



# NEW MEDIA, same old tricks

A survey of the marketing of food to children on food company websites



## About Consumers International (CI)

Consumers International (CI) is the only independent global campaigning voice for consumers. With over 220 member organisations in 115 countries we are building a powerful international consumer movement to help protect and empower consumers everywhere.

Consumers International is a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee in the UK (company number 4337865) and a registered charity (number 1122155).

For more information, visit [www.consumersinternational.org](http://www.consumersinternational.org)



This report is part of *Junk Food Generation* – the Consumers International campaign to stop the marketing of unhealthy food to children.

For more information, visit [www.junkfoodgeneration.org](http://www.junkfoodgeneration.org)

## New media, same old tricks

A survey of the marketing of food to children on food company websites

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A survey of the marketing of food to children on food company websites

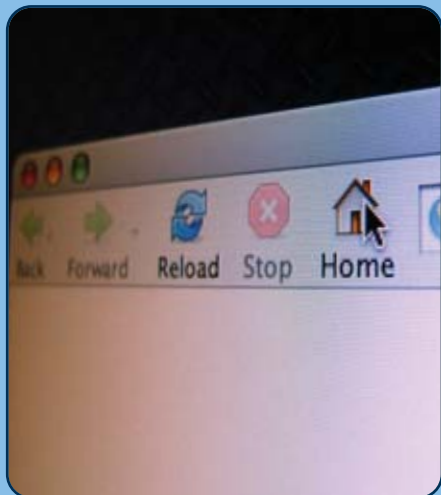


## Credits

This report was written by Justin Macmullan based on research by Helen Wright, Hubert Linders and Arlene de Vera at CI. Key reviewers of the report included Sue Davies from Which? (UK), Luke Upchurch and Rosalchen Whitecross at CI.

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# Introduction

## Obesity on the rise

Rising levels of obesity are now recognised as a global crisis. Experts estimate that one in ten children, or 155 million children worldwide, is overweight or obese<sup>1</sup> and that the problem is getting worse not better.

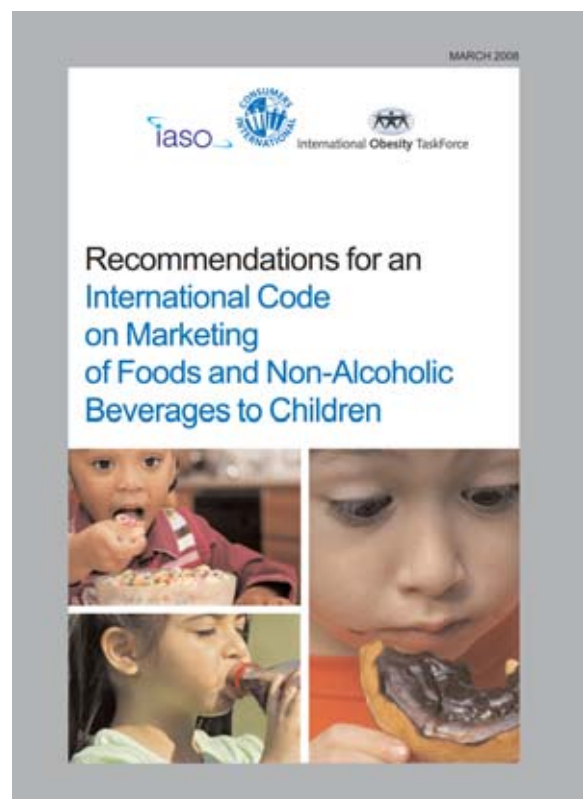
Obesity and overweight are major contributors to non-communicable diseases such as heart disease, diabetes and some cancers. Children who grow up overweight are much more likely to suffer from associated medical conditions in later life. These conditions already affect millions of people but if this crisis is unchecked they will threaten millions more.

In 2008, Consumers International (CI) launched a campaign calling for the World Health Organization (WHO) to adopt an international code to stop the marketing of food and drink high in fat, sugar or salt to children. Tackling this crisis requires a number of actions and a coordinated approach to improving diet and promoting exercise, but we believe action on marketing is fundamental to any long-term solution.

By stopping the marketing of unhealthy food to children, food and drink companies would be supporting parents' efforts to give their children healthy food. Their current marketing practices promote the wrong messages to young people who are still forming their ideas as to what constitutes a healthy lifestyle. They also undermine and run counter to government and public campaigns promoting healthy diets.

CI, working with the International Obesity Taskforce (IOTF) has drawn up a set of *Recommendations for an international code on the marketing of food and non-alcoholic beverages to children*.<sup>2</sup>

The recommendations target the marketing of energy-dense, nutrient-poor foods that are high in fat, sugar and



salt to children up to 16 years old. Its demands include:

- A ban on radio or TV adverts promoting unhealthy food between 06.00 and 21.00.
- No marketing of unhealthy food to children using new media (such as websites, social networking sites and text messaging).
- No promotion of unhealthy food in schools.
- No inclusion of free gifts, toys or collectible items, which appeal to children to promote unhealthy foods.
- No use of celebrities, cartoon characters, competitions or free gifts to market unhealthy food.

## Online advertising of food high in fat, sugar or salt

This report focuses on the marketing of food and drink to children that can be found on websites run by the food and drink companies themselves.

It is only one of the many ways in which these companies promote their products, but with the Internet becoming available to more and more people it is an important area to cover. It is also of particular concern when considering marketing to children, as a higher percentage of young people use the Internet compared to other age groups. In the UK, 75% of 7-16 year olds have used the Internet, double the figure for adults.<sup>3</sup>

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**'In the UK, 75% of 7-16 year olds have used the Internet, double the figure for adults.'**

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Internet use is growing rapidly around the world. UN data<sup>4</sup> suggests that Internet users in Brazil multiplied from 5,000,000 in 2000 to 42,600,000 in 2006, in China the figure went from 22,500,000 in 2000 to 137,000,000 in 2006 and in India the figure went from 5,500,000 in 2000 to 120,000,000 in 2006. Whilst a proportion of this Internet use will be in the workplace there is no doubt that more and more children will also be going online as well.

In the developed world online access at home is increasingly taken for granted and is now a significant source of information and entertainment for children. In the US 93% of 12-17 year olds use the Internet, approximately 70% going online from home.<sup>5</sup>

A European study found that out of the 25 European states covered, more than 60% of children used the Internet in 10 of the countries and in another 12 countries more than 40% of children used the Internet.

Figures from this report suggest that Internet use rises rapidly from the age of six but is fairly established by the

time a child is just 12-13 years old.<sup>6</sup> In the UK 75%, of 9-19 year olds have accessed the Internet from a computer at home and 19% have Internet access in their bedrooms.<sup>7</sup>

In some countries young people now spend as much time on the Internet as they do watching television.

By its nature Internet use is more interactive than the experience children have with other forms of media, this makes for a more intense engagement and therefore a more lasting impression. Internet use is also harder to supervise and can be harder for parents to monitor. Parents who may be particularly concerned about their child's diet may not even be aware that they are viewing websites promoting food or drink high in fat, sugar or salt.

Finally, the Internet does not respect borders. A website designed and written in one country can be viewed in any other country regardless of the rules and standards that should apply there.

CI is aware that this short survey of the websites run by food and drink companies, only scratches the surface of the new media marketing of food high in fat, sugar and salt to children.

We have not surveyed networking sites, viral marketing or the use of SMS, however by looking at what is perhaps the first step in the online marketing of food to children we hope to contribute to efforts already underway to raise the awareness of companies, parents and regulators to the dangers involved.

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**The Internet does not respect borders.**

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# Methodology

CI visited the websites of a number of food and drink products, high in fat, sugar or salt<sup>8</sup> and manufactured by the 10 global food and drink companies with the highest global advertising spend.<sup>9</sup>

Where the company did not have product websites we visited their brand website or the website of the restaurant chain. The survey covered the global website or a UK or US website where it defaulted to one of these countries. For comparison we also surveyed a selection of national sites in Asia and Latin America.

Each website was assessed using a shortlist of criteria drawn from CI's *Recommendations for an international code on the marketing of food to children*<sup>10</sup> in order to assess whether the site could be said to be targeting a child audience and to assess the marketing techniques being employed.

This criteria included:

- The overall look and feel of the website
- Use of cartoon characters
- Use of personalities that might appeal to children under 16
- Use of free gifts or downloads that might appeal to children under 16
- Use of competitions or games that might appeal to children under 16
- Clubs that required registration or submitting details
- Sponsorship of events that might appeal to children under 16

In the case of websites associated with a brand or a chain of restaurants where a range of products may be available, some of which are high in fat, sugar or salt and some of which are not, we noted whether particular techniques were associated with particular products or were simply used to promote the brand.

The websites were visited during January and February 2009.

This exercise was not a systematic survey of online advertising to children. CI's intention was simply to get a sense of the current situation and highlight any concerns we may have as a result.

CI is not offering a ranking of the companies as a result of this exercise.



# Key results

Despite growing concern about the marketing of food and drink high in fat, sugar or salt to children, this survey found that several major international food and drink companies are using their own websites to market these products to child audiences.

The look and feel of the websites are designed to attract their target audiences, cartoons were used for young children; sport, music and films for older children.

Free screensavers and wallpaper attracts children to the sites and presumably once downloaded these branded freebies are an ongoing reminder of the product or fast food chain.

Games and competitions encourage children to stay on the websites and registration tempts children to hand over contact information for future marketing.

Between them these food and drink companies used most of the techniques associated with online advertising to market foods high in fat, sugar or salt.

## Marketing to children under 12

Several websites continue to use cartoon characters, games and downloads that would appeal to children under 12 years old.

- **Nestlé.** Nestlé's Nesquik website signposts a 'kids section' that includes games and downloads. The Nesquik bunny appears throughout the site. Nesquik cereal contains an average of **36g of sugar per 100g** according to a recent CI survey of breakfast cereals<sup>11</sup>.
- **Kellogg's.** Kellogg's Frosted Flakes uses the cartoon character Tony the Tiger throughout the site and has links to its sponsorship of Little League Baseball. Frosted Flakes contain **36.7g of sugar per 100g**.<sup>12</sup>
- **Kellogg's.** Kellogg's Cocoa Krispies uses the cartoon characters Snap, Crackle and Pop throughout the site.

There are also a number of games for children. Cocoa Krispies contain **38.7g of sugar per 100g**.<sup>13</sup>

- **Yum Brands.** KFC websites used cartoon characters, clubs and games to promote the chain to children. Kid's popcorn chicken which is promoted as part of a kids meal contains **22.35g of fat per 100g** which is high according to the UK Food Standards Agency (FSA) criteria for food. Several items on the KFC main menu are high in fat and/or salt according to the UK FSA criteria.<sup>14</sup>
- **McDonald's.** Ronald McDonald has its own website with various games for children. There are also games, gifts and downloads on the McDonald's website linked to the children's Happy Meals. Most items included in happy meals are not high in fat, sugar or salt however several items on the main menu are.<sup>15</sup>

## Marketing to teenagers

Some companies covered in this survey did not appear to be using the websites we visited to market their products to children under 12. However, these websites would appeal to children under the age of 16. These sites had a more sophisticated feel and music, film and sport personalities were generally used instead of cartoon characters.

- **PepsiCo.** The PepsiCo website was bright and active, and included pop stars popular with teenagers and links to YouTube. Pepsi contains **11.67g of sugar per 100g**, which is high according to the UK FSA criteria for drinks.
- **Coca-Cola.** The Coca-Cola website is also bright and active and features new music, film tie-ins and animations. Coca-Cola contains **10.6g of sugar per 100g**, which is high according to the UK FSA criteria for drinks.
- **Mars.** Mars M&M'S website is bright, lively and has cartoon M&M'S and activities such as sending an

e-card. M&M'S contain **64.7g of sugar per 100g** and **20.9g of fat per 100g** both of which are high according to UK FSA criteria.<sup>16</sup>

## Marketing to parents and carers

The pressure that some companies appear to be putting on parents and carers through subtle, and not so subtle, messaging and images that suggest these products are suitable for children equally concerns CI.

- **Yum Brands.** The KFC website has a 'mom's toolbox' that includes money off coupons, activities mom's can use to entertain their kids and suggestions such as serving a KFC meal at the end of a child's soccer match.
- **McDonald's.** The McDonald's website has a parents retreat section.

- **Nestlé's Nesquik** uses images suggesting a caring mother and happy families.
- **Kellogg's.** Includes images of happy families and phrases such as 'wanting the best for your family'.
- **Nestlé Milkybar** website is addressed to the parent, but uses education to encourage the parent to get their child to play the games on the website.

In some cases, the half-hearted efforts made by companies to meet the concerns of parents, nutritionists, campaign groups and health departments verged on the ridiculous.

McDonald's placed a cheery 'Hey Kids this is advertising!' message on some pages. Other companies carried sober warnings in the small print at the bottom of the page. CI doubts either approach has much effect.

# http://www.

## What the websites revealed

### Overall look and feel

KFC

[www.kfc.com](http://www.kfc.com)

[www.kfc.com.my](http://www.kfc.com.my)



*KFC.com has a section for kids as part of the promotion for its laptop meal.*



*The children's section of the KFC website in Malaysia was much more extensive and made use of animation, games and clubs.*

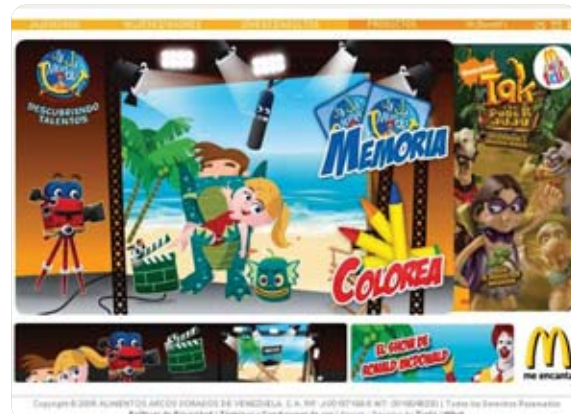
McDonald's

[www.happymeal.com](http://www.happymeal.com)

<http://mcdonalds.wikot.com>



*The 'Happy Meal' section of the McDonald's website in the US has a number of games and activities for children and includes the phrase 'Hey kids this is advertising'.*



*The McDonald's site from Venezuela includes similar activities for children but does not include the phrase about advertising.*

Nestlé's Nesquik

[www.nesquik.com](http://www.nesquik.com)

[www.nesquik-aventura.com/cl/site/default.asp?IDPais=3](http://www.nesquik-aventura.com/cl/site/default.asp?IDPais=3)



The Nesquik bunny is used throughout the nesquik.com website and the homepage even signposts children towards the 'kids' section.



Other Nesquik websites, such as this one from Chile, include the option to send an e-card (a basic form of viral marketing) or play games.

Kellogg's Cocoa Krispies

[www.cocoakrispies.com](http://www.cocoakrispies.com)



The cocoakrispies.com website uses the characters Snap, Crackle and Pop on the website and in games. The small print at the bottom reads 'KIDS: This page may contain a product or promotion advertisement'.

Coca-Cola

[www.cokezone.co.uk](http://www.cokezone.co.uk)



The Coca Cola website in the UK is bright and active and contains activities that would appeal to teenagers.

PepsiCo

[www.pepsizone.yahoo.co.in/young](http://www.pepsizone.yahoo.co.in/young)



*The PepsiCo website is bright and active and includes content that appeals to a teenage audience - the above example is from India.*

Mars M&M'S

[www.mms.com/us](http://www.mms.com/us)



*The M&M'S website in the US is lively and includes bright colours and cartoon M&M'S. Right at the bottom of the homepage is a small print warning that this site contains promotions and that children should get permission before visiting any websites.*

Nestlé Milkybar

[www.milkybar.co.uk](http://www.milkybar.co.uk)



*The Milkybar website in the UK addresses parents, but much of the content is directed towards children.*

## Own-brand characters

Even companies that have made commitments to reduce their marketing of food or drink high in fat, sugar or salt to children under 12 have a blind spot when it comes to their own-brand characters.

In this case, the search for brand profile appears to trump corporate responsibility. When these characters are used to specifically appeal to children it makes a mockery of their commitment to parents and their youngest customers.

Nestlé

[www.nesquik.com](http://www.nesquik.com)



The Nesquik rabbit appears throughout the nesquik.com website.

McDonald's

[www.ronald.com](http://www.ronald.com)



Ronald McDonald has his own website that targets children. The character is also used throughout the McDonald's website.

Kellogg's Cocoa Krispies

[www.cocoakrispies.com](http://www.cocoakrispies.com)



Snap, Crackle and Pop are used throughout the cocoakrispies.com website.

Kellogg's Frosted Flakes

[www.frostedflakes.com](http://www.frostedflakes.com)



*Tony the Tiger is used throughout the frostedflakes.com website.*

Nestlé Milkybar

[www.milkybar.co.uk](http://www.milkybar.co.uk)



*The Milkybar Kid character is used throughout the UK website.*

KFC

[www.kfc.com.mx](http://www.kfc.com.mx)



*KFC websites, such as this one from Mexico, use Chickie to promote the brand to children.*

## Themes, personalities or events that appeal to children

Products or brands can seek to associate themselves with activities or personalities that may appeal to children. Several of the websites included in the survey did this.

Sport is popular with a wide range of age groups, however two websites highlighted their product sponsorship of competitions that are specifically for children.

Two websites in the survey (PepsiCo and Coca-Cola) placed a strong emphasis on new music and films, and featured personalities that have a strong teenage following.

Whilst it is easy to characterise these websites as more appealing to teenagers than preteens, the fact that many children under 12 aspire to have the same interests as older children means that the content would almost certainly appeal to children under 12 as well.

McDonald's

[www.mcdonalds.com/usa.html](http://www.mcdonalds.com/usa.html)



*The McDonald's website in the US highlights its sponsorship of several sporting events, however high school basketball obviously has a particular appeal to children.*

Kellogg's Frosted Flakes

[www.frostedflakes.com](http://www.frostedflakes.com)



*This website supports the Little League World Series baseball.*

PepsiCo

[www.pepsi.com](http://www.pepsi.com)

[www.pepsimundo.com](http://www.pepsimundo.com)



Pepsi.com features pop stars such as Natasha Beddingfield and Rihanna, as well as DJs and football players.



Other PepsiCo websites, such as this one from Chile, features popular films such as Kung Fu.

Coca-Cola

[www.cokezone.co.uk](http://www.cokezone.co.uk)

[www.coca-cola.cl](http://www.coca-cola.cl)



The Coca-Cola sites feature new music bands, and sport and film tie-ins that would appeal to a teenage audience. These examples are from the UK and Chile.



Mars

[www.mms.com.mx](http://www.mms.com.mx)



The M&M'S website in Mexico has a film tie-in with Indiana Jones.

## Free gifts, downloads or collectibles that would appeal to children

A simple technique to attract and retain customers is for companies to offer something 'for free'.

This is particularly easy to do online and several of the websites covered in this survey were targeting children with wallpaper, screensavers and other downloads.

Some companies also used their websites to advertise the availability of 'free' items in their restaurants.

### Kellogg's Frosted Flakes

[www.frostedflakes.com](http://www.frostedflakes.com)



A number of free products, downloads and coupons were available on the [frostedflakes.com](http://frostedflakes.com) website.

### McDonald's

[www.mcdonalds.com.co](http://www.mcdonalds.com.co)

[www.mcdonaldsph.com](http://www.mcdonaldsph.com)



McDonald's also uses its websites to support promotions available in its restaurants. This site from Columbia shows the weeks when specific characters are available. This could encourage children to go to McDonald's every week to collect the set.



The McDonald's website in the Philippines promoted a number of games available in its restaurants.

Key Results: Free gifts, downloads or collectibles that would appeal to children

Nestlé

[www.nesquik.com](http://www.nesquik.com)



The nesquik.com website provides free downloadable images clearly targeting a young audience.

Coca-Cola

[www.cokezone.co.uk](http://www.cokezone.co.uk)



This Coca-Cola website from the UK has a section 'Free fun stuff' that includes wallpaper, screensavers and 'chat goodies'.

Key Results: Free gifts, downloads or collectables that would appeal to children

PepsiCo

[www.pepsi.com](http://www.pepsi.com)

[www.pepsimundo.com](http://www.pepsimundo.com)



The *pepsi.com* website gave the option of downloading Pepsi themed wallpaper. You can also download free programmes such as this volume controller.



PepsiCo

[www.pepsiworld.com.ph](http://www.pepsiworld.com.ph)

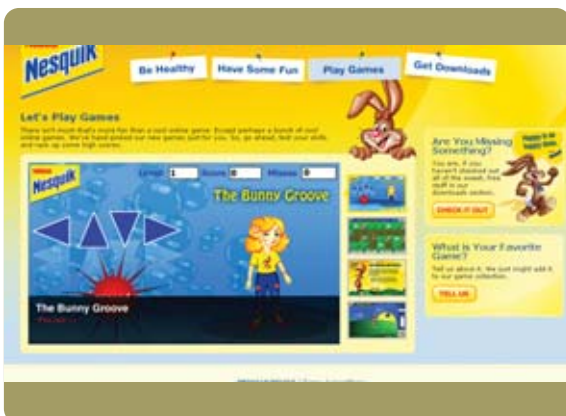


This PepsiCo site from the Philippines features a number of games. The games did not have any age restricting software in place.

Nestlé's Nesquik

[www.nesquik.com](http://www.nesquik.com)

[www.nesquik-aventura.com](http://www.nesquik-aventura.com)



Several games for young children were available on the nesquik.com website. They included the option to forward to a friend, which is a basic form of viral marketing.



This site from Chile opens with the option to send a Christmas card. There are also games to be played with Quicky, the bunny. Other options include games, in some cases with prizes to win. Again you need to register and then login to play.

Kellogg's Frosted Flakes

[www.frostedflakes.com](http://www.frostedflakes.com)



The frostedflakes.com website had a menu option to mix a musical chant, however this was not available at the time of the survey.

Mars M&M'S

[www.mms.com/us](http://www.mms.com/us)



A number of games were available on the M&M'S website in the US. To play the games you have to register and the registration only accepts birth dates for children aged 14 or over.

Mars M&M'S

<http://global.mms.com/cl>



The M&M'S website in Chile also featured a number of games and free downloads. The South American sites restricted registration to children aged 14 or over.

## Online membership clubs

A number of the websites included in this survey had clubs or other activities that required registration. Sometimes the sites included inducements to register such as access to more activities, extra coupons or newsletters. Clubs and membership can appeal to children and adults as this makes them feel part of a group.

Encouraging children to register is of particular concern as it can be a way for the company to build an ongoing marketing relationship with the child. In a few cases children were also asked to divulge information that could be used to refine the marketing that they receive.

The registration process also revealed how serious the company was about restricting its marketing to an older audience. Whilst some websites rejected dates of birth that would have made the child less than 12 or 14 years old, others accepted birth dates that would have meant the child was much younger.

Whilst entering a date of birth is obviously not a fail safe way to prevent children from registering with a club, rejecting dates that suggest a child is too young at least sends a message to the child.

KFC

[www.kfc.com](http://www.kfc.com)[www.kfcindonesia.com](http://www.kfcindonesia.com)

KFC.com features the 'Colonel's email club'. Members can join at age 13 and receive promotions, vouchers and recipes.



In contrast several KFC websites in Asia, such as this one from Indonesia feature the Chicky club or Chaki club which is clearly targeting a much younger audience.

McDonald's

[www.mcworld.com](http://www.mcworld.com)

McWorld is a virtual world for children. It doesn't ask for a real name or email, but it was possible to register as a four year old.

PepsiCo

[www.pepsi.com](http://www.pepsi.com)



On the [pepsi.com](http://pepsi.com) website it was possible to get Pepsi membership at age 13. The site requests a considerable amount of information, including how much Pepsi you consume, the proportion of soft drink consumption that is Pepsi and your interests. Presumably this information is used to better target the company's advertising. Members are given the option to receive text messages.

[www.pepsimundo.com](http://www.pepsimundo.com)



In order to register for this Pepsi website in Chile the user has to provide an email address, as well as their name, date of birth, sex, country, telephone, address and say yes or no to the Pepsi's newsletter. Other options included a networking site. It was possible to register with a birth date of 10 years old.

Mars M&M'S

[www.mms.com/us](http://www.mms.com/us)



In order to register and create an M&M character the user has to enter their birth date. Children under 14 are not accepted. Registration includes an option to receive a newsletter.

Coca-Cola

[www.cokezone.co.uk](http://www.cokezone.co.uk)



It's possible to register on the Coca-Cola website in the UK and receive points based on the number of bottles of Coke you drink that can be exchanged for various gifts. Registration was accepted for children aged 12 years or more.

## Marketing to parents and carers

CI was also concerned by the subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, manipulation of parents and carers that was evident on several of the sites. Depictions of happy families, phrases such as ‘we know you want the best for your child’ and a ‘mom’s tool box’ with helpful suggestions for entertaining the children.

The Nestlé Milkybar website was addressed to the parent, but the website still had the branded games common to other sites. The only difference appeared to be that the parents were recruited in getting the children to engage with them through statements such as ‘Help your kids learn with the Milkybar Sound Machine’.

KFC

[www.bringbackdinner.com](http://www.bringbackdinner.com)



*‘Mom’s tool box’ places KFC at the centre of family life and meal times. It is also possible to register for money saving vouchers on the website; one of the questions asked is whether you have children. This example is from the KFC website bringbackdinner.com*

McDonald's

[www.happy meal.com](http://www.happy meal.com)



*The McDonald’s website in the US has a parent’s ‘retreat’ section. The section doesn’t promote specific products but does seek to reassure.*

Nestlé's Nesquik

www.nesquik.com



Nestlé's Nesquik's parents section lists 10 ways to get your child to drink more milk. It is no accident that the suggestions are presented as if coming from a child... and not the large international food company who are the real source.

Top of the list is a suggestion that involves purchasing a Nestlé product that is high in sugar. At least three of the other suggestions include purchasing Nestlé products.

The site also uses images suggesting a caring mother and happy families.

Kellogg's

www.kelloggs.com



Images of happy families and phrases such as 'we know you want the best for your family' suggest the company is on their side. This example is from the kelloggs.com website.

McDonald's

www.mcdonalds.com.ar



Websites can also be used to promote offline activities that parents can take their children to. This McDonald's site in Argentina promotes birthday parties at McDonald's, Ronald McDonald shows and family tours of the restaurants.

Nestlé Milkybar

[www.milkybar.co.uk](http://www.milkybar.co.uk)



*The whole website in the UK is geared towards parents but encourages them to engage their children in the website as a way to learn or have fun, eg 'Help your kids learn with the Milkybar Sound Machine'.*

Information given on the Nestlé site in Singapore describes Milkybar as:

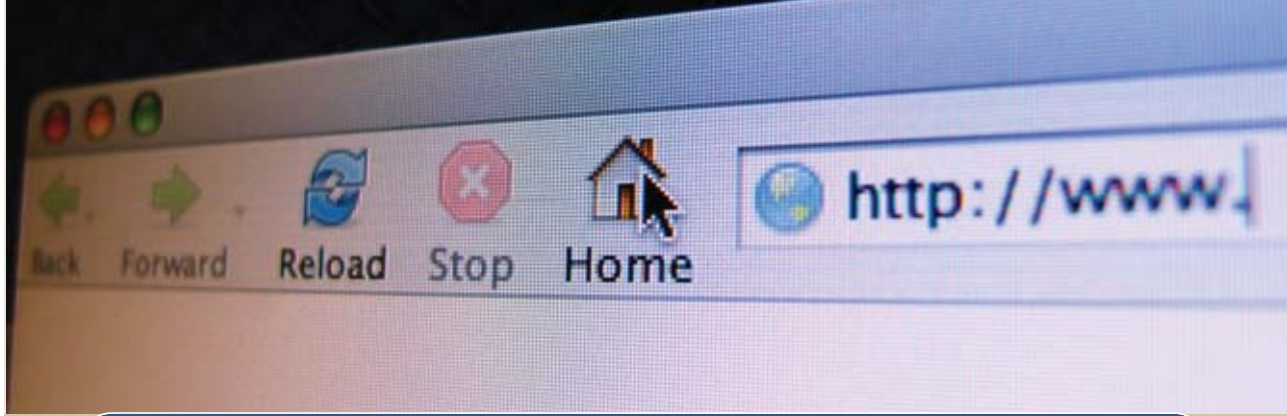
*"a nutritious white chocolate treat that is full of milky goodness and it provides the energy and enjoyment for the child – its approach is all about being able to take on the world, creative and energetic. One with which each can identify and each mother can feel reassured. As a truly "permissible" snack, MILKYBAR unique taste and high nutritional is a hit with both moms and child. Whether at home, at school or at play, MILKYBAR is a delicious and nutritious snack."*

Mars M&M'S

[www.mymms.com](http://www.mymms.com)



*This M&M website mymms.com has branded merchandise available in infant and toddler sizes.*



## Conclusions and recommendations

### Conclusions

CI is aware that this survey is only scratching the surface in terms of the marketing of food and drink to children through new media. This survey only looked at websites and covered a relatively small number of company and product websites, and whilst some other country sites were visited, the study mainly focused on global sites or sites in the US or UK.

Despite this we discovered widespread marketing of food and drink high in fat, sugar or salt to children, including children under the age of 12. Several marketing techniques were used including:

- The use of games to attract children to the site, and to associate the fun and excitement of playing the game with that brand or product.
- The availability of free items to attract children to the site. The vast majority of the gifts were branded thereby getting the brand off the website and into other areas of the child's life.
- The use of clubs and other activities that required registration and in some cases requiring the child to impart information about themselves that could be used for ongoing marketing.
- Marketing to parents and carers – often with emotive messages that suggested the company was on their side and that they would somehow be a better parent or carer if they gave their child this product.

Several of the companies covered in this survey have made commitments to reduce their marketing of food and drink high in fat, sugar or salt to children. CI is not suggesting that these companies are breaking their own rules but we feel this survey clearly demonstrates how limited their commitments are.

We accept that some companies have made some concessions. Coca-Cola and PepsiCo's sites did not appear to directly target children under 12, however as

young children often aspire to emulate their teenage peers we would question how effective this distinction is.

CI remains convinced that children up to 16 should not be the targets of marketing for food high in fat, sugar and salt. Most teenagers are still forming their own ideas about what constitutes a healthy lifestyle, they are often image conscious and particularly vulnerable to marketing pressures. It is also in their teenage years that many children start to exercise their own spending power.

We also noted that in the case of McDonald's and KFC, there have been some moves to ensure that the items offered in children's meals are not high in fat sugar and salt. We also noted that some – though not all - of the advertising on both sites was linked to these children's meals. However, this association was often very limited and we felt it likely that the child would associate the website with the brand rather than a particular product and several of the products available in those chains are high in fat, sugar or salt.

There is now so much marketing of food high in fat, sugar and salt that there is a danger that parents and those in authority take it for granted and stop questioning whether it is appropriate. It goes without saying that not all food companies produce food high in fat, sugar or salt and not all companies that do produce such products choose to market them to children. The point is that there are alternatives for the companies highlighted in this survey. Companies can reformulate products or simply not market them to children.

Online marketing is by no means the only reason why we need an international code on the marketing of food to children, but it is perhaps one of the clearest. The techniques highlighted in this study are all too often used to encourage children to eat food that is high in fat sugar or salt. Furthermore, it is available through a medium that is hard for parents to monitor and that recognises no borders and, therefore, no national efforts at regulation.

While some companies have introduced policies to limit their marketing of food high in fat, sugar and salt to children under 12, their efforts to regulate themselves have been shown to be half-hearted at best. CI believes that it is time for governments to agree a robust and effective WHO code based on the recommendations published by CI and IOTF in 2008.

## Recommendations

CI believes that all children up to the age of 16 years old should be protected from marketing of unhealthy food and drink through a global standard based on the Recommendations prepared by CI and the IOTF. In particular, the following marketing techniques should not be allowed to promote food high in fat, sugar and/or salt:

### 1. Advertising or promotion that directly appeals to children, including the:

- Use of celebrities
- Use of cartoon characters, including brand owned and licensed
- Inclusion of free gifts, toys or collectible items
- Inclusion of competitions, vouchers or games
- Shape or novelty value of the food or food packaging

### 2. Advertising or promotion in places children visit frequently, which includes:

- Nurseries, pre-school centres, schools and school grounds
- Children's clubs, centres, playgrounds and sports halls
- Family and child clinics and paediatric services

### 3. Advertising that targets parents or carers:

- No indirect advertising to parents or other adults caring for children such as other family members, child carers, teachers, health workers. This includes suggesting that a parent or adult who purchases such a food or beverage for a child is a better, more intelligent or a more generous parent or adult than one who does not do so, or that their child when fed these products will be more intelligent and gifted.

Consumers International calls on:

### The World Health Organization (WHO)

- To develop an international code to restrict the marketing of food to children based on the CI/IOTF recommendations.
- Report on and monitor compliance with the international Code.

### National governments

- To give their support to the development of an international code on the marketing of food to children.
- To implement national legislation based on the international Code to restrict the marketing of food to children

### Multinational food and beverage companies

- To voluntarily comply with all the provisions in the CI Code.
- To adopt a consistent global approach and ensure that all internal policies on advertising and nutrition are implemented to the same standard in all countries.
- To use their creativity and breadth of marketing techniques to encourage children to make healthy food choices.

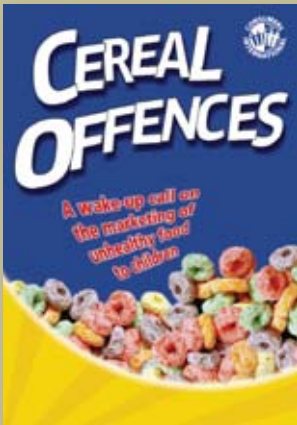
# Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> <http://iotf.org/database/TrendsInChildrenmaps.htm>
- <sup>2</sup> [http://www.consumersinternational.org/shared\\_asp\\_files/GFSR.asp?NodeID=97478](http://www.consumersinternational.org/shared_asp_files/GFSR.asp?NodeID=97478)
- <sup>3</sup> <http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/children-go-online/>
- <sup>4</sup> <http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?q=Internet&d=MDG&f=seriesRowID%3a608>
- <sup>5</sup> Jeff Chester (Center for Digital Democracy) and Kathryn Montgomery (American University), *Interactive Food & Beverage Marketing: Targeting Children and Youth in the Digital Age*, May 2007. <http://digitalads.org/documents/digiMarketingFull.pdf>
- <sup>6</sup> All European information is from the EU kids online project. <http://www.eukidsonline.net/>
- <sup>7</sup> *UK Children Go Online - End of Award report*. Sonia Livingstone (London School of Economics). <http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/children-go-online/>
- <sup>8</sup> In the absence of an international standard the consumer movement has used the UK Food Standards Agency front of pack labelling system in recent surveys. For consistency the same system was used in this exercise. For more information see <http://www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/frontofpackguidance2.pdf>
- <sup>9</sup> *Advertising Ages Annual Global Marketers 2008*. The food and drink companies with the largest global advertising spend were: Unilever, Nestlé, Coca-Cola, Kraft foods, McDonald's, Mars inc, PepsiCo, Pepsi Danone, Yum brands, Kellogg's.
- <sup>10</sup> See [www.consumersinternational.org/shared\\_asp\\_files/GFSR.asp?NodeID=97478](http://www.consumersinternational.org/shared_asp_files/GFSR.asp?NodeID=97478)
- <sup>11</sup> *Cereal Offences. A wake up call on the marketing of food to children*. Consumers International October 2008. Available at [www.consumersinternational.org](http://www.consumersinternational.org)
- <sup>12</sup> <http://www2.kelloggs.com/Product/ProductDetail.aspx?product=450>
- <sup>13</sup> <http://www2.kelloggs.com/Product/ProductDetail.aspx?product=555>
- <sup>14</sup> [www.kfc.com/nutrition/](http://www.kfc.com/nutrition/)
- <sup>15</sup> <http://nutrition.mcdonalds.com/nutritionexchange/nutritionfacts.pdf>
- <sup>16</sup> <http://www.m-ms.com/us/about/products/milkchocolatemms/>

Also from the *Junk Food Generation* Campaign:



**The Junk Food Trap**  
Marketing unhealthy food to children in Asia Pacific



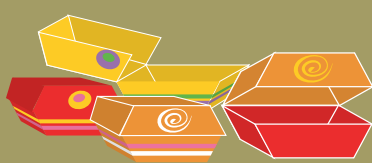
**Cereal Offences**  
A wake-up call on the marketing of unhealthy food to children



**Left wanting more**  
Food company policies on marketing to children



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# junk food GENERATION

The campaign to stop the marketing of unhealthy food to children

Find out more about Consumers International's  
campaign by visiting [www.junkfoodgeneration.org](http://www.junkfoodgeneration.org)

