents the gum irritation that can come with prolonged use. ON!, a brand sold by the American tobacco company Altria, boasts stretchier “flex tech” encasements on one of its products, allowing for a softer mouthfeel. (I found that this makes the pouches unpleasantly leaky.) Ericsson still lends his expertise to new companies around the world. In 2020, he created a formulation for a California-based brand called Lucy, whose name is a play on the term for a single cigarette, a “loosie.” Lucy's signature pouches are called Breakers; each one contains a “tiny jewel-like capsule” that can be broken open in the mouth to release “a flood of extra flavor and hydration”—a nicotine Gusher.

Lucy was formed in 2016 by David Renteln and John Coogan, whose

previous business venture, a nutrition shake called Soylent, was designed with workaholic tech employees in mind. Coogan, a lively thirty-five-year-old from California who has smoked “fewer than ten” cigarettes in his life, has become an eager spokesman for the possibilities of oral nicotine. In addition to Breakers, the company sells an eponymous line of nicotine gum, and Excel, a line of pouches that winkingly appeals to the Wall Street set. (“At Excel, we believe that by maximizing productivity, we not only enhance individual performance but also contribute to the overall success and growth of your clients and stakeholders,” the website reads.) Coogan is creating an umbrella corporation to house all of Lucy’s products; he plans to call it the Anti-Smoking Company.

Like Ericsson before him, Coogan hopes to attract a new group of customers. “The cohort is already the max masculine,” Coogan said. “That might be a good business strategy, but that is not broadening the appeal.” Nonetheless, the company owes most of its growth to the Zyn-centric milieu it’s trying to transcend. In Lucy’s early days, Coogan and Renteln bought ad reads for Barstool Sports podcasts, such as “Pardon My Take” and “Bussin’ with the Boys.” Eventually, Barstool’s founder, Dave Portnoy, took an interest in Lucy, and offered to make the company Barstool’s exclusive nicotine-advertising partner in exchange for equity. Lucy’s sales grew tenfold last year, thanks to the Barstool deal—and the Zyn shortage.

Today’s nicotine entrepreneurs cite Juul as both an inspiration and a cautionary tale; the product’s appeal was so broad that teen-agers flocked to it. When the 2024 National Youth Tobacco Survey was published, Coogan and others in the industry were relieved: the rate of underage pouch usage had remained relatively low, at 1.8 per cent. Because of the Juul debacle, Zyn flavors in the U.S. are restricted to mint, coffee, cinnamon, and citrus varieties. (Swedish teen-agers seem to have embraced the smorgasbord of white snus flavors available to them.) Coogan hoped that the Excel line would help his company dodge any suggestion of marketing to adolescents. “Children do not like spreadsheets and Bloomberg Terminals,” Coogan said.

“It’s not something that’s cool with them.”

And yet it seemed preposterous to me that any kind of marketing, in 2025, could avoid the eyes of teen-agers. Equally so was the idea that adults exist in a consumer category that is distinct from that of children. Grown men make millions of dollars by live-streaming themselves playing video games. Coffee consumption has been disrupted by wacky energy drinks and elaborately sweet, calorie-rich Starbucks concoctions. Meanwhile, today’s teen-agers have a penchant for trying on grownup identities and “aesthetics” online—it is not difficult to imagine a group of high-school students getting *very* into the idea of spreadsheets and Bloomberg Terminals. It’s as unnerving as the thought of the millions of grownups who need to feel like they’re popping candy all day.

In Stockholm, at one of Swedish Match’s proprietary snus cafés, I met Fredrik Peyron and Brian Erkkila, two of the company’s liaisons to the F.D.A. Earlier this year, the F.D.A. announced that Zyn would receive a new federal green light. Its premarket tobacco application—the first for a nicotine pouch—had successfully made it through several years of F.D.A. review. “It means that we can continue doing what we’ve been doing,” Peyron said.

“We had to do our best to say, ‘O.K., these products, in the flavors we market them in, are helping cigarette smokers and other users switch over,’ ” Erkkila said.

“In the end, you have to show that the product is safer than cigarettes,” Peyron said. “Slam dunk.”

Erkkila, who previously worked as a toxicologist at the F.D.A., glanced at Peyron as if he’d made a major gaffe. Here was the semantic dance of the modern tobacco business: these companies can’t claim the product is safe, even if it could help people improve their health. Doctors and public-health agencies in Sweden still generally advise people not to use snus, but they are more receptive to the idea of harm reduction. (Last year, the Swedish

parliament voted to lower taxes on snus by twenty per cent, while raising taxes on combustible tobacco products.) When I spoke to American experts on the topic, the phrase “harm reduction” seemed to carry an immense weight. The word “safe” was almost third-rail. “Fredrik is using language that I would never allow in the United States,” Erkkila said, laughing. “But we’re in Sweden.”

Last year, one intrepid YouTube blogger published a video hypothesizing that podcasters and video creators were being paid to advertise Zyn without disclosing it. Among those featured were the Nelk Boys, a group of right-leaning, prankster YouTubers who once used a helicopter to deliver a sedan-size tin of Zyn to Tucker Carlson. It was the sort of promotion that marketing executives can only fantasize about.

But, when I mentioned the stunt to Peyron and Erkkila in Stockholm, they winced. “We’ve done so much to rein in those influencers,” Peyron said. “We don’t use any influencers, we don’t pay anyone, we don’t have any spokespeople,” Erkkila added. “We get asked and we say no.” A product like Zyn could likely survive with few official advertising efforts: when you combine a substance as addictive as nicotine with the alchemical influence of content creators, the pouches practically sell themselves.

In his youth, Ericsson was never much of a smoker. It was not until he began developing Nicorette that he had prolonged, habit-forming exposure to nicotine. “Then I was hooked,” he told me. While working in Amman, Jordan, in the early two-thousands, Ericsson would stow used pieces of Nicorette in the blister packs; they would melt in the heat and ruin his clothes. It prompted him to switch to snus. Today, he uses one of his own proprietary white-pouch brands, called ART. When he pops one into his mouth—which he does frequently—he does it so fluidly you hardly notice. Around his office, he keeps several miniature trash cans to stash his used pouches. And yet in conversation Ericsson never struck me as a salesman for his invention. I mentioned that anti-tobacco organizations have struggled to

find a stance on white snus pouches, because they're sold by tobacco companies. "I understand that," he said. "I mean, they have been the evil ones."

I asked Ericsson whether he had any concerns about the possible harms of nicotine itself. "Of course you should have concerns," he told me. "Or you should do risk analysis." He walked out of the room and returned with a large ball of string. The string was exactly ninety-five metres long, each millimetre representing one of Sweden's approximate ninety-five thousand annual deaths. Ericsson slowly unravelled the string until he reached a piece of tape representing the people who die early from smoking each year. He moved his fingers down to another marker, a few meters shorter, which represented the people who die from drinking. He continued shortening the string, indicating the number of deaths by suicide (fifteen hundred), drowning (a hundred and fifty), car accidents (two hundred), and workplace accidents (between fifty and seventy).

"You can ask yourself, 'What are Swedish people most afraid of?' They're afraid to fly. They're afraid of wolves. They're afraid of deer and other things," he said, holding a short length of string. "But what you should be afraid of is the wasp. It kills five to ten people every year." Finally, Ericsson reached the very tip of the string. While working on Nicorette, he and his colleagues did a risk-analysis calculation that estimated that fewer than two people per year would die of heart illnesses exacerbated by nicotine use. Compared with other hazards, he said, "this is not a big risk."

Ericsson did not strike me as someone who takes his own health lightly. He told me that he is so concerned about lung health that he won't burn candles in his home. During our conversations, he periodically dropped a fizzy aspirin tablet into a glass of water, because he had worked on clinical trials in the nineties that found that it could reduce the risk of heart attacks—and he did suffer a heart attack, in 2022. Did he think that long-term nicotine use was a factor? Ericsson paused for a long time, then threw up his hands. "You

take risks every day—by driving, what you eat, and so on,” he said. “I am a proud nicotunist.” ♦

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