

McLibel

In 1986 two activists: Helen Steel and Dave Morris printed and distributed a 6-sided leaflet titled; 'What's Wrong With McDonalds? – Everything They Don't Want You to Know.' The leaflet accused McDonalds of exploiting children by advertising, promoting an unhealthy diet, exploiting their staff and being responsible for environmental damage and ill treatment of animals. In '89 McDonalds hired two private investigator firms to infiltrate the Activists meeting and determine who was responsible for the production and distribution of the leaflet. In 1990 five of the activists were told to either apologise or go to court, 3 of the five did leaving Helen and Dave who stood up in court. The case lasted 2 and half years, and a total of 316 days in court. Since the case was a libel case, Helen and Dave were not allowed legal support and the case would only be presented to one judge. Due to the nature of libel cases everything that McDonalds were accused of had to be proved.

The accusations of the leaflet can be divided into 7 sub categories, which are also very broad: Nutrition, Advertisement, Rainforest, Recycling and Waste, Employment, food poisoning and animals.

The first, nutrition, McDonalds were promoting a diet which was high fat, low fibre which is believed to be linked to health issues such as cancer, heart disease, rising obesity and diabetes, issues which are believed to contribute to 3 quarters of western premature deaths. McDonalds argued that evidence was insufficient and that their food can be part of a balanced diet, this is untrue and that there is plenty of evidence to the fact that the food is unhealthy. They were not looking at whether the food was unhealthy or not but whether it was right for them to advertise as nutritious, if it was right for them to sponsor sports events and open restaurants in hospitals.

The next issue was advertisement: McDonalds spend over \$2 Billion dollars a year on advertisement meaning that the McDonald's 'M' is the symbol most recognised worldwide. Activists were attacking McDonald's marketing methods: accusing it of lying and being deceptive to the public, and their direct marketing to children. McDonalds marketing strategy is generally geared towards children. This is believed to be the time children build up their eating habits for the rest of their life. McDonalds were achieving this through using child friendly characters: Ronald McDonald, he was plastered everywhere children would see him, he appeared on TV teaching children songs and dancing with them. The actor, who played the beloved clown later quit his job; he said that he couldn't live with what he was doing, which he said was manipulating children. McDonald continued to swamp children with devices like the happy meal where with every purchase; the child received a toy, something that they could associate as having received with McDonalds burgers. McDonalds were also donating to health centres, which was seen as ethically wrong considering the nature of their food.

McDonalds have been accused of being linked to Rainforest depletion, being such a large business there is huge demand for packaging that is thrown away minutes after being used. McDonalds have said they are green and recycle but were still being accused of being the cause of litter on the streets. The question, which was to be answered, was whether a multinational company like McDonalds is possible of not contributing to some of the most well known environmental issues.

McDonalds were said to be exploiting workers for the benefit of a few more pennies. They said that McDonalds were treating workers like cogs in a machine, they were deemed as being given low pay, so for McDonalds this meant high earnings high profit. McDonalds argument to this was that the workers were treated fairly and that

they all wished to be part of this growing multi-billion dollar company. The question that was giving to this was that, 'How much profit do McDonalds make annually, and how much of it goes to the workers.'

McDonalds were accused of mistreating animals by forcing them to put on unhealthy amounts of weight and to them being reared in inhumane conditions. They were being accused of rearing animals in places which weren't illegal but shouldn't be allowed, also that the animals were being pumped full of chemicals.

The final verdict, said that Helen and Steve were right about the following points:-

- Deceptive Adverts
- Exploiting of Children
- Low Wages
- Being Anti Union
- Contributing to Animal Cruelty

But it said that McDonalds were not :-

- Causing Cancer
- Heart Disease
- Litter
- Damaging the Rainforests
- And giving their workers bad working conditions

So overall Activists lost the case, and were charged £60,000 afterwards the Activists asked for it to be reviewed and the judge granted them that McDonalds were:-

- Contributing to Heart Disease
- And to having bad working conditions

This brought the damages down to £40,000. It was never paid and never chased up, people believe this was because it was the worst PR case in history and damaged McDonalds reputation greatly.

Looking at what McDonalds was accused of I can see why they would do most of the things whether it is deemed as right, a business' main objective is to make a profit and they were trying to make as much profit as they can, and no where does it say they aren't allowed to advertise at children. Still what they were doing overall is ethically wrong and I don't agree with much of what was being done. I believe McDonalds sued the 2 because they believed they needed to protect their image from the leaflet and thought that they could win the case, not realising how wrong it went for them. Even after this though McDonalds are doing amazingly well worldwide.