

# Amex launches Blue Card in UK

By Clare Conley

American Express is launching a new credit card in the UK, called the American Express Blue Card, after testing the concept in other countries.

It is understood that a major advertising push by Ogilvy & Mather will be used to raise the profile of Amex in the UK where it is under attack from new US entrants to the market, including MBNA and Capital One.

The campaign will also seek to attract a younger market to Amex, which is traditionally used by business people aged over 35.

The Blue Card, which is tailored to suit different markets, will be a straightforward credit card in the UK and emphasis will be on strong



Amex: Attempting to attract a younger market with its new Blue Card

branding. "Brand is more and more important in the UK. As new players flood the market, consumers

don't know what each brand stands for," says Amex Europe director of public affairs Doug Smith.

Amex is testing the Blue Card in Italy in the form of a deferred debit card.

It has already launched the Blue Card, in various forms tailored to suit individual markets, in Germany, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Canada, Australia and Japan.

UK advertising will follow the pattern of international campaigns in an attempt to present a more upbeat image.

Smith claims there is still a large untapped market in the UK. "Only 50 per cent of consumers have a credit card – there is still tremendous potential," he says.

American Express Europe spent over £20m on advertising in the UK 1997, according to ACNielsen-MEAL.

## ASA dragged into Shell UK Smart battle

The Advertising Standards Authority has been dragged into the legal fight between Shell UK and the sales promotion agency Don Marketing.

The agency issued a High Court writ against Shell at Easter alleging a copyright infringement over ownership of the Smart card concept.

But now it is alleging that in 1995 Shell deliberately misled the ASA, which was investigating complaints about its Make Money promotion. As part of it, envelopes were given away with petrol purchases, containing two pieces of paper which had to match to qualify for a prize. Players complained that the envelopes were not secure.

The allegation about Shell misleading the ASA is made on a spe-

cially created Website, which discusses Don Marketing's relationship with Shell over the past ten years.

Don Marketing managing director John Donovan claims Shell lawyers asked his company to withhold additional information which it wanted to pass to the ASA as part of a complaint it had also made.

At the time of the ASA investigation, in July and August 1995, Don Marketing was negotiating to resolve an outstanding legal claim with Shell over ownership of the Make Money promotion idea.

"Shell torpedoed that (ASA) investigation and stopped important information going to the ASA," says Donovan. "We had further information that would've changed what the ASA said in its report."

The ASA dismissed the complaint. ASA spokesman Bill Lennon says: "I cannot see it is in anybody's interest to reopen the claim."

Shell adds: "Shell did not mislead the ASA. It had all the information it needed to make its decision."

## AA ditches 'cowboy' tradesmen scheme

The Automobile Association has axed its service which helped members to vet cowboy tradesmen.

Under the scheme, which was launched in 1995, members were able to call a number featured in their annual handbook and ask for details of an appropriate tradesman from a register of builders, electri-

cians, roofers and plumbers which had been vetted by the AA.

"Only 0.02 per cent of the AA membership took up the service over the past year," says a spokesman for the organisation, which has 9.3 million members. "The AA is in the business of making its members' money work and if there's no demand for a particular service, there's no point wasting resources on it."

He adds that the database of tradesmen had already been compiled for use in conjunction with one of the AA's insurance policies.

The database will continue to be used for the Home Assistance Annual Cover, which provides 90 minutes free labour for £59; and the AA Premium Cover, which offers three hours of labour, plus £100 of parts and materials for £89.



AA: Lack of take-up dooms scheme

Granada Home Technology is launching a TV advertising campaign for its first digital television package. The push, through Abbott Mead Vickers BBDO, features Top Gear presenter Jeremy Clarkson. It aims to show consumers how Granada can help them avoid being saddled with outdated technology. The TV 2000 scheme offers viewers a Nicam stereo television and a set-top box, compatible with digital terrestrial TV consortium British Digital Broadcasting. The equipment will subsequently be replaced by an integrated set once it becomes available, in about two years' time. Media for the campaign is being handled by New PHD.

