

# Problems at McDonald's, and what it means for you

By Colin Bates

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McDonald's has received a lot of bad press over the past few months. And according to their own press releases they are 'closing countries' (someone should tell the countries!) and closing approximately 175 under-performing restaurants in 10 other countries.

Properly managed, brands can live forever

As you may already know, we are firm believers that, if properly managed, a brand can live forever. Some of the earliest brands, many of which came into existence well over 100 years ago, are stronger than they have ever been.

The implications for McDonald's

Part of properly managing a brand (a part which many brand managers neglect!) is to develop an effective long-term environmental monitoring system. That may sound very grand, but basically it means thinking about long-term trends in your market and anticipating the impact they will have on your brand (and your brand's current range of products).

For MacDonal'd's a big issue for them is this: "Is there a long-term trend away from fast-food to health-food amongst our consumers?". How you choose to answer this question has a fundamental impact on the appropriate brand strategy for McDonald's over the next 5-10 years. (Could McDonald's every become a health food chain? Perhaps not, but IBM successfully moved from mainframes into PC's, which I think is comparable.)

So, finally, the implications for you...

Whether you are large or small: a single retail outlet, or a huge global corporation like McDonald's, the issue remains the same. What are the long-term trends that are going to have an impact on your brand, and your brand's current range of products.

If you are not looking for, and considering, these long-term trends you are not protecting the future of your brand.

Where to look? Consider the possible impact of long-term changes in:

- Consumer attitudes and behavior
- Technology

- Legislation
- Demographics
- The physical environment

Whether it is the new highway that is going to be built through your neighborhood, long-term changes in consumer values and behavior, or a whole new technology that will change the shape of your industry, you need to be monitoring these fundamental changes.

Take time out occasionally to reflect on the changes, and their impact (frankly this becomes much easier as you get older, because having more to look back at makes it easier to look forward too!).

Of course with so much change it is impossible to be certain. But if you have a considered opinion about the long-term - and apply that thinking to your brand planning -you are one step closer to protecting the future of your brand.

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