

## Is Pester Power Dead? Neil Samson, Kids and Youth

### Is Pester Power Dead?

#### **Diet/Health/Obesity: How are food manufacturers, retailers and advertisers tackling the challenge?**

#### **Neil Samson, Kids and Youth**

#### **Abstract**

This paper is intended to give a unique insight into the response of food manufacturers, retailers and advertisers to key challenges that affect marketing to children in 2005. These include the possible banning of food advertising to children, concerns over foods with high levels of fat, sugar and salt, and the need for manufacturers and marketers to take some responsibility for children's health. The paper features new research, involving a series of eleven in-depth interviews with prominent international and UK professionals from the food manufacturing, retailing and advertising industries, to ensure that the insights are up-to-date in this growing and important debate.

In the light of increasing concerns relating to the health, diet and obesity levels amongst children, those involved in the production, marketing and retailing of children's foods, are increasingly feeling the pressure from regulatory bodies to 'clean up their act'. The media has also become quite vociferous about issues relating to children's health, and in particular the part played by food manufacturers and marketers. The heightened awareness of issues relating to children's health amongst the general public, has also led to increased levels of scrutiny from those buying foods for children, usually mothers.

There have been a few notable unfortunate press stories in recent years which have been borne out of increased levels of scrutiny to children's food and drink. For example, Ribenas' 'tooth kind' claim, which could not be substantiated, and Cadbury's 'wrappers for schools sports equipment campaign' that was interpreted as encouraging children to eat more sweets.

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So, faced with real threat of tighter legislative controls on marketing to children, increasingly health conscious consumers, and scrutiny from the media, how are food manufacturers, retailers, and marketers responding?

### Marketing of children's food in the past

The landscape of the children's food market has undergone considerable changes over the past 10 years. As 'compression culture' continues to advance unabated across the developed world, time and in particular 'quality time' spent with the family is becoming the most precious resource. The increasing numbers of two income families resulted in many families being cash rich but time poor. These two factors led to an increased demand for convenience foods, lunchbox items, takeaways and children's restaurants.

Ten years ago most children were not very concerned about the healthiness of products they consumed; 'sugar free' meant that it would not taste very nice and 'low fat' was not even a consideration. Mothers wanted to give their children a healthy diet, however they found themselves making continual compromises in their quest to achieve this, often giving their children less healthy options which they knew their children would eat.

Marketers' realised that there was an opportunity to provide products which children enjoyed and at the same time reassure mothers that there was some goodness in them. Sunny D is an extreme example of a product which was positioned as a compromise product - an alternative to orange juice which children like the taste of. The advertising majored on the vitamin C content of the drink and showed children enjoying it and having fun. The placement of the product alongside fresh orange juice in the chill cabinet and the similarity of the bottle to orange juice, resulted in mothers unconsciously coding the drink as a healthy alternative to orange juice.

*"It all suggested it was freshly squeezed orange juice with sort of added goodness rather than a totally artificial product"*  
(Mother with three children")

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Using the word 'sunny' encourages associations with health, vitality, outdoors and also in the context of an orange drink, an association with the natural ripening of orange groves by the sun. The effect of this strategy was remarkably effective in the short term and created a mega brand almost overnight, with sales of £160 million a year. The strap line 'The great stuff that kids go for' sent two very powerful messages to mothers, firstly it reassured mothers that it is good for children and secondly that their children will like it.

Unfortunately for Sunny D, the honeymoon with consumers was short lived, negative publicity began to surround the product which challenged the healthiness of the drink. Of particular note was the little girl who turned orange after drinking large quantities of it. This was further compounded by the airing of a Sunny D ad. depicting a snowman turning orange. James Griffiths, a director of Saatchi and Saatchi that was responsible for the ad. told the BBC

*"I have to say we would be the first to say that it was an own-goal"*

(The Money Programme 3 December 2003)

The consumer backlash which ensued resulted in the product being re-launched in a sugar free format. Even well respected established brands such as Ribena, in their efforts to bolster the health status of the brand, fell foul of advertising regulations with its 'Toothkind' claim. Action was brought by the Advertising Standards Association which believed that the claims made by the brand were misleading.

Both of these high profile cases catalysed the change we see today in mothers attitudes to health claims made by food and drinks manufacturers. Mothers are becoming increasingly wary of health claims made by new and existing brands and beginning in increasing numbers, to look for 'unhealthy' additives such as sugar, and artificial sweeteners/colorants.

A growth in the lunchbox market, coupled with the time pressure on mothers, led to the introduction of a wide range of lunchbox/snack products aimed at children. These products were welcomed by many mothers who believed them to be a healthier alternative to other snacks such as crisps and chocolate. Some products have been

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very successful at meeting the needs of mothers for convenience and relative healthiness, and children's demand for fun, interaction and taste. Cheestrings (stringy cheese which can be made into a myriad of different shapes/styles) is a product which kids love because it is fun, enables independence, and has engaging adverts and an appealing taste. Some mothers also accepted the product because it is perceived as a good way to get their children to eat cheese. This product was initially advertised predominantly to children in the hope that they would request this – and they did, in droves. The adverts were aspirational, edgy, but also fun, an irresistible mix. It became one of the most successful cheese products using this strategy.

As part of an analysis by the UK government Select Committee on Health on the issue of food advertising to children (November 2003), a document was received from Abbott Mead Vickers concerning a campaign for Wotsits (a cheesy snack). This document clearly illustrates the use of 'pester power' as an integral part of the campaign.

### *Media Strategy Brief*

*"what is the desired consumer response"*

*Wotsits are for me – I'm going to buy them when I get the chance and pester mums for them when she next goes shopping"*

*Target Audience: C1C2, four to nine years, 10+ years, male and female*

*"Mothers don't necessarily have to like the campaign but should not be so offended that they stop purchasing the brand for their children"*

This period in time was possibly the golden age of Pester Power in the UK, a time when it was believed that if you could get the child to ask for the product you were home and dry.

However, this attitude towards advertising to children was not the case across the whole of Europe. In Sweden advertising to children under the age of 12 has been

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banned for 13 years. Denmark has banned ads five minutes before and after children's programming. Belgium has banned all ads to children and Italy has banned ads during cartoons. Greece has banned TV stations from advertising toys to children between the ages of 7am -10pm. Quebec restricts all television advertising directed at children under the age of 13.

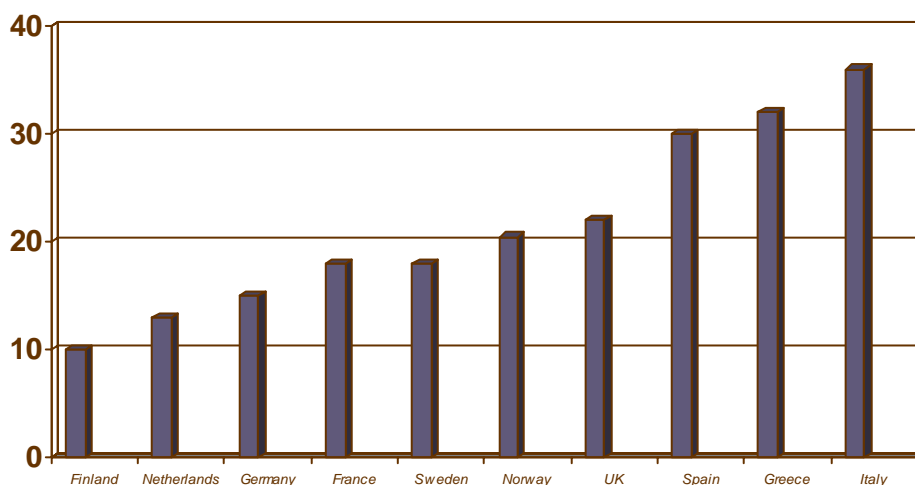
### Obesity/diet concerns and potential interventions

According to the World Health Organisation's information sheet on obesity and overweight 2004.

*"Childhood obesity is already epidemic in some areas and on the rise in others. In the USA the number of obese children has doubled and the number of overweight children has trebled since 1980"*

A similar picture is true across much of the developed world where childhood obesity levels are now at alarming levels in some countries. The prevalence of childhood obesity in Europe is shown in the table below.

### Prevalence of overweight children aged 10 years in Europe



Source: IOTF collated data 95 – 01 'Obesity in Europe'

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The problem is even extending into the developing world, with countries like Thailand showing marked increases in recent years. In the UK the government's National Diet and Nutrition Survey of 4-18 year olds in 1997 found that British children eat less than half the recommended amount of fruit and vegetables. The survey also found that the vast majority exceeded the maximum adult recommendations for sugar, salt and fat. As the epidemic of childhood obesity increases, governments, pressure groups and other stakeholders are increasing the pressure on those marketing foods to children.

In France, the French Public Health Bill has been adopted which includes two amendments on food advertising to children (30<sup>th</sup> July 04). In the UK, various bodies including the British Medical Association and the National Union of Teachers are calling for a ban on 'junk food' advertising to children. The Consumer Association in the Netherlands has launched a campaign against 'unhealthy' foods. The Public Health Advocacy Institute in the US has called for restrictions on marketing food to children. In Portugal the Green Party has announced a ban on 'unhealthy' food advertising to children.

### **Looking at marketing/advertising in the current climate**

Regulators in several countries are currently re-evaluating policies on advertising to children. In the UK, Ofcom which regulates the communications industries, issued a report in July 2004 looking into the issue of childhood obesity and the role of food promotion within this.

Key findings from this report include:

- foods which are high in fats, sugars and salt are commonly promoted to children
- children eat well below the recommended 5 pieces of fruit and vegetables per day
- obese children consume a large amount of convenience foods, carbonated drinks and dairy products
- food preference, consumption and behaviour are multi-determined
- there are 'modest direct effects' of television advertising on food preference, consumption and behaviour

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- peer pressure is a notable influence on food choice
- television is the key medium for food advertisers
- branded goods sometimes assert health claims for foods that have other 'unhealthy' aspects
- there was very little support amongst parents for a total ban on advertising products with high fats, sugars and salt
- just under half of parents wanted to see cartoon characters (49%) and celebrities (48%) banned from advertising products with high fats, sugars and salt

The UK Government's recent white paper - 'Choosing Health' November 2004  
Outlines a series of initiatives to respond to the issue of obesity and children's diets. Several of these measures have ramifications for manufacturers, retailers and advertisers. The key proposals include:

- industry funding of national campaigns to promote positive health information and education
- the inclusion of clear nutritional information on packaging
- working with industry to increase opportunities for people to make healthy choices in what they eat, e.g. reducing levels of salt, sugars and fat, clearer food labelling
- restricting the advertising and promotion of those foods that are high in fat, salt and sugar. Voluntary restrictions will be sought initially, however legislation could be implemented if 'they have failed to produce change in the nature and balance of food promotion to children' by 2007. These restrictions could apply to all forms of food advertising and promotion, including, but not limited to: broadcast/non-broadcast; sponsorship, point of sale and packaging
- advertising to children of 'unhealthy foods' could be restricted before 9pm
- the use of celebrities and cartoon characters on 'unhealthy' foods could be restricted
- marketing of 'unhealthy' foods in schools could also be restricted

### **Existing Regulations governing advertising to children**

In many of the developed countries which permit advertising to children, there are specific regulations governing how products can be advertised to children. For example in the UK, there are several guidelines which restrict the advertising of products to children. The two which are particularly relevant are the prohibition of: direct appeals to children to purchase or to ask their parents to purchase products; and, encouraging children to eat or drink near bedtime, to eat frequently throughout the day or to replace main meals with confectionery or snack foods.

Recent research conducted by Kids and Youth across Europe has revealed that mothers and children's attitudes and behaviours towards food and drink products have changed markedly over the last year. There is a pan-European multi-faceted movement which involves the media, schools and governments in raising the issue of childhood obesity and the link with poor diets. This is leading mothers to feel increasingly guilty about giving their children 'unhealthy' food, and making the compromises they were previously willing to make. Increasing numbers of mothers are starting to look more closely at the food packaging/labelling, and are increasingly put off by artificial additives and high levels of sugar, fat and salt.

Children themselves are also becoming more aware and concerned about healthy eating. Schools and nurseries are not merely educating children about healthy eating, they are actively encouraging it through initiatives such as the 'School fruit and vegetables scheme' in the UK which makes available one piece of fruit or vegetable for each child aged between four to six. An increasing number of schools throughout Europe are banning 'unhealthy' foods from being consumed at school. Some children have started to question the 'healthiness' of the food being given to them – further reinforcing the guilt felt by mothers .

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### Retailers

In preparing this paper Kids and Youth conducted a series of eleven in-depth interviews with prominent professionals from the food retailing, manufacturing and advertising industries. Each interview lasted approximately 20 minutes. The participants were asked about their opinions on the current and future response of their industry to the issues of childhood obesity and children's diets. The discussion also covered the issue of 'pester power' and explored their thoughts on the current and future viability of this strategy regarding food advertising to children. In order to ensure confidentiality I have not attributed quotes to individuals or organisations.

In the last few years we have seen the main supermarkets in the UK launch their own ranges of foods targeted at children. Sainsbury's, for example launched their Blue Parrot Café range in 2001, a healthier range of children's meals and snacks. Prior to launch, several conducted comprehensive research with parents and children to understand how to appeal to the children (primarily in terms of the look and taste), and at the same time satisfy parental needs (including nutritional concerns). By understanding both perspectives, successful children's food ranges have been developed which are child-friendly, healthy and convenient.

Recently some of these supermarkets have revisited their children's ranges and have reformulated some of their products to make them healthier.

*"We are reformulating our existing ranges to reduce sugar, salt and fat contents" Food Retailer*

Recently Tesco has announced its intention to introduce a 'traffic light' labelling scheme to indicate the levels of fats, sugar and salt in its products. This move is being considered by other retailers. A red light would indicate high levels of 'unhealthy' ingredients and green for low levels. This move will enable busy mothers to make quick informed decisions about which products to buy for their children and is likely to lead to widespread re-evaluation of current products purchased. However, many of the products bought for children are branded rather than own label, therefore the scope of this initiative is limited.

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The Co-op has taken a hard line on marketing of 'unhealthy' foods to children. The retailer has committed to a voluntary ban on the advertising during children's TV hours, of all food and drink products that are high in fat, sugar or salt. It has also pledged to use its own TV advertising to promote healthy diets to children. It is banning the use of character and cartoon merchandising on Co-op products high in fat, sugar or salt.

Some of the family restaurants which have been the focus of negative media attention have taken positive steps to improve the healthiness and variety of their food offerings to children.

*"Reducing salt, fat and sugar are the key enemies, we like a lot of others in the industry will be working with our suppliers to reduce the content of sugar, salt and fat where it is feasible because it will be deemed irresponsible not to do it" Food Retailer*

McDonalds was singled out by many of the advertisers, retailers and manufacturers interviewed as being one of the most pro-active organisations in taking steps to combat obesity and poor diets. McDonald's has recently broadened out the Happy Meal kids offer to include healthier options such as water, fruit juice and fruit; it has also reduced the salt content in McNuggets.

*"McDonalds have probably been ahead of the game on it, they have been the most obvious in changing their menu, they have brought out fruit and water" Food Advertiser*

McDonalds has also produced a series of health education messages which are aired during children's programmes, encouraging children to drink water and eat fruit and vegetables.

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### **Manufacturers**

Food and drink manufacturers are acutely aware of the concerns surrounding childhood obesity and poor diets. This issue has risen in the last few years from a side issue to one of the key areas of concern.

*“The industry is very aware (of obesity), it is something that has been increasing by at least 100% year on year in terms of the amount of time people spend thinking about it” Food Manufacturer*

One of the main challenges faced by manufacturers in the light of concerns over obesity/children’s diet is how to produce food and drinks which contain lower levels of sugars, salt, fat and artificial additives which children will enjoy consuming.

*“We like sugar, fat and salt, how do we come up with solutions to provide products which taste just as good but are not bad for us” Food Manufacturer*

Some manufacturers, such as Kraft, have already increased the ‘healthiness’ of their products by reducing the levels of fat and salt. Sunny D has re-launched a ‘no added sugar’ version, with added health benefits such as vitamin C and calcium. Kellogg’s, having been criticised for the levels of sugar and salt in its cereals has brought out a reduced sugar version of Frosties.

Finland has been taking steps to tackle obesity for the past 30 years. Healthy eating has become part of the culture. Manufacturers have responded to this desire for healthier products, for example, 30% of cheese on supermarket shelves is low fat, compared to 10% in the UK.

The issue of food labelling represents a formidable challenge to manufacturers. There is mounting pressure around the developed world for clearer labelling of food products. In the UK for example there is a proposal contained in the White Paper ‘Choosing Health’ to introduce a signalling system for foods – similar to the traffic light system mentioned earlier. This form of labelling will result in many of the foods currently aimed at children getting a red or amber label, indicating high or moderate

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levels of sugars, fat or salt. Some children's brands such as Ribena are currently using their packaging to communicate health messages and responsible use of its products. For example it recommends that soft drinks should only be drunk at mealtimes and that children should visit the dentist regularly.

In September 2004 the UK, the Food and Drink Federation issued a Food and Health Manifesto. This set out the industries commitments to tackling the issues of obesity and diet through practical steps. Examples of those which are particularly relevant to children include: clearer labelling on packaging, reducing levels of sugar, fat and salt in products, removing vending machines from primary schools and education initiatives.

Some manufacturers have reduced in size, or withdrawn, their larger portioned food/drink options. Cadbury proposes to phase out all non portioned King Size chocolate bars, Nestle offers a large proportion of its range in bite-size and mini versions. Pepsi and Coca-Cola now offer a range of smaller sized canned drinks.

In the last few years there has been a rise in the importance of the quality of food in children's products. Brands have recognised that it is now insufficient to merely offer a convenient product that children will enjoy, it is also advantageous to demonstrate that it has health benefits and contains natural ingredients. Hence the packaging of children's foods often includes reassuring health messages directed at mothers whilst remaining attractive to children.

*"There has been a big change from just convenience to much more about what the food is that you are selling" Food Manufacturer*

Some manufacturers have brought out healthy food ranges specifically aimed the children's market, for example Bird's Eye's Captain's Ready Meal Range.

There has been a growth in the development of functional foods aimed at children, for example Rice Krispies Muddles which contain pre-biotics (which help digestion). Munch Bunch has also recently brought out a yoghurt drink containing pro-biotics. The existence of these products is a testament of the desire to respond to the increasing

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demands from mothers for healthy products for their children. Faced with this desire from mothers to judge the nutritional content of children's foods plus the knowledge that mothers have little time to scrutinise the backs of packaging, clear food labelling has become key. Many of the foods aimed at children now clearly show the health benefits on the packaging.

### **Advertisers**

Advertisers like the other industries involved in the marketing of children's foods are acutely aware of the issues of obesity and children's diet.

*"The fact that the stats are so alarming amongst children, doubling and tripling in such a short time period means that it is a big issue" Food Advertiser*

This heightened awareness has ramifications for the way that advertisers promote foods.

*"Now that we are so aware of the issue and every time we put a script together you are critiquing it from the perspective of a lobbyist, thinking how could we attack this" Food Advertiser*

It has been estimated that US children may view between 20,000 to 40,000 advertisements per year, of these, half are for food products. By the time that students graduate from high school they would have watched up to 180,000 advertisements for food.

Despite television advertising still dominating in terms of expenditure on promoting food to children, the media which marketers are using is becoming increasingly diversified and multi-faceted. Marketing channels and techniques include television, in-school marketing, internet, kids clubs, electronic games and toys.

There have been some interesting developments in the way that television advertising of children's food products is changing. Some products, particularly those with healthy claims, which were previously targeted primarily at children, are now either directly

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targeting mothers or are heavily signalling to mothers that the product is healthy. Cheestrings is a good illustration of a product which has moved towards courting mother's approval. The latest Cheestrings ad begins with mothers and child on a train, mothers hands the child the Cheestring, he then proceeds to make a moustache like the passenger in front of him by stringing the cheese and placing it on his lip. The passenger in front the looks around to see the child mimicking his moustache. The action then cuts to show the packaging and emphasises that it is real cheese and contains milk. This is quite a departure for the brand which was previously almost exclusively child-centric.

Children's products which contain high levels of sugars, fats and salt have had a more difficult task in this more health conscious climate. Numerous tactics have been used to maintain the appeal of these products and ensure that mother's still buy them. Brands such as Wotsits, Coco Pops and Real Fruit Winders have majored on maximising their appeal to children. Fruit Winders engaged in a viral campaign where it 'seeded' the characters and a secret language at concerts, in magazines and cinemas. The campaign also encouraged children to interact with it on websites, choosing which characters were going to get 'splattered' next. The packaging also attempts to appeal to mothers with the claim that it is 70% fruit.

Other brands have been using advertising to promote a more active culture amongst children. Walker's crisps for example, have launched a pedometer campaign which encourages children and families to be more active. To date over 1.5 million pedometers have been sent out. Some of the cereal brands which have high levels of sugars are also encouraging children to participate in sports such as football and swimming rather than overtly promoting their products to children.

The issue of whether 'pester power' is still a viable strategy for marketing to children depends on the definition of 'pester power'. The most direct form of 'pester power' is the direct incitement of children to ask for a particular product. This form of 'pester power' was deemed by most of the participants in the survey to be neither effective nor permissible due to the advertising code of conduct. It was not deemed to be effective since marketers believe that children are marketing savvy and will only ask

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for products which appeal to them and not because they are asked to 'pester' for them.

*"Pester power is something that you don't have much control over, what you have got control over is making that brand attractive or not attractive"*  
Food Manufacturer

*"I think the child has to be given more credit, children are not mere sponges soaking up everything that is aimed at them"* Food Retailer

However, the less overt forms of 'pester power' were perceived to still be common place in the advertising of foods to children.

*"Obviously we are going to use devices to engage children in the ad and pay attention, but that is something very different from 'you need to go and get this now or get your mum to buy it now'"*  
Food Advertiser

*"Where we feel very comfortable is that having a kid pester for a yoghurt or a fromage frais is a lot better than them pestering for a chocolate bar or a packet of crisps"* Food Manufacturer

*"I have been looking at breakfast cereals and how they are marketed to children. It just feels like they are using every trick in the book and that hasn't changed. They all use cartoon characters and songs, they sell a free widget rather than the product, so the kid wants the toy not the cereal"*  
Food Advertiser

In America, around forty percent of secondary schools have signed deals with a broadcasting company called Channel One Communications. The deal involves Channel one supplying TV's video recorders and satellite dishes to schools in exchange for a guarantee that its programmes will be shown to 80% of the pupils most days. This translates to an audience of 8.3 million students. Two minutes out of

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every programme is devoted to commercials. Food and drink commercials are particularly prominent amongst these.

Following in the footsteps of the success of the placement of the chocolate brand Recis Pieces in ET in 1992, which increased sales by 65%, product placement has moved on and now appears in popular children's electronic games. Placements of food and other products now appear in electronic games. Martin Lindstrom in his book *Brand Child*, 2003 cites the following example:

“Red Bull teamed up with Sony PlayStation, and secured product-placement space in their games so that once you reach a particular level a message appears promoting the Red Bull energy drink as a good way to take a break between the levels. No official data has validated that this component was a key factor in Red Bull's success among its target market; however, interviews conducted with tweens clearly indicate that most of the Sony PlayStation players remember the Red Bull promotion in the games – in fact they felt it was cool that a brand finally managed to create a direct dialogue with the avatars when playing the game”

Interaction with brands in the 'virtual real world' where many children spend much of their spare time can help build strong relationships with brands which are then transferred to the real world.

The internet is a very powerful medium for marketing to children and one that marketers have been quick to include within their marketing strategy. The virtual reality world of the internet enables children to associate with brands in a far more interactive way than watching an advertisement. Many of the most successful food brands have websites and/or micro sites attached to popular children's sites e.g. Fox Kids, Cartoon Network, Nickelodeon. These sites include a wide range of activities, including games, puzzles, downloads, competitions, jokes etc.

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### **Marketing, manufacturing and retailing of children's foods in the future**

With the prospect of increasing restrictions or even prohibition of advertising and food promotion to children across the developed world, marketers will need to change the way that they promote foods/drinks aimed at children. Marketers are likely to become increasingly circumspect regarding the messages that they communicate about brands.

*"I think it (marketing to children in future) will be about recognising that the age of scoffing Pringles until you fall down has probably gone"* Food Manufacturer

There is also a clear message that the successful food/drink brands of the future will be those which are honest and transparent with consumers. The brands which have suffered the most in the past were those which were not entirely clear about health messages.

*"What I find is that brands who try to masquerade as being healthy when they are not, that is where the problems arise. For a chocolate bar or a packet of crisps, we never position those as being a meal or any sort of nutritional benefit, they are a treat"*  
Food Advertiser

The more stringent legislation in countries in the developed world may signal the death of 'pester power' as a strategy for marketing foods to children. Mums are likely to increasingly replace children as the target for children's food products, particularly those which are less healthy since healthier food options are likely to still be allowed. However, the messages and products which will appeal to mothers are very different to those used to engage children. Mothers will respond to products which are healthy, or healthy alternatives, convenient and will appeal to their children visually and in terms of taste.

*"I think that over time there will be more advertising to mum. A lot of clients are looking to develop better for you products and that message is probably more effectively targeted at mum than kid anyway"* Food Advertiser

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*"I think as a strategy it will become less effective. I don't think you will be able to sell a food stuff on the back of a free toy unless it has got the nutritional benefits there" Food Advertiser*

Stricter rules on food labelling and packaging is likely to prohibit the practice of making less healthy products appear healthy and force manufacturers to be more transparent about the nutritional qualities of their products. For example products which make a claim about being low in fat which are high in sugar may have to be more explicit about the other product attributes.

Manufacturers will need to respond to the challenges of reducing salt, sugars and fat in children's foods whilst ensuring that the taste is not compromised. This is a very big challenge, especially for foods which have previously had high levels of these. There is also likely to be a rise in the proportion of foods aimed at children that offer additional health benefits, such as fortified and functional foods. Retailers face the increasing demands of consumers for healthy, tasty options for children. This is likely to be particularly acute in the snacks category which has traditionally been dominated by products with high levels of fat, sugar and salt.

As children in the developed world begin to eat a more healthy diet with less sugar, salt, fat and artificial additives, their palates will begin to change. There could be a move away from sweet and salty foods with stronger tastes and a move towards more subtle flavours. This trend will could further strengthen the movement towards providing more healthy foods and drinks for children. There is some evidence that this is already happening. Highland Spring, a bottled water manufacturer has launched a children's variation. These bottles are in handy sizes with a sports top for convenient drinking. The bottles feature water drop characters to appeal to children.

Children's attitudes towards healthy eating are changing. Even children as young as seven are aware of which foods are healthy and unhealthy. Many children in the UK, Scandinavia, Holland, France and Germany face restrictions on the types of food and drinks they can bring into school. A growing proportion of schools now only allow water to be drunk at school, and 'unhealthy' foods such as crisps and chocolate are

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often banned. There is also a growing awareness and concern over body image amongst girls and boys. In the recent past, concerns over body image were largely confined to teenage girls, however now, possibly in part due to the heightened media coverage of obesity, some children as young as eight are becoming concerned about their weight (even when they are normal weight). This trend has resulted in some children demanding healthier food/drink options.

### Summary

The industries involved in the manufacture, retailing and advertising of food to children are all acutely aware of the growing issue of childhood obesity and poor diets. This is an issue which has increased exponentially over the past few years to become possibly the main challenge faced by these industries.

Retailers have been the most pro-active in responding to this challenge, several had healthier children's ranges in place over five years ago. Manufacturers and advertisers (with some notable exceptions) have been slower to react to the issues of childhood obesity and concerns over children's diets. However, changes in food reformulation, brand development and marketing strategies take a considerable amount of time to surface in the marketplace. All of the industries are taking active steps to tackle the issue of childhood obesity. These range from making children's foods healthier such as, product reformulation and introducing healthier ranges/products, to encouraging children to become more active. McDonalds is perceived by many of the participants in the survey to be more pro-active than most in encouraging healthy eating amongst children. This has been achieved by introducing healthier options in its children's range and by education programmes encouraging children to eat a balanced diet.

Pester Power as a strategy for promoting foods to children in the future may only be permitted when applied to healthier products. This strategy is likely to be welcomed by parents as it will encourage children to eat healthier food options. For example, using celebrity or character endorsement on healthy foods such as fruit, vegetables, yoghurts could be advantageous to children's diets. Even if advertising of 'unhealthy' products to children is not banned, the practice of using 'pester power' is not

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perceived as beneficial to the brand since this could lead to attacks from the media, pressure groups and parents.

Some marketers feel empowered by the challenge of generating alternative strategies for promoting food and drinks to children. They have felt shackled in the past by cautious manufacturers who have imposed restrictions on their alternative creative propositions. The strategy of using 'pester power' to market food/drink to children may therefore become less visible to the regulators by inhabiting children's worlds via other routes.

*"I think that there are lots of products which have done it (engaged children's pester power) without advertising, and that it is about finding different channels to communicate to kids"* Food Advertiser

The current practice of 'health by stealth' i.e. giving the appearance or aura of healthiness to a brand without explicitly claiming that it is healthy may be outlawed by future legislation. Clearly there are certain marks that signify health even though they are not overtly health claims. For example showing sunshine gives an impression of vitality, using pictures of fruit implies a high fruit content and green implies healthy.

Mothers are becoming far more savvy about the product claims made about children's food and drink products and are questioning these. Mothers and some children are demanding healthier children's food and drink options. The successful children's food brands of the future are likely to be those which are honest and transparent about the product attributes and are marketed in a responsible way.

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