

CURIOUS? A NEW PHILIP MORRIS CAMPAIGN TARGETING YOUNG PEOPLE



Launched in 2024, Philip Morris's "Curious X" advertising campaign for IQOS, its heated tobacco product, is becoming increasingly visible at Swiss festivals. Electronic music, celebrities, contests, and immersive experiences: the brand is creating a festive atmosphere centered on curiosity and discovery, elements particularly likely to appeal to teenagers.

A CAMPAIGN SHOWCASING A FESTIVE WORLD

"It's a platform that lives inside festivals and events where you'll discover new sounds, meet new people and find the places where you truly belong. IQOS Curious X invites you to step in, dance, connect and contribute to the vibe."

Introductory text from the IQOS website (1)
<https://www.iqosclub.ch/en/iqoscuriousxevents>

Reading this description on the Swiss website for the "Curious X" campaign, it's hard to imagine that this is an advertisement for a tobacco product. Recently, this new campaign has been promoting the IQOS heated tobacco device by showcasing a festive atmosphere. The goal is to create an experience for visitors that they'll remember more than just a simple promotional booth.

The campaign takes various forms: contests, artistic performances, exclusive events, and collaborations with artists and well-known personalities. The events and collaborations focus particularly on the worlds of electronic music and design.

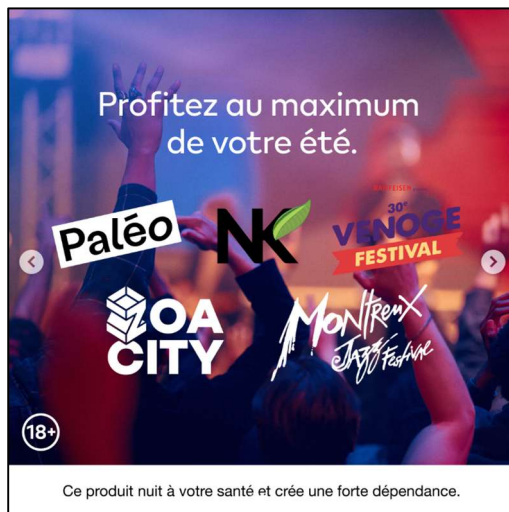


Figure 1 - Screenshot from the iqos.ch Instagram page (2)

On the campaign's Swiss website, IQOS highlights a collaboration with the Swiss DJ duo Adriatique. Among other things, the brand is running a contest inviting the public to remix one of their tracks (3), another contest to win a weekend in Amsterdam (4) to meet the DJs, and a Spotify playlist dedicated to electronic music (5).

IQOS is also present at numerous music festivals and events throughout the year, where the "Curious X" campaign takes the form of various activities and experiences designed for the public.

"[...] for us, festivals are more than just events. They are powerful brand engagement platforms where we connect with adult consumers in authentic and relevant ways. Where conversations happen naturally, experiences create memories, and every touchpoint helps strengthen our brands and our relationship with consumers."

LinkedIn post by a Philip Morris International employee responsible for implementing brand engagement initiatives across the Swiss market, in July 2026 (6)

The business objective is thus clear: to use the festival experience to connect with consumers, strengthen the brand, and leave positive memories.



A PRESENCE AT THE HEART OF FESTIVALS

On its Swiss website (1), IQOS lists several festivals where the brand plans to be present in 2026, including the Paléo Festival and the Montreux Jazz Festival.

At the 2026 Paléo Festival, visitors could explore the “Curious Cité” area, reserved for those 18 and older. From the outside, there were few elements that clearly identified Philip Morris: only the IQOS logo was visible, with no other branding. Inside, the area offered numerous activities: a cocktail bar, sales of T-shirts and accessories related to the Adriatic duo, booths where visitors could remix one of the band’s songs, a “silent party,” and ball games. In addition, there was a retail area dedicated to Philip Morris products, with gifts offered with certain purchases.

The “Curious X” campaign has also been rolled out in many countries since 2024, sometimes under different names but maintaining a similar approach centered on curiosity and experience. For example:

- A presence at numerous festivals, such as the Superbloom Music Festival (7) in Germany, the Eagle Beat Festival in Albania (8), the Mighty Hoopla in the United Kingdom (9), and the EXIT Festival in Serbia (10) ;

- Design installations and exhibitions, such as the Sensorium Piazza, presented during Milan Design Week in 2025 (11) ;
- Collaborations with artists, creators, and designers, such as with designer Esteban Tamayo in Mexico (12), or with the creative duo Mates in Serbia (13).



Figure 2 - Screenshot of the Instagram page iqos.ch (2)

CURIOSITY AS A TOOL TO ATTRACT YOUNG PEOPLE

Although Philip Morris claims that this campaign is aimed solely at adult smokers, it has a strong presence in spaces frequented by young people, particularly social media and music festivals. Furthermore, the activities offered appear to be designed to appeal to a teenage audience: electronic music and popular DJs, contests, and fun activities.

Researchers who have analyzed this campaign across several countries also note that IQOS is associated with new and desirable experiences, adventure, self-confidence, romantic relationships, and relaxation. These are all themes that particularly resonate with the concerns and aspirations of teenagers (14).

Curiosity is, in fact, a tactic frequently used in marketing, and it is particularly effective with young

audiences. This personality trait is especially pronounced during adolescence, a period marked by an increased desire for exploration, novelty, and risk-taking (15). Studies show that advertisements for tobacco products that play on curiosity can thus increase the likelihood that young people will want to try them (16, 17).

An analysis published in *Tobacco Control* supports this view. The authors argue that Philip Morris’s “Curious X” campaign appears specifically designed to attract young people, who are particularly receptive to new experiences. They see this as an evolution of IQOS’s advertising strategy: whereas the brand’s messaging previously focused on recruiting adult smokers, it now appears to be seeking to appeal more directly to teenagers and young adults (14).



RESTRICTING ACCESS TO STIR UP CURIOSITY: THE “FOR ADULTS ONLY” CONCEPT

Philip Morris will counter that this campaign was designed solely to attract adult smokers, and that minors are not directly exposed to it anyway, since access to “Curious X” events and spaces is always restricted to those 18 and older. But this argument is far from that simple. **Internal documents from the tobacco industry show that it has long recognized that “one of the very things that are attractive is [the] mere fact that cigarettes are forbidden fruit.”**(18). In other words, the ban is not necessarily a deterrent, quite the contrary.

This strategy is described in the “Archetype” document by Clotaire Rapaille, a psychologist and marketing expert commissioned by Philip Morris in the 1990s to develop a marketing plan specifically designed to appeal to teenagers. In it, he makes several specific recommendations, including

“emphasiz[ing] that smoking is for adults only,” “mak[ing] it difficult to obtain cigarettes,” “continu[ing] to ensure that smoking is perceived as a legitimate, albeit morally ambiguous adult activity,” and “emphasiz[ing] that smoking is for people who like to take risks”(19).

More than thirty years later, the underlying strategies remain the same: with “Curious X”, IQOS associates tobacco with curiosity, music, and new experiences. The “for adults only” aspect may even increase its appeal to adolescents.

To put an end to this and effectively protect young people, Switzerland must completely ban tobacco advertising, promotion, and sponsorship, as provided for in Article 13 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) and as most European countries already do.

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