

Targeting Kids

The relationship between children and quick-serves continues to be scrutinized. By Amanda Baltazar

Fast-food companies have never been shy about touting their products to adults or children.

But a group of councilors in Liverpool, England, is trying to ban quick-serves from giving away toys to children, after the results of an inquiry earlier this year.

Liverpool Councilor Paul Twigger says the toys lead to “pester power” by children, and busy parents find it easier to give in to children and buy the fast food than direct their attention elsewhere.

The debate over marketing to children is not new. Boston-based Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood (CCFC) has been at it for years.

Its most recent challenge was the cross-promotion between Burger King and the PG-13 movie *Iron Man* this past spring. Earlier this year it was successful in having the McDonald’s logo and the promise of a Happy Meal removed from report cards in Seminole County, Florida.

The CCFC is not alone in its attempts to prevent fast-food companies from marketing their wares to children.

In November 2006 the Council of Better Business Bureaus (CBBB) established the Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative, run by representatives from companies, including Burger King and McDonald’s, that pledged only to market healthy food to children.

In a July 2008 study, the CBBB reported that of the 14 program participants, four have pledged not to advertise their products to children and nine have

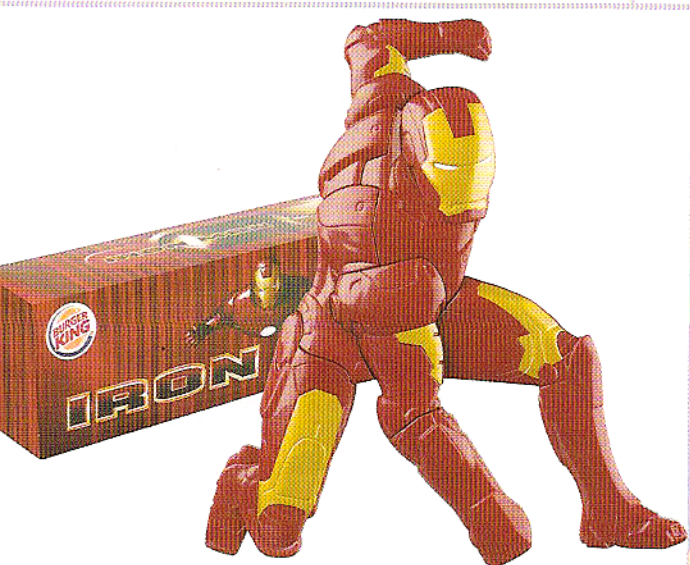
pledged to advertise only better-for-you products. (Nestlé joined too recently to have made its pledge.)

Elaine Kolish, director of the initiative, says that for the most part, the member companies are complying with their pledges.

She points to Burger King’s new mac and cheese, apple fries, and 1 percent milk as proof. “This is not jury-rigged; it meets standards,” she says.

McDonald’s says it is adding healthier foods to directly meet these customer demands. Spokeswoman Danya Proud says: “We remain committed to honoring our commitment to the CBBB.”

Josh Golin, associate director of the CCFC, however, is still skeptical. “The companies tailored [their pledges to the CBBB] so it would suit their products,” he says. “McDonald’s advertising is not about promoting Big Macs but about promoting the McDonald’s experience.”



LEFT: BURGER KING; RIGHT: ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/EKATERINA MONAKHOVA