



Fast Food Marketing to Children

Did You Know?

- 30% of children ages 6 to 11 are overweight. 15.3% of children ages 6 to 11 are obese.
- The eating habits children develop carry on into adulthood.
- McDonald's marketing goal is 20 visits per customer per month.
- McDonald's has an extensive marketing strategy aimed at children as well as tweens and teens.
- 90% of children visit McDonald's once a month.
- Only 1 Happy Meal option meets calorie guidelines for children.

Today, parents are becoming more and more concerned with the foods that their children are eating. Because of the nutrition concern, parents are beginning to look at what foods are marketed to children. Experts are becoming increasingly aware of the ways that fast food is advertised to children.

This newsletter will help explain the ways that the fast food industry markets to children and provide suggestions for parents to help their children stop making unhealthy food choices based on persuasive advertising.

Do You Think This is Advertising?

This coloring page was downloaded from happymeal.com. It is listed on the website as a coloring fun page. Notice how less than half the page is actually for coloring with an emphasis on collecting the Happy Meal toys displayed in color. The colors are vibrant and artistically displayed. This is one of the many examples of advertising used by the fast food industry.



Advertising: Part of a Bigger Picture

Marketing is the plan developed by a company to convince people to buy their particular good. One part of marketing is advertising.

Companies spend hundreds of millions of dollars on marketing. They research who to sell a product to, how to sell the product and are constantly using research to make marketing more persuasive to kids and parents alike.

Many children view advertising as being objective and simply providing

information about a product. Part of the reason for that view is the themes that are used in advertising.

The most common concepts in marketing focus on specific themes. For example, fast food marketing works hard to associate food with fun through toy premiums.

Marketers constantly work to create an emotional attachment between children and a particular brand. The use of characters such as Ronald McDonald and the Trix Rabbit help

secure an emotional bond between the character and the child.

The fast food industry also uses movie and television characters which children already have an emotional bond to in the hopes that the bond will transfer to a specific brand.

The fast food industry uses **cradle to the grave marketing**. The goal is to specifically tailor a marketing plan which will reach customers throughout their life to have a life long loyal consumer.

McDonald's spent \$528.8 million in marketing to support \$24.4 billion in sales.



The website is required to state that it is advertising. You can see the disclaimer at the top in white, "Hey Kids, This is advertising." Note the use of bright colors which are used for association with fun and games. McDonald's actively uses bright colors throughout their marketing campaign and in their restaurant. In addition, the prominence of the toys is a major part of McDonald's marketing.

Smarter Than You Think

By the age of three, children are able to understand the difference between television programs and commercials. By the age of 10, most children are able to understand the persuasive nature of advertising and that not all advertisements tell the truth. However, being able to understand the persuasive nature of marketing is another story entirely.

Several experts believe that the only way to protect children is to constantly control their exposure to commercialism including TV, internet access, and other areas where children are exposed to marketing and advertising. Restrictions and constant surveillance are the most extreme measures.

Other experts feel that simply talking to your child about the effects of advertising and marketing. Also, discussing the nature of marketing is a good way to help your child

become a more aware consumer.

Any type of instruction and education on marketing and advertising will help children become more aware consumers. However, the best strategy for fast food advertising and fast food consumption is for parents to lead by example and constantly discuss the effects of marketing and advertising.



Talk to your children about the effects of advertising; they will understand.

FUN!!

By having tie-ins relating to popular movies or TV shows the fast food industry creates a connections between the feelings that children have for the toys with a brand.

Approaches To Teach Children about Marketing

Problem	1st Approach	2nd Approach	Results
Children assume advertising is objective information instead of persuasion.	Ask kids what they think about commercials or the toy premiums they receive in Happy Meals.	Allow children to purchase toys and realize that what they saw on the ads is not applicable in real life.	Children will become more aware of advertising and not see it as objective information
Children do not understand the different methods of marketing.	Discuss and look together for the common themes of marketing on TV, bags, and in restaurants.	Demonstrate that brands and specific products do not guarantee happiness.	By understanding the methods, children will better understand advertisements
Constant exposure to marketing and advertising	Restrict children's access to television and internet	Monitor what children are looking at online and when watching television	Children will not be as continuously exposed to and persuaded by marketing
Advertising in schools — children consider this an endorsement from the school	Explain to children that school's are not endorsing the brand advertised	Become involved with your child's school to see what level of advertising is occurring and work to decrease that level.	Children will have an area where they are not exposed to advertising.

Methods of Marketing: The Subtle Influences

Fast food is marketed to children in a variety of ways. The strategies of that marketing address how to best engage the customer and see that they purchase the product and then return at a later date for more.

The Happy Meal is a form of advertising. The **toy** is often tied in with movies or TV shows which act as a transition for children to transfer their feelings about the movie characters or TV shows to McDonald's. The idea that eating should be fun influences children in regards to their food choices.

The **Happy Meal bag** contains games and pictures for children to occupy them while they are eating. It also blends movie characters with **Ronald McDonald** to further emotional attachments to the McDonald's

brand.

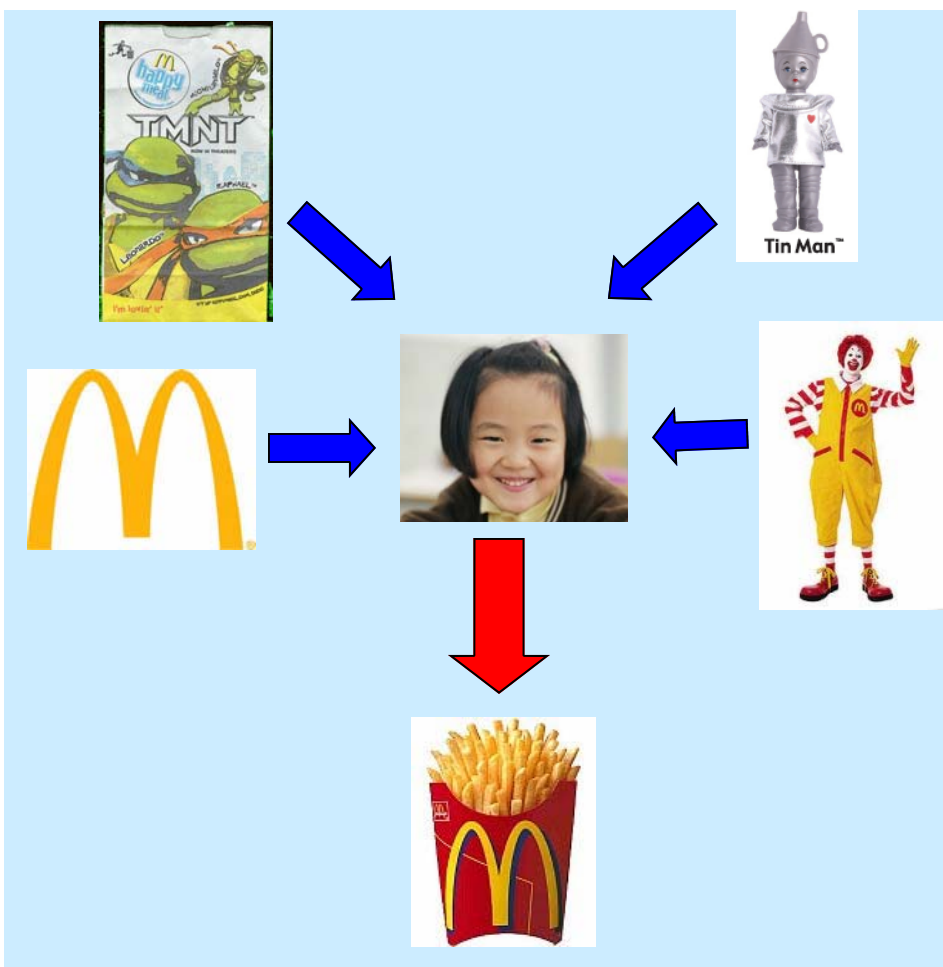
An emotional attachment between children and a brand considered a negative influence. Food becomes a time for play which may have a negative impact on how children view eating traditional meals. Also, the food that McDonald's serves does not contain all the parts of a balanced diet.

The **website** is another form of advertising. The only place that labels the website as advertising is on the homepage. The website is highly interactive and works to promote the toys as well as engage children through games, puzzles, coloring pages, and other interaction. On every page, McDonald's is mentioned in an attempt to have children associate McDonald's with fun.

McDonald's does not stop at toys

and Happy Meals when marketing to children. McDonald's has created a notion of 'learning' among parents and children by offering educational materials to teachers and schools, sponsoring fundraising events, and having a link called 'Learn' on their website. McDonald's, through their appearance with the notion of learning, is often viewed by children as being acceptable to schools, and actually a good company to buy from.

As children age, they become more aware of the intent of advertising; however, many children are not aware what marketing is and how it effects the way that the fast food industry has set up kids' meals to keep them coming back and preventing any negative views about the company.



Objects Used In Marketing

- Happy Meal Bags
- Toys
- Ronald McDonald
- McDonald's Arches
- Website
- McDonald's Safety Shows
- Educational Materials
- PlayPlaces

Objects used in marketing are meant to reinforce brand identification and positive feelings for a particular company so consumers will continue to purchase that product.