

ARTICLES

5 lessons to learn from McDonalds' marketing

Whether you like their food or not, McDonald's are one the very best marketing businesses in the world today.

They are an excellent case study in both how to market your services globally, and so often over looked, locally.

Here are 5 lessons you can apply to your own business.

Maintain a consistent brand

McDonald's has franchises all around the world and yet wherever you go, you know you are in a McDonald's and every aspect of that experience will be consistent (language excluded), regardless of where you are.

This includes everything from the wrapper around your burger to the décor to even the coffee stirrer.

This attention to detail on such a mammoth scale ensures their brand values are never diluted or put at risk.

To make sure you always stay 'on brand' you can write style guidelines that lists information such as:

- The exact colours a designer must use
- How your copy should be written (e.g. formal, informal etc.)
- Do's and dont's for your logo and any strap line (e.g. don't change the colour, cut it in half...etc.)

This means that regardless of who is working on them, you'll look the same across all of your channels.

React to changes in the market place

Two of the biggest challenges McDonald's has faced in recent years has been criticism of the quality of their food and a change in the UK's attitude towards healthy eating.

In response to this McDonald's made the following big changes (and at lightning speeds for a company of its size):

- Major redevelopment of their restaurants to change the décor from the previous red and yellow
- Started advertising where they got their produce from and what goes in to their food
- More prominent charity and society improvement activities

These all helped to confront the criticisms head on and eventually overcome them.

It is interesting that other competitors failed to make these changes and are now struggling and some are even looking for buyers.

Understand your customers

McDonald's knows it is all things to all people, and rather than shy away from this marketing challenge, it has embraced it.

The UK advert for their coffee that shows all the different types of people who come in at different times of the day is inspired.

Rather than focusing on what target audience, they have managed to go for them all in under a minute.

Your customer base is probably more defined than McDonald's but the lesson is valid, the more you understand about your customers, the easier it is to market to them.

Read about [how to write a survey and get information you can actually use](#).

An often over looked aspect of McDonalds is how they localise their menu for a nation's tastes. Ones I know of are salad bars in Italy, sea food options in Hong Kong, spicy variants in India and a shrimp wrap Japan.

Know your strengths and play to them

It also knows its food isn't all that great, so with this I mind it doesn't compete on food quality.

Instead it uses all those years of branding to communicate the feeling of familiarity, security, warmth and convenience you get when you go along. i.e. you know where you are with us.

Be imaginative

Despite their age and size, McDonald's regularly come up with great marketing ideas that haven't been done before.

They aren't afraid to try something new and experiment with ideas and new technology.

A great example is their Monopoly promotion they have started to run each year because it has been so successful, plus their McFlurry which was the first of its kind to market.

They are also keen adopters of new technology such as social networks and new ways of paying at the till (they are currently trialling touch less scanning of debit cards).

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Justinas

15/04/2014 at 9:20 am

Hey, interesting topic! I think that's true – brand consistency, quick reaction to the market changes and understanding the customers are all important factors. However, I believe there are a few other important factors that we can learn from McDonald's marketing.

1) They create addictive products. Not only the need for food is at the bottom of our needs pyramid, they also make food high in fat, sugar and salt (here's some information about sugar and how it affects our body: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lEXBxijQREo>). To put it simply, McDonald's creates drug-like food which we crave for and having such product is probably the best marketing you can get.

2) They hook their customers early. I mean childhood early. Toys, gifts, colours, happy-meals, everything is created to make McDonald's the favourite brand of the young consumers. More importantly, once they have them in their childhood it is much easier to lure them back as they grow older and older. Meet with a friend? McDonald's. Quick snack? McDonald's. A gluttonous feast at 4am after a night out? McDonald's.

There are some theories about creating habits and one of them says that it takes usually 30 days to create a habit. So lure people back to McDonald's to eat (for different reasons and different occasions) 30 times and they will find their own reasons to come back again. That's pure speculation, but that's what it seems from my own experience.

**Matt**

AUTHOR

15/04/2014 at 11:24 am

Thanks for the extra points.

Hooking people early is also used by the fashion industry, hence baby Ralph Lauren!

Matt

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**Rich**

19/02/2018 at 4:40 pm

Brand marketing is critical all business and needs to be carried through everything you do. Online and offline materials, the voice and language used, even how a phone call is answered and the journey your customer experiences. Every touch point that customer has with your business should be consistent and reflect your brand, your businesses values and ethos.

