

THE LINK PUBLICATION SOCIETY INC.

BOYCOTT POLICY

Revised April 2011

“Advertising is a privilege, not a right. Boycotting advertisements is neither censorship nor a freedom of speech issue. Nothing obliges you to accept a company’s ads unless you take their money. Rather, the effective use of boycott lists and follow-up actions can send a strong message about the morals and politics of your publication.”

–from CUP’s “Boycott policies,” 1992

History

The Link has had a working boycott list since 1985, when staff decided to stop running ads placed by tobacco companies. *The Link* had run several back page, full colour cigarette ads in the previous two or three years, but recognized that it was inconsistent with the paper’s progressive mandate to accept funding from corporations with questionable business practices.

In the late 1990s, the list had grown long with the names of companies that had practices with which *The Link*’s staff did not agree. The list was reviewed at the end of most semesters in general staff meetings that would often last several hours and would feature lively debate, usually around the issue of whether or not to take cigarette advertising.

In 1999, and again in 2002, committees were struck to review the boycott list and streamline the overall policy. It was agreed that having a long, unwieldy, incomplete list was impractical, and unless *The Link* had the resources to have a full time body to maintain and update the list, it needed to be simplified.

Current thinking

In the last few years, the boycott list has begun to change from the names of specific companies to a broader list of guidelines (eg. instead of “Merck-Frosst,” the list includes an entry for “ads for prescription drugs”). These categories mean that the staff isn’t bound by specifics, but is led by an ideological framework.

This change is part of a national trend in the student press. It is partly the result of widely available internet resources which have shown that almost every successful corporation has skeletons in its closets, and it would be impossible to name each one on our boycott lists. It is also a product of realizing, over time, that boycotts are less about the companies we don’t want to do business with, and more about the ethical stance we want to take. Concordia’s population has naturally grown and changed over the past 25 years too, and so have its values. Our practices inevitably change as a reflection of the community.

With this in mind, in 2009, a committee of current and former *The Link* staff assembled to review the boycott policy. They recommend that a simplified list of guidelines replace the current practice.

As a student newspaper, *The Link*, being outside the market system, is in a unique position to be able to accept or refuse advertising. The committee suggests that readers take an active role in reading and responding to the whole paper, including ads, because there are few settings where feedback to advertising content is considered. As with editorial content, the committee sees advertising as an opportunity to open dialogue with *The Link*'s readers and staff. The goal is to encourage all involved with *The Link* to have more of a vested interest in the paper's advertising policy so that the ads on the pages of *The Link* reflect the institution's core values.

The proposed boycott policy

- *The Link* boycotts ads that are aggressive, in poor taste, violent or objectifying in tone, or if the content represents or promotes a violation of human rights in any way. Decisions will be made by giving consideration to a company's environmental and social policies.
- *The Link* boycotts ads from oil and gas industries, the tobacco industry, the military and military-related industries.
- It is up to *The Link*'s Business Manager and Editor-in-Chief to flag any ad that they determine to be in violation of the boycott policy and present it to masthead for discussion and vote (2/3 majority is required for accepting a flagged ad). If a staff member or reader complains about an ad after it has been published, then masthead can decide whether to run the ad again (in the case of a recurring ad) or run an apology (if it's decided that it shouldn't have run).
- The policy will be reviewed at the annual retreat.