

# ECSTASY BRANDING

Ecstasy is an illegal drug and is the commonly used street term for the chemical methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA). It is structurally similar to amphetamines or 'speed', but has quite different emotional effects. Ecstasy is sold as a tablet, a capsule or in powder form. Tablets are the most common form and these are usually swallowed.

These tablets or pills are usually stamped with a logo or brand. Pills with the same logo can be different sizes, colours and shapes. The logos can be established brands such as Rolls Royce, Versace and Mercedes or simple designs and shapes such as moons, stars and triangles.

The branding of ecstasy tablets has been an issue since the mid 1980s when manufacturers began to use certain designs to help identify particular pills. Users having no other way of knowing what pill they were taking needed to have some identifying mark so that if they enjoyed the experience they could always go back and get more of the same thing.

Unfortunately, branding is no guarantee of quality or safety. Pill-making machines now exist in Australia and a brand that has developed a good reputation can be matched and distributed quickly.

There are four stages in the manufacture of an ecstasy tablet. First the ecstasy powder (MDMA) is manufactured. The powder is then mixed with the other substances which go into the tablet. Sometimes colours are added. Speckled effects are produced by mixing different colours of filler, giving the impression that the tablet contains several active ingredients. The mixture is then weighed out. The final stage is the manufacture of the actual tablets. All of the process can be carried out in one place, but it is usually split up and done in different locations.

Pill-making is done by specialists. The MDMA which has been mixed with filler to increase the size and help bind it into a hard, smooth tablet, is forced by a piston against a die at high pressure. The die is engraved with a logo or name and can be changed to identify a 'brand'.

When a brand has a good reputation, fake look-alikes are produced. The reputation is lost and new brands emerge - it is believed that this cycle takes three to six months. There have been exceptions over the years. One of the first brands to remain on the market and survive dubious quality was the 'dove'. Another brand that lasted for some time was the 'Mitsubishi'. The 'Mitsubishi' appeared in Australia in late 1998 and was the first ecstasy tablet for some time to contain a high percentage of MDMA (up to 140 mgs). As a result a flood of 'fake' Mitsubishis came onto the market. Even though the quality of these pills were far lower, with some not containing any MDMA at all, Mitsubishis continued to be in high demand for some time.

More recently the 'CK' brand has been popular. These come in a range of colours with blue, red, orange and green CKs being available over the years.

Since 2000 there have been a number of warnings issued around the world concerning ecstasy pills which have become known as 'red Mitsubishis'. In some parts of the world analysis has shown that some of these pills have contained PMA (para-methoxyamphetamine). However, it is important to be aware that not all pills with the red Mitsubishi logo contain PMA.