

Healthy Marketing: The Only Solution

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Hart Sharp Video (2004)

Little Jonathon scurries down the aisle in search of his usual supermarket purchase. As he impatiently tugs at his mother's arm, she drops boring food items like oatmeal and fresh fruit into the cart. After quite some time, Jonathon's mother gives him permission to go to the "fun food aisle." There, Jonathon drops a cereal box into the cart with Sponge Bob on the front, and a bag of chips with his favorite basketball players' (i.e. LeBron James) picture on it. These unsafe advertising strategies are raking in millions of dollars for cereal and junk food manufacturers. As Morgan Spurlock points out in his documentary *Super Size Me*, when young children are raised to idealize cartoons and athletes that market unhealthy food, it should be no shock that the United States is the fattest country in the world.

Morgan's unprecedented documentary shines light on the unknown effects of regular diets based solely on the American fast food industry. In his first-hand analysis, Morgan attempts to tackle an unimaginable task: eat only McDonald's for three meals a day, eat everything that McDonald's offers on their menu, and super-size his meal whenever offered the option to upgrade. In order to affirm that his high fat "Mac diet" was not going to cause any serious health concerns, he consulted cardiologists and nutritionists to evaluate his health and to predict any health risks or side effects of the diet. The main predictions that the team of doctors decided was that Morgan would increase his blood pressure based on high cholesterol and sodium intakes, gain overall weight, and feel sluggish and miserable.

Such forecasts by the team of doctors seemed to be relatively accurate when analyzing Morgan's weekly results. After just five days of eating nothing but McDonald's food, Morgan gained 10 lbs, he started feeling pressure on his chest, he felt depressed, and he could not seem to quell the intense hunger attacks that he experienced shortly after eating a meal. Morgan's second weigh-in put him at 203 lbs with no apparent side effects. The doctors hypothesized that his body was beginning to adapt to the intense increase in fat-intake. Although his health seemed to be adequate after the second weigh-in, the same could not be said for the time between the second and third weigh-ins. When Morgan showed-up for his third health update, he weighed 202 lbs, but that did not mean that

he felt well by any stretch of the imagination. Morgan's cholesterol went from 165 mg/dL at his first weigh-in to 225 mg/dL after the third weigh-in; one of the doctors said that anyone would say that Morgan is sick.

The doctors concurred that Morgan was at risk of liver failure, which usually is a product of alcoholism, not a high-fat diet. By day 21, Morgan woke up in a hot sweat with difficulty in breathing. One of the physicians stated that Morgan needed to stop, because his liver resembled that of an alcoholic. Morgan continued despite pleas from his girlfriend and physicians to stop the, "McDiet." In his final assessments, Morgan weighed 210 lbs—24.5 lbs heavier—and increased his body fat from 11% to 18%. When Morgan returned to a normal diet and exercise it took him 5 months to lose 20 lbs and 9 months to lose 4.5 lbs. This one-month test of a McDonald's diet proved that McDonald's food definitely has adverse effects on health.

In the American society, we seem to be having a difficult time digesting the fact that our own family members are overly obese. We look for escape routes when we are pinned in the corner of being labeled overweight from proclaiming that the Body Mass Index is a faulty measuring tool, to trying every fat burning pill on the market. In an interview in *Super Size Me*, Dr. David Satch stated, "We live in an environment that makes us sick, a toxic environment" (Satch 2004). The environment that Dr. Satch is referring to is the trend of replacing home cooked meals to on-the-go fast food that is pumping our arteries full of saturated fat. The marketing teams of fast food and junk food manufacturers are undoubtedly the cause of this drastic transgression.

There are over 10,000 advertisements a year that are targeted at the youth of America. Since the early days of Michael Jordan endorsing Big Macs, the healthy food industry has been matched to an unfair fight with the fast food and junk food industries. To show the considerable variation in available capitol between marketing of healthy foods and fast food, consider that McDonalds spent 1.4 billion dollars on advertising in 2005, while healthy marketers were able to dig into their pockets for a meager 2 million dollars. Such disparity is evident in the way that fast food faces like Ronald McDonald, the playpens in fast food establishments, and Happy Meal toys are all unfair ways in which the fast food industry gains the upper hand in parental food choices and overcomes the small healthy food market. These marketing tactics have allowed being overweight a socially acceptable idea. The fact is that pressuring someone to quit smoking is socially permissible, but telling someone to lose weight is completely out of the question. Maybe it should be considered impolite to demand another to lose weight, because according to nationwide statistics, obesity is about to take over smoking as the number one cause of preventable deaths in the United States.

The obesity epidemic is unquestionably an intense dilemma for the youth of the nation, and it all starts with healthy eating habits at home and school. Rarely are school lunches made from fresh ingredients, rather they are reheated packages with disturbing amounts of preservatives. Food for the majority of schools is government-issued, which poses an up-hill challenge in the attempt to offer children affordable, healthy lunches. This government task of providing

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healthy lunches is a long-term predicament that will take years to sort out. For that reason, America needs to achieve short-term success in the obesity epidemic by turning our attention to snack food marketing. Short-term incentives for marketing healthy foods seems to be a step towards slowly changing the nutritional habits of our youth. Frito Lays has a healthy marketing scheme that marks snacks that are low in calories and fat, known as "Smart Choices Made Easy." Such a conversion between product concept and healthy marketing is the only way in which healthy foods have a chance to compete with the evil empires of the junk food and fast food industries. While cartoon characters and sports heroes continue to be brandished on junk food packages, moms like Jonathan's will have to struggle to quickly pass by the unfair marketing strategies of junk and fast food companies, whether pushing a cart or driving a car.

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