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McDonald's Marketing Focused On Children, New Report States

by John Koshuta

(NewsTarget) A new report released by Corporations and Health Watch, earlier this month, exposes the marketing tactics of McDonald's. According to the report entitled "McDonald's and Children's Health: The Production of New Customers," the world's largest fast food chain uses cartoons, toys, schools, charities and even parents to reach its youngest customers.

Some highlights of the report include:

* A recent study published in the Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine found that low income 3 to 5 year old children preferred the taste of hamburgers, chicken, French fries, carrots or low fat milk if they thought the products were from McDonald's, whether or not they actually were.

* According to its 2006 Annual Report, McDonald's is the leading global food service retailer with more than 30,000 local restaurants serving 52 million people in more than 100 countries each day. Its 2006 revenues were \$21.6 billion, up 16% from 2004. In 2006, McDonald's spent almost \$2.5 million a day on traditional advertising in the United States. About 40% of McDonald's total advertising budget is directed at children.

* A study of 9 to 10 year old Australian youth demonstrated that more than half believed that Ronald McDonald knew what was best for them to eat. An earlier version of the McDonald's children's website told young visitors Ronald was the "ultimate authority on everything" and they were encouraged to send Ronald an email telling him their favorite food items, their favorite sports team, favorite book and their name.

* McDonald's operates more than 8,000 playgrounds around the United States, more than any other private American corporation and far more than any municipality.

* In 2003, 20% of McDonald's meals sold were Happy Meals and they accounted for \$3.5 billion in revenues. The fast food giant stands as one of the United State's largest distributors of toys.

* According to a recent CDC survey, in 2006, 24% of the nation's high schools and 19% of its middle schools offered on-site brand name fast foods.

* In 1998, 89% of children in the United States eight years of age or younger had visited a McDonald's at least once a month. In response to this information, R.J. Milano, a McDonald's Vice President stated that their goal for the following year was to reach 100%. He boasted "I'm going to own every kid transaction out there." To counter criticism that fast and junk foods contribute to obesity and other health problems, McDonald's recently launched a contest to recruit mothers for three day paid field trips where they will be given access to the farms "where our fresh ingredients are grown, to our world-class suppliers and to our restaurants.

Among the recommendations for solving the problems associated with this report, the Strategic Alliance, a coalition of nutrition and physical activity advocates in California, recommends that all marketing and advertising of junk and fast foods be eliminated for children and youth. The International Association of Consumer Food Organizations (IACFO) urges governments to restrict or ban all food advertisements to children and prohibit the marketing of soda, junk and fast foods in schools. The IACFO also points to the importance of global action on this issue, noting that restrictions in the developed world often send multinational corporations overseas to the global south where they market unhealthy products with greater ease.

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(http://www.corporationsandhealth.org/mcdonalds_nov_07.php)

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John is an experienced professional in the field of wellness. Along with a BS degree in Exercise Science & Health Promotion, the author also has a BA in Journalism and is in progress on a MA in Health Studies. Among the author's many forthcoming projects are an independent wellness consulting business and a health-related website, along with many articles and books.

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