

# Systems for Simplicity: What any Business can learn from

## McDonald's

By David Brewster

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David Brewster  
dbrewster@businesssimplification.com.au

Business Simplification <http://www.businesssimplification.com.au>

Open any book on the subject of building effective business systems and you are sure to find McDonald's used as a prime example. Now their food mightn't be great, but it has one outstanding characteristic: it is entirely predictable. And few could argue that they haven't been successful.

Consider this: in less than fifty years, McDonald's have built over 29,000 stores based on a very robust system. If you didn't like the Big Mac you had in Moscow, you can be sure you would equally dislike the Big Macs you might have in Madrid, Melbourne or Manila.

Of course, McDonalds have it easy. Their business has never been about their food - it has always been about their systems. It is the sameness of their food, rather than its originality, which is what their customers expect. So it is sameness that they deliver.

Which is hardly what most of us are looking to provide, is it? We are selling a product or a service - not a 'system'. Our creativity, our unique approach, our flexibility to customer needs - these are what we are selling. The McDonald's approach seems anathema.

The reality is that systems have a place in every business because, used properly, they can help us achieve something that every business wants: efficiency and happy customers.

Take your average plumber. He is selling his skills - certainly not a system. The plumber loves to plumb - he hates administration. But we still expect him to return our calls, to keep appointments and to provide us with accurate invoices.

So the plumber has a choice. He can forget to return calls, turn up late and get increasingly bogged down in paperwork (both of which happen all too often). Or he can put in place a basic time management and bookkeeping system.

Either way he'll still be a good plumber, but the system will provide him with more, happier customers and greater peace-of-mind.

What your plumber can't systemise is the art of plumbing. His experience and his apparently innate ability to diagnose a problem: these can only be passed on properly over time. Becoming the plumbing equivalent of Ronald McDonald is unrealistic.

Somewhere between McDonald's and your plumber lie most other businesses. Systems have a place in every business - it is simply a matter of degree. But we need to make a conscious effort to identify those parts of our business that can be 'systemised'.

In the long run, we will be rewarded with a simpler business and happier customers.

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