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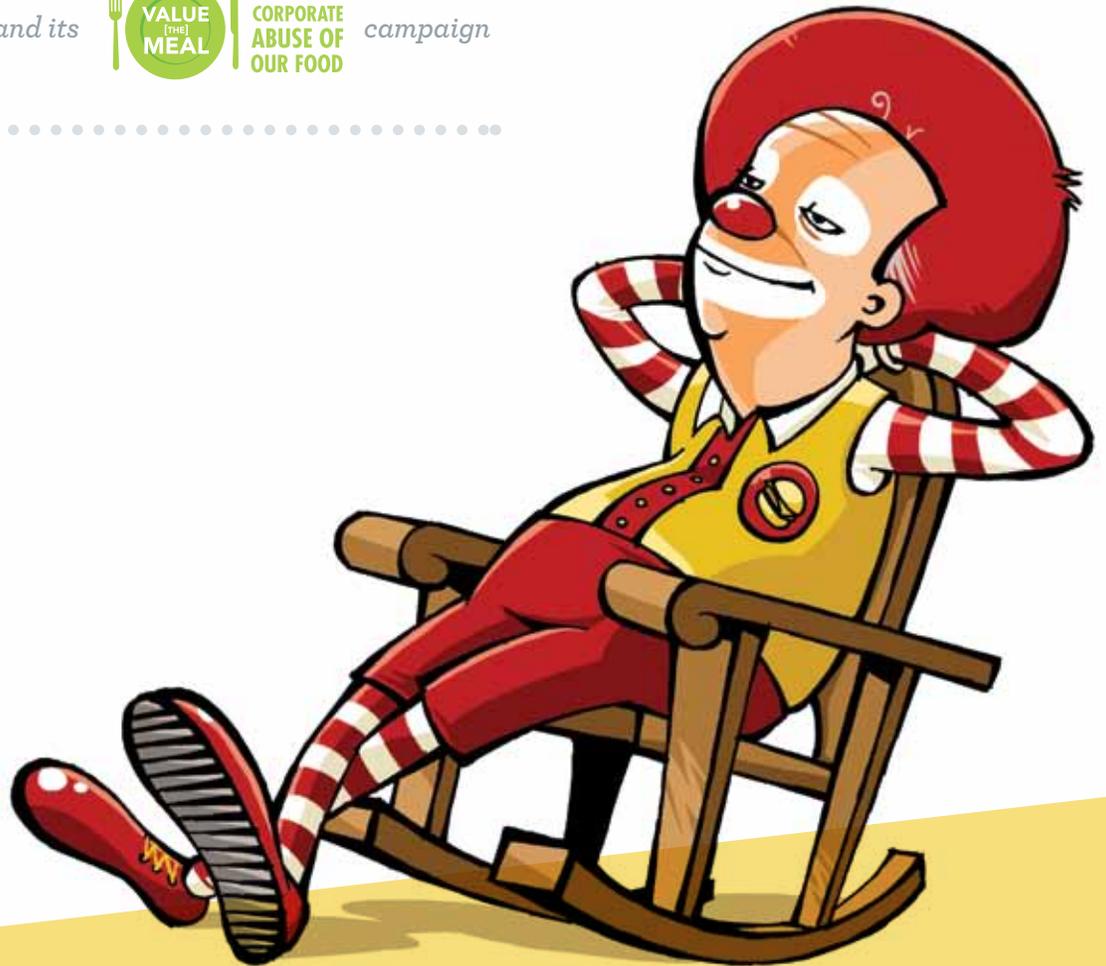


and its



CHALLENGING
CORPORATE
ABUSE OF
OUR FOOD

campaign



Clowning With Kids' Health

**THE CASE FOR
RONALD MCDONALD'S
RETIREMENT**

www.RetireRonald.org

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Foreword *by Michele Simon*

Author of Appetite for Profit: How the Food Industry Undermines Our Health and How to Fight Back



Ronald visits Calverton Elementary in Beltsville, Maryland. School presentations are but one way Ronald slips past parents to market directly to children.

To most children, Ronald McDonald is the very embodiment of McDonald's. But Ronald McDonald is far from an innocent clown. Rather, as this stunning report reveals, the character is the product of a well-orchestrated and shrewd marketing strategy by America's king of fast food. By connecting its corporate image to a fun-loving clown, McDonald's gains a tremendous amount of positive public relations. And what better way to bypass parents and market directly to children than through a clown – the icon of circuses and children's parties.

But most children have never heard of public relations and don't even have the capacity to understand what marketing is all about. Instead, children's lives are guided by fun and emotional attachment. That's why they are the most vulnerable to the marketing strategies of a character like Ronald McDonald.

In addition to the unforgivable exploitation of children there is the manner in which clown imagery masks the true face of McDonald's operations. Far from being "happy meals," McDonald's food is responsible for such social ills as heart disease, diabetes, animal welfare abuses, labor exploitation, unceasing environmental destruction, and the breakdown of our food system.

"What about the parents?" I hear this refrain all too often. After all, kids don't drive themselves to McDonald's or purchase those Happy Meals themselves. But any parent can tell you how difficult it is, after a long day at work, to resist the daily pestering by their children to take them to McDonald's. What parent hasn't driven past a McDonald's and heard the whining from the back seat? Who doesn't know a child bent on collecting Happy Meal toys or visiting the playground McDonald's so cleverly places on much of its property?

It's not just the "nag factor," which is the practice the advertising industry invented to get kids to nag their parents for all sorts of products, including junk food. What McDonald's multi-billion dollar marketing machine represents is a fundamental restructuring of the family dynamic. Every time a parent has to say no to a child, it's another let down, another way that a parent has to feel bad about not making that child happy. It's yet one more way Corporate America



Ronald reads to kids at Inglenook Library in Birmingham, Alabama. What may seem like corporate social responsibility is really just branding by another name.



Ronald with kids in Minnesota, building brand loyalty among children from a very young age.

has insinuated its way into the lives of children to make profits, even if it undermines parental values.

Even more insidious is how these very same corporations defend their alleged right to advertising by wrapping themselves in the United States Constitution. "Free speech," they claim, is what allows them to advertise wherever, whenever, and to whomever they please. But that's not what the First Amendment says at all. Free speech is a concept intended to protect the American people from the excesses of government, to allow individuals to speak out. It was never intended to protect corporate advertising. Even in the modern interpretation of "commercial speech," the Supreme Court has upheld reasonable restrictions on corporate advertising, especially to protect children, the most vulnerable of Americans.

Moreover, parents have a right to raise their children in a safe environment, without constantly worrying about predatory corporate marketing. And children have the right not to be preyed upon by a clown with a corporate agenda.

It's time to send Ronald McDonald to join Joe Camel in the retirement home of marketing icons, where he hopefully will never be heard from again.

AN INTRODUCTION

In 1963, the McDonald's Corporation unveiled a clown with hamburger bun-shaped shoes and a food tray hat that has since profoundly shaped advertising, eating habits, and the global food system.

Never before had a corporation so sharply focused its marketing beyond (and around) those with the purse on those with the greatest pull on the purse strings. The strategy was simple and ingenious: build brand loyalty among children and you will have customers for life.

Today, there is scarcely a child who doesn't recognize Ronald McDonald nor a parent who hasn't been nagged to visit the Golden Arches. The use of the iconic clown has propelled McDonald's growth into an international fast food juggernaut.

The problem is the clown's success can now be measured in staggering rates of diet-related disease. Since Ronald's conception, obesity rates have more than tripled among American children. The prevalence of diet-related conditions like type 2 diabetes has similarly skyrocketed. In addition, McDonald's dependence on enormous quantities of cheap, consistent ingredients has fundamentally reshaped our entire food system.

But McDonald's is loath to take responsibility, leaning on a series of age-old public relations myths, namely that "the corporation just gives consumers what they demand." It's as if the corporation's billion dollar



Ronald and a child at a store opening in Middleton, Massachusetts. Toddlers such as this little girl are unable to differentiate advertising from reality until they are much older.

marketing budget wasn't aimed at influencing and creating that demand, especially among those most vulnerable to the manipulations of marketing: children.

It has been previously reported that about 40 percent of McDonald's advertising expenditures are spent marketing directly to children.¹ This percentage spikes significantly when you include the dollars spent convincing "gatekeepers" (a term McDonald's executives use to describe parents) that McDonald's fast food isn't so bad for kids.

It may be one thing for an adult to judge the sales pitch against the science, but children do not understand the persuasive intent of advertisements. Brand loyalties can also form at a very young age and persist through adulthood.

That's a major reason why, while most Americans have a favorable impression of McDonald's and its corporate mascot, about half favor retiring Ronald. It wouldn't be the first time a global corporation gave its controversial namesake a rest either by force of public pressure and/or moral compunction.

Until that time, he will remain the face and a driving force behind an epidemic of obesity and diet-related disease that costs well over \$147 billion a year in the U.S. alone.²

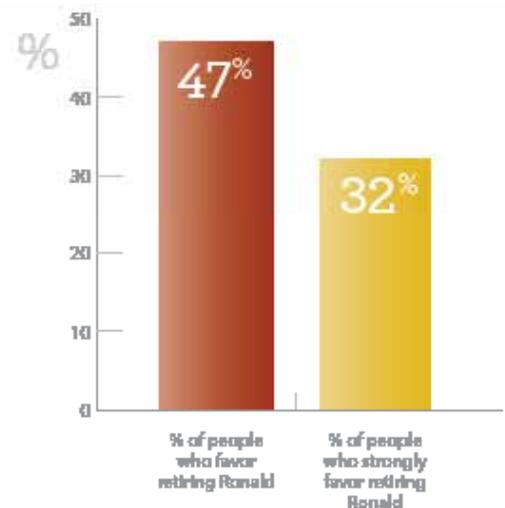
So far, rather than let Ronald rest, McDonald's spin doctors have instead aimed, ironically, to make the clown the face of something else: health and well-being. As history demonstrates, Ronald has no difficulty speaking out of both sides of his mouth.

McDonald's former CEO Fred Turner once explained, the corporation got into charity "for very selfish reasons. It was probably 99 percent commercial. It was an inexpensive and imaginative way of getting your name before the public and building a reputation to offset the image of selling 15-cent hamburgers."³

In other words, for McDonald's, "corporate social responsibility" is just branding and marketing by another name. Sending Ronald to schools as a "health ambassador" is a means of building brand trust among parents by alleviating their concerns about McDonald's products. And for all the talk of health and healthy choices, like chocolate milk and apple slices in caramel dipping sauce, all the promotions aim to bolster sales of McDonald's bread and butter: its burgers, fries and soda.

Well it's time the huckstering was reserved for talent night at the retirement home. If Ronald continues at the job he's been doing the joke will be on the health of future generations.

Public Opinion of Ronald



Clowning With Kids' Health provides findings from a new nationwide poll conducted by Lake Research Partners on American attitudes toward its most recognizable commercial icon. It also details the results of a nationwide dragnet to dredge up just where and how Ronald is being used to market fast food to children. To provide the backdrop to which Ronald has ascended to the brink of retirement, *Clowning With Kids' Health* documents the clown's history and the psychology behind the clown's usage.

Without further ado, we give you Ronald McDonald....

RONALD MCDONALD: A RETROSPECTIVE

“Here I am kids. Hey, isn’t watching TV fun? Especially when you got delicious McDonald’s hamburgers. I know we’re going to be friends too cause I like to do everything boys and girls like to do. Especially when it comes to eating those delicious McDonald’s hamburgers.”

-Ronald McDonald, from his first television commercial⁴

The era in which Ronald McDonald was conceived was a simpler time. The clown marketed fatty burgers and fries directly to kids without repercussion, and seemed to have a ball doing it.

McDonald’s Corporation Founder Ray Kroc spoke plainly about why marketing to kids made business sense, “a child who loves our TV commercials and brings her grandparents to a McDonald’s gives us two more customers.”⁵

But today things aren’t so simple. Most Americans don’t think it’s right to use cartoon and children’s characters like Ronald to sell a harmful product like McDonald’s burgers.⁶ So CEO Jim Skinner has attempted to rewrite history claiming, “Ronald has never sold food to kids in the history of his existence.”⁷



McDonald’s Corporation Founder Ray Kroc believed marketing to kids just made plain business sense. Today kids under twelve command up to \$50 billion in direct purchasing power, and influence \$670 billion in family purchases.

The public is also getting wise to why Ronald has reinvented himself more times than Madonna and maintained a fever pitched schedule of parties, speaking engagements, and commercials (hint: it’s not to trim America’s waistline). The trend has even the Vice President for Marketing Greg Watson longing for simpler times.

“We have Ronald doing all sorts of things...we want to simplify that and not burden him with too many other assignments – making him a spokesperson for nutrition, making him a spokesperson for too many other things,” said Watson recently. “I think it takes away from the magic and joy that Ronald’s suppose to bring.”⁸

And when Watson says “magic and joy” it may be that he really means “all beef patties, special sauce, lettuce, cheese.” And that is what Ronald McDonald is all about in a nutshell...er...sesame seed bun.

Birth of a pioneer...in marketing to kids

Speaking of reinventions, before Ronald was Ronald he was Bozo the Clown, star of his own television show, "Bozo's Circus." Tapping Bozo's popularity with kids, McDonald's hired the clown to attend the opening of a store in Alexandria, Virginia. Children and their families lined the streets by the thousands; purchasing food from McDonald's in order to visit the clown.⁹

This in-person promotion was an extension of commercials Bozo the Clown delivered during the local version of his weekly television show that was sponsored by McDonald's.

Bozo proved a talented spokesperson for McDonald's. In just three years of marketing with Bozo, local sales grew 30 percent and exceeded McDonald's national average by 50 percent. The Washington, D.C. -area franchises became the largest in the country with an advertising budget that exceeded that of the national corporation. And most of this budget was spent promoting the clown.¹⁰

Despite Bozo's success promoting McDonald's to children on television, the Washington network dropped Bozo's Circus in 1963, leaving McDonald's without a pitchman. They quickly decided it was time the store had a spokes-clown of its own.¹¹

So in 1963, rookie television announcer Willard Scott suited up as Ronald McDonald and the clown made its own commercial debut.

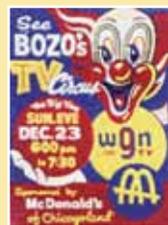
Though hard to imagine as extraordinary today given the ubiquity of advertising to children, in his first commercial Ronald made a direct appeal not to potential adult patrons but to children. The approach bucked all marketing conventions...and it worked.

Before long McDonald's had embraced the clown nationwide and attached its fortune to Ronald's star, ushering Scott out in favor of the trimmer Coco the Clown of Barnum and Bailey fame.¹²

Soon the move would blow-up...literally.

A Clown's Coming of Age

Over the years, Ronald has taken on many roles, all in devoted service to building lifelong brand loyalty to the Golden Arches.



McDonald's discovers clown power

McDonald's sponsors the popular children's show "Bozo's Circus." "There was something about the combination of hamburgers and Bozo that was irresistible to kids," said former "Bozo" star Willard Scott.



Ronald McDonald is born

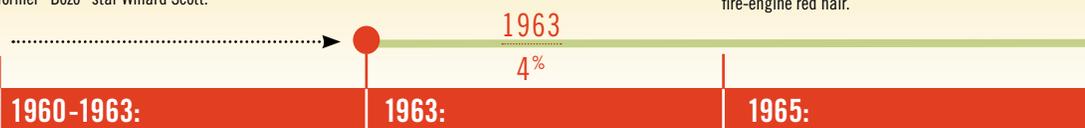
Capitalizing on Bozo's success marketing to kids, McDonald's introduces its own clown in a series of locally televised commercials.



Ronald Goes National

In preparation for his role as national corporate spokesperson, Ronald gets a makeover. His new image includes the now-famous white face, canary-yellow jumpsuit, red shoes, striped socks and fire-engine red hair.

Childhood Obesity Rates (Centers for Disease Control)
Prevalence of Obesity* Among U.S. Children - Ages 6-11



*Sex- and age-specific BMI ≥ 95th percentile based on the CDC growth charts.

In 1965, after some initial internal disagreement about the benefits of national television advertising, McDonald's accepted an offer from NBC to sponsor the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. The 3.5 minute ad buy featuring Ronald gave the corporation an eight percent sales jump during a time of year where sales typically declined.¹³

The following year, pleased with the successful gamble, McDonald's for the first time sponsored a, shall we say, super-sized Ronald balloon in the parade.

The return on investment was so super that in 1967 the corporation broke into athletic sponsorships with a new postseason football game that would later be called the Super Bowl.¹⁴

And that was just the beginning for a corporation that today spends \$1.2 billion on marketing just in the U.S., with much of that amount being spent advertising directly to children...namely through its clown mascot.¹⁵⁻¹⁶

Clown at a crossroads

Today, McDonald's boasts that Ronald McDonald is as recognizable as Santa Claus.¹⁷ The brand he helped create now exceeds \$32 billion, making it the sixth most valuable brand in the world over Google, Apple and Disney.¹⁸

But he is also spread more thin than ever (as you'll see in the next section) and falling out of favor. In an effort to deflect criticisms raised by popular films like "Food Inc." and "Supersize Me" and books like "The Omnivore's Dilemma," the clown has been employed in a wide range of public relations gimmicks that double as a means of branding and marketing unhealthy food to children.

But how long can he keep up the hoax? After all, no one likes a duplicitous clown.

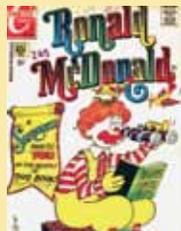


Ronald participates in a tree-trimming at the Chicago Police Department. Such appearances have helped blur traditional lines between public and commercial space.



Ronald joins the parade

Ronald makes his national commercial debut at the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, a favorite spectacle among children nationwide.



Ronald crosses over into comics

Ronald leaps into the world of graphic art, inviting comic-reading kids to visit him at McDonald's.



Ronald gets a gang

Ronald gets a home, McDonaldland, and a cast of characters to help him market fast food to kids.



Ronald gets into health care

The first Ronald McDonald House opens in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania for what a former executive would call "99 percent commercial" and "selfish reasons."

1973

4%

1965:

1970:

1971:

1974:

WHERE'S RONALD?

“He’s here. He’s there. Man, the guy is everywhere.”

-from McDonald’s kids page¹⁹



Unlike Waldo of the popular children’s books, Ronald continues to build his popularity by making sure he isn’t hard to pick out in a crowd.

In the fall of 2009, Corporate Accountability International put out a national call for Ronald sightings to get a better sense of just where and how he was hooking kids on unhealthy food.



Ronald becomes an action figure

Ronald is miniaturized, so that play time can double as a marketing opportunity. Throughout his life, Ronald will be reincarnated as everything from a Barbie doll to a Beanie Baby to a bobble head.



The Happy Meal rolled out

McDonald’s launches a primary vehicle for Ronald’s popularity, the Happy Meal. It is the result of two years of development by advertising firms Bernstein-Rein and Stolz Advertising Company who were contracted to develop a children’s meal that would promote McDonald’s as a restaurant for families, specifically those with small children.



Ronald remakes himself

Whether it was riding as a cowboy on the Cheesburger McTrail, or appearing as an astronaut or a Viking, the 80s were a branch out decade for the corporate clown; each incarnation an effort to connect with a different demographic of children.



Ronald hits the big screen

Ronald plays a supporting role in the film Mac and Me, “winning” a Razzie Award for Worst New Star.

1990
11.3%

1976
6.5%

1976:

1979:

1980s:

1989:

What did Americans find?

Well, it turns out building brand identification with children is hard work. Ronald is no longer content just to interact with children when they visit McDonald's, he has become involved in every aspect of childhood, with appearances in some of the most unlikely places.

Fortunately for Ronald, his appearances can be short on substance and long on promotion. As the American Psychological Association explains, "the most common persuasive strategy employed in advertising is to associate the product with fun and happiness, rather than to provide any factual product-related information."²⁰

McDonald's ad executives know as much. "Ronald does not promote food, but fun and activity – the McDonald's experience," according to corporate spokesman Walt Riker.²¹

The strategy is one Ronald pioneered and one that predominates, but it's just one of the many ways Ronald reaches kids. And though the schedule today is accelerated, the objective remains the same: turn children into life-long customers.

While on the surface Ronald's running around may seem like community service, see if you can't spot "branding and marketing by another name" in the examples below.

Clowning around schools

"Back in the days when we first got a company airplane, we used to spot good locations for McDonald's stores by flying over a community and looking for schools. Now we use a helicopter, and it's ideal."

-Ray Kroc, McDonald's Corporation founder ²²



Ronald stars in his own video game

Ronald tries to stay cool and relevant in the '90s by starring in Sega's "Treasure Land Adventure" giving kids of all ages a new opportunity to spend hours thinking about McDonald's.



Ronald makes movies

Ronald stars in six 40-minute animated films called "The Wacky Adventures of Ronald McDonald." Note the number of times the Golden Arches appears on the cover image alone.

2000
15.8%



Ronald promoted

In line with what the American Psychological Association calls "the most common persuasive strategy employed in advertising," Ronald is promoted by McDonald's to the position of "Chief Happiness Officer." The strategy associates fast food with "fun and happiness" instead of providing any "factual product-related information."



Ronald goes online

Ronald debuts his website www.Ronald.com as a place where kids can "learn, play and create while having fun." Early versions of the website proclaim that Ronald is "the ultimate authority in everything." Partner website, McWorld, incentivizes kids to buy Happy Meals as a means to unlock treasures in McDonald's virtual universe.

1994:

1998:

2003:

2004:

Zoning restaurants near schools has made it easy for kids to frequent McDonald's at times when parents have the least control over where their children eat. The proximity is also an opportunity to market to children regardless of whether their parents approve of their eating fast food. Think about each Golden Arches and Ronald's Playground as a giant billboard – that's the impact they have on those who pass by...or children glancing out from a classroom window.

But what's good for the corporation's bottom line is quite the opposite for the public's health and waist line.

A 2009 study by the National Bureau of Economic Research found that ninth graders whose schools were within a block of fast food were more likely to be obese than students whose schools were further away.²³

McDonald's practice of building restaurants at the doorstep of schools is widespread and continues to spur competitors to follow suit. In Chicago, one of the chain's biggest markets, Corporate Accountability International found that more than 90 percent of the city's McDonald's were located within walking distance* of a school.²⁴

Another study has found the clustering of McDonald's and other fast food chains in neighborhoods with schools to be disproportionately high when compared to other neighborhoods.²⁵

If proximity to schools can contribute significantly to obesity rates, you can imagine what happens when McDonald's and other fast food is sold in schools.

McDonald's pioneered that practice too. The first McDonald's to open inside a high school opened in 1976 in Benton, Arkansas.²⁶ Today, nearly a quarter of the nation's high schools sell branded fast food.²⁷

*Walking distance is calculated to be 0.5 miles, the distance standard between any two major streets in Chicago and the equivalent of four blocks.



Ronald continues to find ways to penetrate public, non-commercial spaces like schools. By promoting positive causes, he is able to in turn promote junk food to children. Here he gives a thumbs-up during a school presentation on bullying in Churubusco, Indiana.



Ronald becomes an ambassador... of health

Ronald morphs into an "ambassador for an active, balanced lifestyle" in response to lawsuits that allege the fast food industry is responsible for childhood and adolescent obesity.

2006
17%



Ronald finds new ways into schools

Ronald finds ways to slip fast food promotions past parents and into schools, through programs such as "McTeacher's Night," "Ronald McDonald School Shows," and "Book Times with Ronald McDonald."

"He's here. He's there. Man, the guy's everywhere."

2005:

2006:

TODAY:

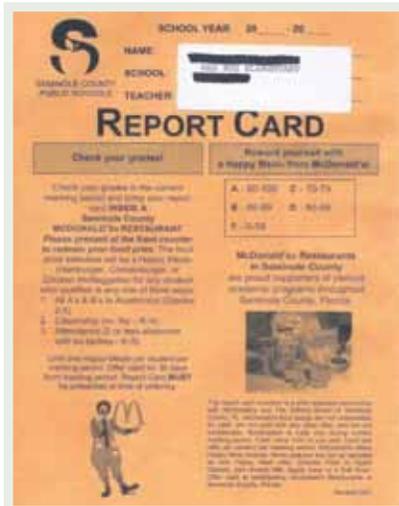
McSpelling and Teaching

“Clowns and teachers are both figures that children trust. Just like using teachers to bring kids into McDonald’s, to sell and serve them fast food, the use of Ronald McDonald as a marketing tool exploits that trust.”

- Rebecca Coolidge, first grade teacher, South San Francisco, California²⁸

When it comes to marketing to kids in and around schools, Ronald’s employer has also been busy figuring out ways to engage kids in the classroom...and even to bring the classroom to McDonald’s.

Using the underfunding of the nation’s schools as a marketing opportunity, McDonald’s conceived “McTeacher’s Night,” a fundraising program that puts teachers behind the register for a night. In exchange for their free labor, McDonald’s donates a percentage of the evening’s profits to the local school.



The program generates great local public relations for McDonald’s as well as a spike in sales from the parents, children, and community members who are encouraged to eat while teachers work. Children are encouraged to draw pictures of Ronald McDonald and to decorate the walls of the restaurant. In exchange for the boost in sales, favorable public relations and opportunity to market to its target demographic, schools receive an average of \$800 for a night’s work.²⁹

For further free publicity in schools, McDonald’s rewards children with free burgers and Chicken McNuggets for meeting educational goals and academic achievement through programs like the “McSpellit Club.”³⁰ In one Michigan elementary school, McDonald’s even installed a mural of Ronald and a “Mini McDonald’s” restaurant where students could redeem academic achievement awards for their favorite fast food.³¹

In Seminole County, FL, McDonald’s offered free Happy Meals in exchange for academic achievement. Report cards arrived in a branded envelope.

In Seminole County, Florida, McDonald’s took their fast food reward program a step further. Grade school children received their report cards in envelopes featuring Ronald and offers for free Happy Meals in exchange for good grades, attendance, and behavior.³²



Ronald receives third party validation from Wisconsin’s first lady at an event promoting reading.

McDonald’s also develops “sponsored educational material” as yet another means of penetrating schools with its marketing. One McDonald’s first grade program asks kids to design a McDonald’s restaurant and provides information about applying for a McDonald’s job.³³

Apparently, it’s never too early to start recruiting!

Parents are, however, challenging such practices. In Seminole County, the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood and area parents pressured the county into canceling the first grade program.³⁴ You’ve got to give it to the “hamburger-happy” huckster, he’s mastered some clever means of marketing burgers to children and using the adults kids trust most to validate his product...despite its affect on public health.

The Ironic Ronald McJock

“I take what I put into my body very seriously – we should not be promoting this type of food as having any connection to athletic pursuits. It breaks my heart to see the Olympics using Ronald McDonald to promote this food to kids; it’s the exact wrong message to be sending.”

-Ruth Heidrich, track and field gold medalist and six-time Ironman Triathlon finisher ³⁵

Another way Ronald has inserted himself into schools is as an “ambassador for health” – mind you that the diplomat is from a restaurant at the heart of the global epidemic of diet-related disease.

Though physical activity is a key element in health and wellness, the lack of it does not appear to be the primary reason behind the epidemic. While only one third of U.S. adolescents meet the recommended levels of physical activity, there is no clear evidence young people have become less active over the past decade as the prevalence of obesity has continued to rise.³⁶ There are, however, plenty of studies confirming the increase in consumption of McDonald’s-style fast food and its impact on children’s health.³⁷⁻³⁸

That’s why McDonald’s approach is such a cunning one and has provoked the fast food industry, at large, to follow suit. Though no amount of exercise can compensate for a diet high in fast food, Ronald’s calisthenics are distracting enough to make people believe otherwise.

In 2005, McDonald’s transitioned Ronald McDonald from “chief happiness officer” into an “ambassador for a balanced, active lifestyle.”³⁹ One can only imagine the move was in response to growing concerns about the healthfulness of its product and the 2004 release of “Supersize Me,” a film critical of the corporation’s practices.

In his new incarnation Ronald traded in his baggy yellow jumpsuit for a formfitting track suit and appeared on television commercials riding bikes, snowboarding, and juggling vegetables.⁴⁰

With Ronald taking on his new persona, the corporation initiated new programs designed to gain access to kids through educators and government officials like the “McDonald’s Active Achievers” and “Passport to Play.”

Through “Active Achievers” Ronald delivers, “educational messages to students about nutrition, and balance between eating right and staying active,” and offers “Get Moving with Ronald McDonald” school assemblies.⁴¹ Partners on the program also include sugary-beverage manufacturer Coca-Cola as well as education departments, nutritionists, and associations who don’t seem to see the trouble with having a salesperson for cheap burgers sell kids on health.⁴²



And when McDonald's launches a new program, it goes all out. "Passport to Play," the corporation's curriculum on "how kids around the world play, snack and grow," has been used in 40,000 schools in the U.S. alone. The guides and materials will reach approximately eleven million children in 15 countries.⁴³ Ronald had the opportunity to kick-off the use of the new curriculum with a bang, appearing at more than 90 schools across the country in his newly adopted athletic wear.⁴⁴

Not only has McDonald's used schools and health professionals to validate its not-so-healthy food among students and parents, it has also paid generously for the endorsements of a range of professional athletes from Kobe Bryant, LeBron James and Dwight Howard to Julie Foudy, Serena Williams, and Michael Phelps; none of whom actually rely on a McDonald's diet to remain atop their respective sports.

McDonald's has long-sponsored the Olympic Games and recently committed upwards of \$100-150 million to the Vancouver games and the upcoming summer Olympics in London.⁴⁵ For one, McDonald's has launched the "McDonald's Champion Kids Contest" that selected ten children between 11 and 14 to attend the games, and sent Ronald to deliver the good news to each of the winners. Their charge? Promote McDonald's by posting journals, photos, and videos on McDonald's.com.⁴⁶ For McDonald's executives, the only thing better than a clown promoting cheap, unhealthy food is having unsuspecting teens do Ronald's job for him.

Providing his own brand of health care

"The medical community must practice what it's preaching. It is deplorable for a doctor to ask a patient to avoid harmful foods that cause heart disease while there is McDonald's in the hospital's lobby serving a menu that is mostly burgers, fries, and soda."

-Dr. Lenard I. Lesser, Robert Wood Johnson Clinical Scholar and family physician at University of California, Los Angeles ⁴⁷



Ronald's Scripps Research Institute partnership is one example of Ronald's duplicity. On the one hand he promotes fatty food to kids. On the other, research initiatives on childhood obesity. Needless to say McDonald's support for such research raises serious questions about the integrity of the outcomes.

While Ronald and his employer have done quite a bit to align themselves with health and wellness, perhaps no other Ronald sighting was as troubling as his appearances in children's hospitals across the country.

The *Washington Post* discovered there are at least 30 McDonald's restaurants located inside hospitals nationwide, including children's hospitals in Los Angeles, Philadelphia, New York City and Cleveland. In some cases, Ronald hails patients from the lobby.⁴⁸

If it's not McDonald's in the lobby or food court, it's a chain patterned after the market leader. A 2006 study published in the *American Academy of Pediatrics* estimates that fast food restaurants can be found in nearly 30 percent of U.S. hospitals with pediatric residency programs.⁴⁹

The reason for opening McDonald's in hospitals may extend well beyond the profit potential, which itself should not be diminished. Outpatient pediatric visitors to a hospital with an on-site McDonald's are four times

more likely than visitors to other hospitals to have purchased fast food the day of their visit. Inserting Ronald in the health care environment is yet another way to build undeserved brand trust among parents and the public. Visitors to hospitals with a McDonald's more often assume that the chain supports the hospital financially, rating McDonald's food healthier than visitors to hospitals sans the corporate clown.⁵⁰

Ronald is no newcomer to health care settings. His first foray into the industry was 35 years ago with the founding of his own homes for sick children and their families – the Ronald McDonald House, which now boasts some 300 homes worldwide. The charity's founding, however, was not entirely as altruistic as the corporation's historians would today have people believe. Beginning in the late 1950's McDonald's decided to visibly support local charities as a means of generating positive publicity. "We got into it for very selfish reasons," Fred Turner, former CEO and Chairman once told an interviewer. "It was an inexpensive, imaginative way of getting your name before the public and building a reputation to offset the image of selling 15-cent hamburgers. It was probably 99 percent commercial."⁵¹ The exposure generated by this community involvement spurred McDonald's idea for a branded charity of its own.

The expressed marketing intent of McDonald's charity work raises some serious questions. On the one hand, the charities are helping children and families in great need. On the other, the charities are another means of building brand trust, identification, and loyalty to a product and a corporation at the heart of the global epidemic of diet-related disease.

Needless to say, Ronald's forays into the world of public health have him speaking out of both sides of his mouth.

Taking to the tube

During the nationwide Where's Ronald search people spied the clown during Saturday morning cartoons and other prime-time viewing hours for children, making an activity that should be harmless and fun for children another realm for parents to police.

In addition to getting the McDonald's brand in front of kids during these times, a bulk of the corporation's advertising aims to entice children to visit restaurants with the cross-over appeal of the movies, games, music and toys kids like and want most...or simply have the greatest familiarity with – familiarity that generally results from supersized expenditures on marketing.

Recent promotions surrounding animated films *Shrek Forever After*, *Alvin and the Chipmunks: The Squeakquel*, and *Ice Age: Dawn of the Dinosaurs* are but a sampling of the film releases and merchandising McDonald's capitalized on to further incentivize children to frequent its franchises. In 2009, McDonald's also celebrated 30 years of Happy Meals with its fifth Beanie Babies promotion.⁵²

And lest you think Ronald only partners with fictional characters in his television promotions, there are also marketing campaigns involving pop icons that are geared for a slightly older crowd, namely 'tweens.' Of the celebrity spokespeople, Justin Timberlake may be the most notable,



Ronald shows up wherever kids are and in whatever kids watch, from commercials during Saturday morning cartoons to movies, games and music.

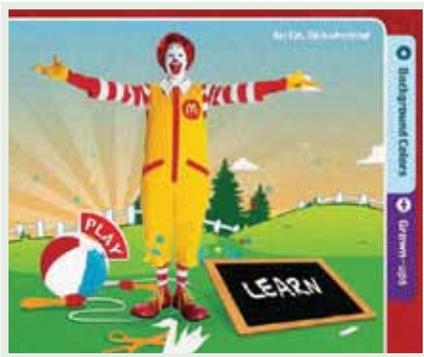
because he also sold his 2003 single "I'm Lovin' It" to McDonald's to use in its advertising campaign of the same name.⁵³

Unfortunately, the inundation of cross-promotional images, products, and celebrity endorsements leaves children with more than just stars in their eyes. The marketing can have a profound impact on children's brand preferences and inclination to eat unhealthy food – issues we explore further in the section *Putting Ronald on Kid's Brains, Past Parents*.

There's a reason why McDonald's and other junk food purveyors dedicate so much of their ad budget to television advertising. It reaches a vast audience and it's effective.

Today the average American child views 40,000 commercials in a year, half of which are for junk food.⁵⁴⁻⁵⁵ Parents could just turn the TV off, but that wouldn't prevent Ronald from reaching children through other mediums like the internet.

The McWorld Wide Web



Ronald.com invites children too young to understand the persuasive intent of advertising to spend hours playing "adver-games" that reinforce loyalty to the McDonald's brand.

Although people found a slew of ways the clown and the brand he promotes shapes the world our children live in, online Ronald actually *creates* a world...a "McWorld" that is...for children to explore and, were it possible, inhabit.⁵⁶

To unlock "all kinds of cool stuff" in McDonald's virtual world (the "Happy Meal gone digital" to borrow from the Web site's description) kids are encouraged to frequent McDonald's and look for special codes found on the Happy Meal's "healthier" items (apples with caramel dipping sauce, White and Chocolate Milk Jugs). So, in other words, in order to maximize fun in this "free" virtual space, children are incentivized to buy Happy Meals. In McWorld, "where kids rule," buying Happy Meals is the best way to obtain, "accessories for your avatar, treehouse, or interactive pets" and visit with popular movie, comic and TV characters.⁵⁷

For parents concerned about their children spending their free time in the corporation's promotional virtual reality, instead of reading, getting exercise or exploring educational sites, not to worry – buried in the fine print McDonald's reminds children to follow family rules on internet use. Kids, never mind the voice that comes with each scroll over reminding you that "kids rule."⁵⁸

What a perfect world in which to hawk hamburgers, right? Well, that may be because earlier incarnations of McDonald's Web presence were geared primarily at gathering information on the behaviors and preferences of its youngest customers.

Declaring Ronald "the ultimate authority on everything" the first McDonald's kids-oriented Web site encouraged children to send the clown an email telling him their name, favorite McDonald's menu item, and other personal information that would help the corporation assemble data about the interests and hobbies of their child consumers.

Today children are protected from such overt tactics by the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act, which took effect in 2000. But rest assured, McDonald's is still able to gather information by observing the behavior of children in its McWorld.

In McWorld's partner site, Ronald.com, McDonald's advertises in the form of games, often referred to as adver-games, as well as party kits. Like in McWorld, parents needn't worry children will mistake the Web site for anything but an interactive advertisement – written innocuously in white, small print in the upper right-hand corner is the warning, "hey kids, this is advertising."⁵⁹

Unfortunately, while these interactions with Ronald McDonald occur virtually, his influence on our children's eating habits are very real.

PUTTING RONALD ON KIDS' BRAINS, PAST PARENTS

"We have living proof of the long-lasting quality of early brand loyalties in the cradle-to-grave marketing at McDonald's. We start taking children in for their first and second birthdays, and on and on, and eventually they have a great deal of preference for that brand. Children can carry that with them through a lifetime."

-James McNeal, children's marketing expert, author of *Kids As Customers*⁶⁰

To the retailers of the world with products to sell, children represent a once and future market with a combined purchasing power unseen in earlier generations. In the U.S. it is estimated that children (up to age 12) command \$40 - \$50 billion in direct purchasing power, and influence another \$670 billion in family purchases annually.⁶¹

And there may be no other demographic to which marketing is more effective than children. Unlike adults, children do not understand advertising's persuasive intent and even just one 30-second commercial can influence the brand preferences of children as young as two.⁶²⁻⁶⁴ For this reason child psychologists are increasingly calling into question the ethics of marketing to children at large, let alone the marketing of a product so detrimental to children's health and the public's well-being.

As scientific evidence continues to mount that McDonald's marketing to kids is no less than commercial exploitation, more and more professional and health associations are going on record about their concerns as well. The American Academy of Pediatrics, for one, has asserted that, "advertising directed toward children is inherently deceptive and exploits children under eight years of age."⁶⁵

What's most insidious is that the manipulation of children in this case translates not only into a child's favorable impression of Big Macs and Chicken McNuggets, but into their eating unhealthy amounts of each.⁶⁶ As the former Director General of the World Health Organization has noted, "these marketing approaches matter for public health. They influence our own – and in particular our children's – patterns of behavior. Given that they are designed to succeed, they have serious consequences for those at whom they are targeted."⁶⁷

And as we've seen in the previous section, McDonald's not only pioneered the science of marketing to children, but elevated it to a \$17 billion a year practice.⁶⁸

The power of getting the brand in kids' hands

We all know that the repetition of messages and images – whether in politics, the marketplace, or classroom – has a profound impact on the memory, choices, loyalties and preferences of adults.

In children the effect is magnified; a vulnerability which marketers have exploited for decades.⁶⁹ The repetitious use of cartoon characters creates a recognizable, relatable and unique personality for children to associate with a particular brand or product.⁷⁰ According to Andrew Ellis, professor of psychology and author of a study about brand recognition in children, the associations ingrained in childhood are typically carried forward into adulthood. “You’re more likely to be favorably disposed to a brand you’ve known all your life than one you’ve encountered more recently,” says Ellis.⁷¹ In this way, a corporation that builds trust and positive associations in children is more likely to retain that child consumer’s brand loyalty into adulthood. Marketing characters, in this sense, are tools for establishing customers for life.



The Ronald Beanie Baby is but one way McDonald's aims to position its brand everywhere kids are. To the corporation play time is just another opportunity to advertise.

According to John F. Love, author of “McDonald’s: Behind the Arches,” “no other marketing factor has been more important in distinguishing McDonalds as a leader in fast food than its early decision to appeal to children through advertising.” Although other fast food chains followed suit “none was able to weaken the loyalty of children to McDonald’s.”⁷²

To this end, McDonald’s has not only ensured that Ronald and the McDonald’s brand are everywhere kids are, it has branded products intended for even their youngest customers. There are in-store PlayPlaces for kids and menu items wrapped in images of Ronald playing with children.⁷³ There are also the high chair trays with images of anthropomorphic hamburgers and infant bibs with pictures of Ronald and Friends.⁷⁴ All serve to reinforce the brand for both children and parents alike during meals, playtime and beyond.

Promotional gimmicks such as collectable toy series in kids’ meals provide ongoing incentive to keep kids coming back. Typically, any one toy is made available for a limited time, often a period of one week so that in order to

“collect” the complete set, a child must return to McDonald’s and purchase a Happy Meal as often as the toys are rotated. In a survey conducted by Consumers International, approximately one out of every three 8- to 11-year-olds said the toys and games included in the kids’ meals were an important reason for visiting one chain over another.⁷⁵

So what’s the result of all this product placement?

Well, not surprisingly, numerous studies have shown that exposure to food advertising makes children significantly more likely to favor advertised brands.⁷⁶

In a 2007 study from Stanford University, preschool children even reported that food in McDonald’s wrappers tasted better than identical food wrapped in plain wrappers, suggesting that branding can even trump sensory input.⁷⁷

Rebelling through Ronald

Early on, McDonald's found a formula that worked for reaching the hearts and minds of children, namely by creating a space just for them.

From McDonald's playgrounds and Ronald.com to Happy Meals and children's parties, the messages and images are calculated to appeal to a child's growing self-awareness and desire to possess things that are uniquely her/his own.

As child psychologist Susan Linn writes, "marketing products by feeding into children's 'need to be in control' exacerbates an ongoing normal tension in family life that arises as children move from the total dependence of infancy to the independence of adulthood...we call this a need for 'autonomy.'"⁷⁸

Alarming, that same appeal to independence and autonomy which first attracts a child to the happy meal will cause them to reject the item as they mature and sense they have outgrown the kids meal.⁷⁹ The desire to no longer be treated as a child and cast-off things associated with childhood can be easily leveraged by advertisers. In fact, concerns have been raised that toys given away in happy meals and the nature of the marketing used to promote them are unlikely to appeal to children over the age of 9 or 10 and may instead be sending the message that older children should be making choices from the adult menu.⁸⁰ Consumers International finds that "the marketing for a more teenage audience promotes items from the adult menu."⁸¹

The trouble with this, of course, is that these products come not only with an adult-sized price tag, but an adult-sized calorie count as well, and there's no option for "healthy" side substitutes on the adult menu.



A young child shares a park bench with Ronald.

The power of pester

We have seen how McDonald's takes advantage of environments beyond parents' control to brand and sell its products to children. But that's not the only way McDonald's overcomes the reservations parents have with buying unhealthy food for their children.

As one advertising executive has put it, "we're relying on the kid to pester the mom to buy the product."⁸² The aggressively studied, honed and employed tactic to which this executive refers is affectionately termed "pester power" by those in the children's marketing industry.

Lucy Hughes, former VP of Initiative Media, explains, "if we understand what motivates a parent to buy a product...if we develop a creative commercial that encourages the child to whine...that the child understands and is able to reiterate to the parents, then we're successful."⁸³

Advertisers understand that it takes a lot of fortitude for a parent to continue to say no, when saying yes is the path of least resistance. They also understand that even health-conscious parents are inclined to give-in after a long day at work or after busily shuttling kids from school to soccer practice to piano lessons and beyond. Not only have they classified nagging tactics into seven major

categories from pleading nags to pity nags, they've even gone so far as to categorize parents according to identified stress factors and conditions (such as income, marital status, and guilt) that make a parent more vulnerable to the nagging of their children.⁸⁴⁻⁸⁵

So even as McDonald's is telling parents that they "deserve a break today," they are encouraging children to nag and pester their parents for the advertised products, taking advantage of parent's innate desire to make their children happy.

Getting through the gatekeepers *(read: parents)*



Close to 80 percent of Americans do not believe that food served in fast food restaurants meets even their most basic, daily nutritional needs. But McDonald's is finding new ways to woo weary parents or undermine their health consciousness altogether.

So, assuming the near ubiquity of advertising, the marketing calculated to compel kids to pester, the reach of McDonald's into places where parents can't be, and the appeal of "kid-friendly" environments like McDonald's PlayPlace (where parents can relax while the little ones run wild) wasn't enough, there's also McDonald's strategy to just *go through* parents.

With consciousness growing about the unhealthiness of McDonald's-style fast food for kids, the "gatekeepers" (a term coined by McDonald's to refer to moms and dads) are, increasingly, making a concerted effort to maintain control of the gate despite all the pressures. So McDonald's current promotions are aimed at building brand trust among mothers in particular.

In a series of new television ads, McDonald's appeals to mothers, putting its healthiest offerings and Happy Meal modifications out front. The appeal of such "healthier choices" may disarm "gatekeepers," but that doesn't mean children will get a healthy meal or make "healthier choices."

The main entrée in Happy Meals is still burgers and fried chicken nuggets. The healthier choices are, as has been mentioned before, nominally healthier. The brand identification children will make and carry into adulthood is with McDonald's as a burger corporation. Ronald may hawk the occasional salad, but he's fundamentally a "hamburger-happy" clown.

What's more, recognizing that an endorsement of their brand's nutritional quality is strongest from one mom to another, McDonald's has directly enlisted mothers in recent public relations efforts. Beginning in 2007, McDonald's began recruiting "regular moms" to take a corporate-led tour behind the scenes of McDonald's operation and share their experiences as "Quality Correspondents."⁸⁶ The hope: if they could get a racially-diverse and photogenic group of moms to reassure other "gatekeepers" that they can give their kids a Happy Meal and still be a good parent, it might be possible to overcome the stigma of fast-food. While the independence of these mommy bloggers is questionable at best, the motivation of McDonald's is clear.

At base parents are working against the stream even after they've been persuaded to make McDonald's a regular stomping ground. Their children will have already been bombarded with messages and images from the corporation urging their appetite for low-quality food that is high in fat, sodium, and sugar. Once this appetite forms it is hard to buck. All of these ingredients have a particularly pernicious affect on a child's tastes and cravings while their bodies are still developing.⁸⁷

In sum, we all "deserve a break." Children deserve a break from this ubiquitous corporate icon and the targeted marketing tactics designed to manipulate their psychological and physical appetites. Parents deserve a break from the nagging and pestering that the clown's tactics foster. We all need a break from Ronald McDonald.

CAMELS, CLOWNS AND CARTOON CHARACTERS



Joe Camel: International icon for marketing deadly products to children. Retired since 1997.

There's one reason corporations use cartoons and other children's characters to sell harmful products: they're effective.

Joe Camel, for one, helped make R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company's Camel cigarettes the most recognizable brand among young people – its target demographic.

Within one year of the introduction of the anthropomorphic camel, the brand once dismissed by young people as the brand of their grandfathers became the third most popular cigarette among youth aged 12 to 18, according to the Centers for Disease Control. Within three years, preference for Camel cigarettes had increased from 0.5 to 32 percent among adolescent smokers.⁸⁸ In 1991, the Journal of the American Medical Association published several studies indicating that Joe Camel was not only widely recognized by and popular among children, but that 91 percent of children as young as 6 knew exactly what Joe Camel had to sell.⁸⁹

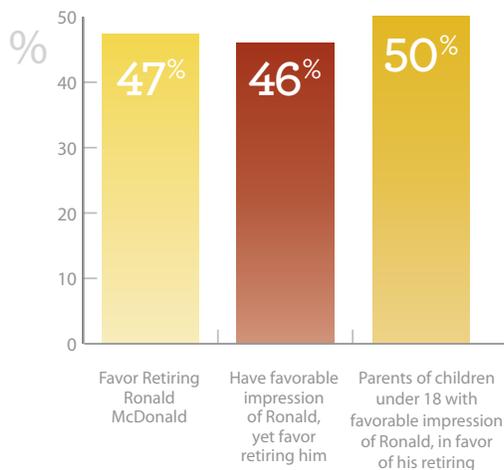
In response to the cigarette corporation's transparent effort to market its product to young people, Corporate Accountability International (then Infact) organized the "Send Joe Camel Packing" campaign. In time, President Bill Clinton, the American Medical Association, the Surgeon General, and the Federal Trade Commission would oppose the use of Joe Camel. R.J. Reynolds ultimately agreed to end all advertising featuring the cartoon camel.

RONALD: ON THE EVE OF RETIREMENT

Today, Ronald is as recognizable to children as Santa Claus.⁹⁰ The honor owes to the corporation's getting in on the ground floor of the craze to market to children, children's marketing budgets that dwarf the competition and the clever insertion of the clown into every aspect of childhood.

That adds up to a cross-generational familiarity like no other and translates, generally speaking, into a favorable opinion of the "hamburger-happy" clown. According to a 2010 poll by Corporate Accountability International, conducted by Lake Research Partners, roughly two-thirds (65 percent) of Americans have a favorable impression of the clown (25 percent very favorable, 39 percent somewhat favorable, 14 percent unfavorable)*.

Retiring Ronald: the Numbers



Not surprisingly, given the close and deliberate link between Ronald and the McDonald's brand at large, **65 percent of Americans also have a favorable opinion of the corporation (22 percent unfavorable)**. But interestingly, the intensity of the response is considerably diminished: **only 17 percent have a "very favorable" opinion of McDonald's at large, while 48 percent have a "somewhat favorable" opinion of the burger giant.**

These findings appear to confirm the value of having a clown cum "Chief Happiness Officer" as the corporation's spokesperson: it softens and personalizes the image of a burger chain founded on the principles of the assembly line and 20th century mass production. But even the corporation's principle salesperson has difficulty translating the totality of his appeal into the chain he promotes.

Though the clown is well-liked, **52 percent of Americans "favor stopping corporations from using cartoons and other children's characters to sell harmful products to children" (30 percent strongly favor this)**. In fact, Ronald is not immune from Americans' desire to stamp out misleading marketing to children. **With similar reach and even greater intensity, Americans support retiring Ronald as a corporate mascot (47 percent favor, 32 percent strongly favor).**

Importantly, the desire to retire Ronald is not reserved for those with an unflattering impression of him. **Among those with a favorable impression of Ronald, about half (46 percent) actually support retiring him.** This is a staggering number. The same is true of those who have a favorable impression of the McDonald's corporation (46 percent support retiring Ronald). **And among parents with children under 18 who have a favorable impression of Ronald or the McDonald's Corporation, fully half (50 percent) support Ronald's exit to the nearest retirement home.**

As public consciousness about the links between fast food marketing and the epidemic of diet-related disease continues to mount, the numbers supporting Ronald's retirement promises only to climb.

* Lake Research Partners designed and administered this study, which was conducted with online interviews among a representative sample of U.S. adults nationwide. The survey was conducted November 12-15, 2009. The margin of error for this poll is +/-3.1%.

RONALD, BEHIND THE MAKE-UP: FOOD SYSTEM INDUSTRIALIST

Not only has McDonald's been a pioneer in marketing products to children, it has been a pioneer in shaping supply chains to meet its demand for cheap, consistent, and long-lasting food. So, when it comes down to it, Ronald isn't just the leading salesman for fast food, but for the industrial food system at large. More sales means big returns for Cargill and Tyson's factory farms, Archer Daniels Midland's high fructose corn syrup processing plants, and Monsanto's pesticide production facilities. Between the taxpayer subsidies for ingredients and the homogenization of the food supply, Ronald is able to pitch a "value" at the register that doesn't really factor in the true environmental and health costs of mass producing so much unhealthy food.



RONALD THE RETIREE

The world is no longer what it was when a clown with a food tray hat and soda cup nose made his first televised sales pitch to the nation's children. The 15-cent burger chain seized an opening to exploit the marketing vulnerabilities of children and in so doing, has become one of the world's largest corporations and a dominant force in the way we eat, the way our food systems function, and the commercialized environment in which our children grow up.



Unfortunately the corporation's success has come at an overwhelming cost, especially to our children's health. The rates of diet-related disease like type 2 diabetes have risen with the growth of the fast food empire, and are increasingly affecting children at younger and younger ages. In the past 30 years, the percentage of obese children has tripled in children ages 2 to 5, and quadrupled in children ages 6 to 11.⁹¹

Today we also have a better understanding of the profound influence marketing has on our children, the lifelong habits it forms, and its role in driving the current epidemic. Leading health institutions, from the World Health Organization to the Institute of Medicine, criticize the practice McDonald's has pioneered.⁹²⁻⁹³ And parents are increasingly fed-up with the bombardment of advertisements, the promotion of fast food under the guise of "social responsibility," and the ploys to dull their resistance to a product they know is unhealthy for their kids.

In other words, parents are ready for McDonald's to take some responsibility for the obstacles it has put in their way when it comes to healthfully feeding and raising their children. Parents can't raise children in a vacuum and their taking responsibility for what kids eat shouldn't preclude the #1 marketer of unhealthy food to kids from doing the same; especially when the corporation is bent on finding ways to reach kids despite the best efforts of the most observant parents.

McDonald's has a history to overcome. Hiding behind the myth of "spontaneous demand" in which every child demands burgers and fries without provocation, McDonald's has deflected responsibility for making kids sick. After all, they're just "meeting consumer demand;" albeit a demand manufactured and cultivated with a billion dollar per annum ad budget.

The corporation has led industry efforts to defeat a range of health protections, working to undermine strong local legislation and weaken the language in national menu labeling standards that could provide parents with the kind of information they need to make informed choices about what their kids eat. McDonald's political maneuvering further demonstrates the corporation's proclivity to sabotage rather than enable the exercise of parental responsibility over the food children eat.⁹⁴

McDonald's success in marketing to kids has set a standard across industries. As they say, "with leadership comes responsibility." Instead of figuring out ways to twist parental concern into marketing ploys by another name (see: "McSpellit," "Get Moving With Ronald McDonald," "McTeacher's Night," etc.), it's time for McDonald's to set the right example and let its frenetic, traveling salesman retire.

A Proper retirement for Ronald

From city hall to McDonald's headquarters in Oak Brook, Ill. there are a few things policymakers and executives should do to give Ronald a proper send off.

MCDONALD'S SHOULD:

- end all use of celebrities, cartoons, and branded and licensed characters that appeal to children;
- eliminate all gifts, toys, collectibles, games or other incentive items from kids meals; and
- remove all advertising and promotional materials from places children visit frequently including schools, playgrounds, recreation and community centers, and pediatric health care centers.

What the rest of us can do to bid Ronald adieu

HERE'S HOW TO GET INVOLVED ON THE INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY LEVEL:

- Join Corporate Accountability International in calling on McDonald's to retire Ronald;
- Go to www.RetireRonald.org to volunteer, learn more, and take actions to protect children's health and safeguard our food systems;
- Support local policy efforts, like eliminating all marketing, advertising and sales of fast food from school grounds, property in immediate proximity to schools, children's libraries, playgrounds and other places where children visit frequently as well as hospitals serving children;
- Support international policy efforts that encourage national governments to respond to this growing public health crisis by curbing the advertisement, marketing and promotion of unhealthy food products to children and young people.

ABOUT US



For more than 30 years Corporate Accountability International (formerly Infact) has run hard-hitting and highly effective campaigns to save lives, protect public health, and preserve the environment. Its campaigns have compelled dramatic changes in corporate conduct, from curbing the life-threatening marketing of infant formula in the developing world to securing strong new global protections against the marketing of tobacco products to children.



Value [the] Meal is a campaign led by Corporate Accountability International dedicated to reversing the global epidemic of diet-related disease. Launched in 2009, the campaign challenges McDonald's and the fast food industry to curb the range of its practices that are contributing to the epidemic. The campaign's advisory committee consists of leading experts on food and nutrition, marketing to children, and sustainable food systems.

VALUE [THE] MEAL ADVISORY BOARD

{Partial List}

Susan Linn, Ed.D.

Susan Linn is co-founder and director of The Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood. An award-winning producer, writer, and puppeteer, she is the author of "The Case for Make Believe: Saving Play in a Commercialized World," and "Consuming Kids: The Hostile Takeover of Childhood." Linn lectures internationally on reclaiming childhood from corporate marketers.

www.commercialexploitation.org/

Marion Nestle, Ph.D., M.P.H.

Marion Nestle is the Paulette Goddard Professor in the Department of Nutrition, Food Studies, and Public Health and Professor of Sociology at New York University. Her degrees include a Ph.D. in molecular biology and an M.P.H. in public health nutrition, both from the University of California, Berkeley. Her award-winning books include "Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health" (2002) and "Safe Food: Bacteria, Biotechnology, and Bioterrorism" (2003), both from University of California Press.

www.foodpolitics.com

Michele Simon, J.D., M.P.H.

Michele Simon is a public health lawyer who has been working as a nutrition advocate since 1996, specializing in legal strategies and food industry tactics. She is the author of *Appetite for Profit: How the Food Industry Undermines Our Health and How to Fight Back*, which *Library Journal* calls an essential purchase and recommends as a follow-up to *Fast Food Nation* and *Food Politics*. Michele is currently the Research and Policy Director for the Marin Institute, an alcohol industry watchdog.

www.appetiteforprofit.com

Raj Patel, Ph.D.

Raj Patel is a writer, activist and academic. He has degrees from the University of Oxford, the London School of Economics and Cornell University. Dr. Patel has worked for the World Bank and World Trade Organization. He's currently a visiting scholar at UC Berkeley's Center for African Studies, an Honorary Research Fellow at the School of Development Studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, and a fellow at The Institute for Food and Development Policy, or "Food First." He is the author of "Stuffed and Starved: The Hidden Battle for the World Food System," and "The Value of Nothing," a work on how to fix the failures of the free market.

www.rajpatel.org

For a full list, visit:

<http://www.stopcorporateabuse.org/value-meal-advisory-board>

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+1 617-695-2525