

Anyone who grew up watching *I Love Lucy* is familiar with the show's Valentine Heart opening introduction. What many don't know is that intro wasn't actually the original. It was adopted when the show went into syndication. The reason for the switch was because the show was originally sponsored by the tobacco mogul Philip Morris and the opening intro was basically an advertisement for smoking.

A Big Box Of Cigarettes

For the first three years that the show ran, it opened with an animated Ricky and Lucy meandering down a pack of Philip Morris cigarettes. For the first four episodes, once Lucy and Ricky got to the bottom of the cigarettes, there also featured an additional ad for the brand. It had a bellhop named Johnny Roventini sing the company's jingle of "Call For Philip Morris" before the show would actually start. Imagine the opening sequence of any current television series being a blatant ad for cigarettes; times certainly have changed. Once it was decided to change the intro, viewers could still see many product placements and cigarette promotions in almost every episode of *I Love Lucy*.

Of course there was a lot of politics behind the abundant showcasing of Philip Morris' tobacco products in the show. Why else would they have an opening credit like that? Philip Morris loved the idea behind *I Love Lucy* and wanted to get it to air, but in order to cut down on production costs, Morris wanted Lucy and Desi to film in New York, as opposed to Los Angeles. In order to shoot the show in L.A., Lucy and Desi struck a compromise with the tobacco giant in which the two stars took a substantial pay cut, but retained ownership of all the episodes themselves and agreed to heavily promote the Philip Morris brand throughout the series. This of course led to Lucy and Ricky smoking A LOT of Philip Morris cigarettes.

The Philip Morris influence was so far-reaching that the show didn't just have the characters actively smoking on set, but there were promotions actually written into the script wherever it made sense. And of course there were commercial ads with Lucy and Desi telling everyone to enjoy the show more by smoking Philip Morris cigarettes while they watched it.

Why Was The Opening Changed?

When the show was sold into syndication in 1959 and Philip Morris was no longer the sponsor, the opening was completely reworked. It's unusual to take SUCH a drastic departure from an opening, however. Shows that rework an opening usually try to retain some semblance of similarity for continuity purposes. But the opening for *I Love Lucy* was such a blatant promotion for smoking, and especially that particular brand of cigarettes, that in order not to ostracize new sponsors, an entirely

new opening sequence was really the only option. This proved a good decision as many shows began to get away from promoting cigarette smoking in the coming years, for obvious reasons.

Complications From Smoking

By the mid 20th century, smoking was a very common and normal activity. People were actually led to believe that it was good for their health and were constantly encouraged to smoke by television, newspaper, and billboard ads, as well as by celebrities who needed to promote their corporate sponsors.

While Lucy and Desi both lived long lives, Desi died from lung cancer in 1986, and Lucy passed away from heart disease in 1989. Both of these conditions are well known to be caused by smoking.

Episodes Available On DVD

While so much of the early days of television is lost forever, Lucy and Desi were smart enough to have the forethought to keep control of and properly store their master reels, allowing them to make millions in the years to come off of syndicated episodes. The original episodes, including the introductions have been digitally restored and are available for purchase on DVD and Blu-Ray. It would be interesting to watch them all and note just how prevalent cigarettes and smoking were throughout the show's lifetime.