

MARKETING HEALTH: ALTERNATIVES FOR FAST FOOD

Joshua Bergman

*Marketing & Public Relations Senior Thesis, Carthage College
Celebration of Scholars 2015: Exposition of Student & Faculty Research, Scholarship & Creativity*



Celebration
OF
Scholars

Introduction to the Issue

Consistency and speed is the most crucial attribute to a restaurant in the fast-food industry. Every purchasing and eating experience should be consistent with the next. The business model of quick and cheap meals has built fast-food into a \$117 billion global industry (Shavin). Unfortunately, any product that is fast and comes at a low cost bears a negative perception of quality. Recently, the low quality food has come under heavy criticism for raising the risk of obesity. Quick service restaurants (QSRs) have been put under fire given the food's high caloric ingredients and inflated portion-sizes. The exploitation of unhealthy nutritional values within the industry's products has posed a major problem: What can fast-food restaurants do to position themselves as healthier alternatives?

American Obesity

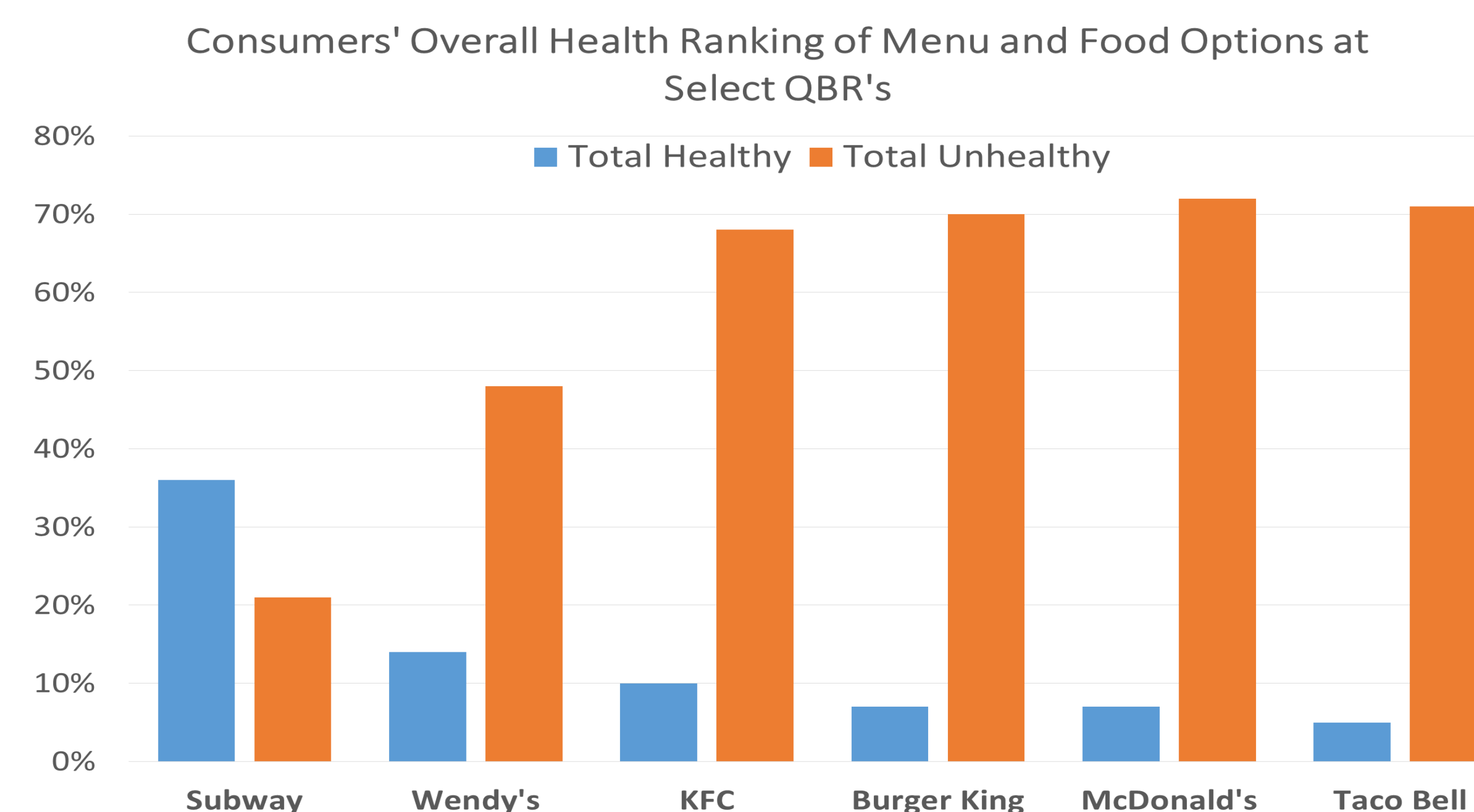
As of 2007, a shocking 67% of all Americans proved to be either overweight or obese (Turley). For an individual to carry a mass amount of extra weight, as many Americans do, the dangers are very high for one's long-term health. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "Obesity-related conditions include heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes and certain types of cancer, some of the leading causes of preventable death" (Adult Obesity Facts). In 2008, medical costs in America for obesity-related treatments totaled just under \$150 billion (Adult Obesity Facts).

Branding Restaurants with "Healthy" Image

Fast food restaurants generally brand themselves with a "convenience" image. Most advertisements focus on flavor and low costs to grab the customers' attention. With consumer diet interests moving in a "healthy" direction, fast food restaurants can gain a competitive advantage by establishing a healthy image. The first alternative focuses on advertisements, communication, and branding techniques that a QSR company could utilize to persuade customers toward a healthy perception of the restaurants.



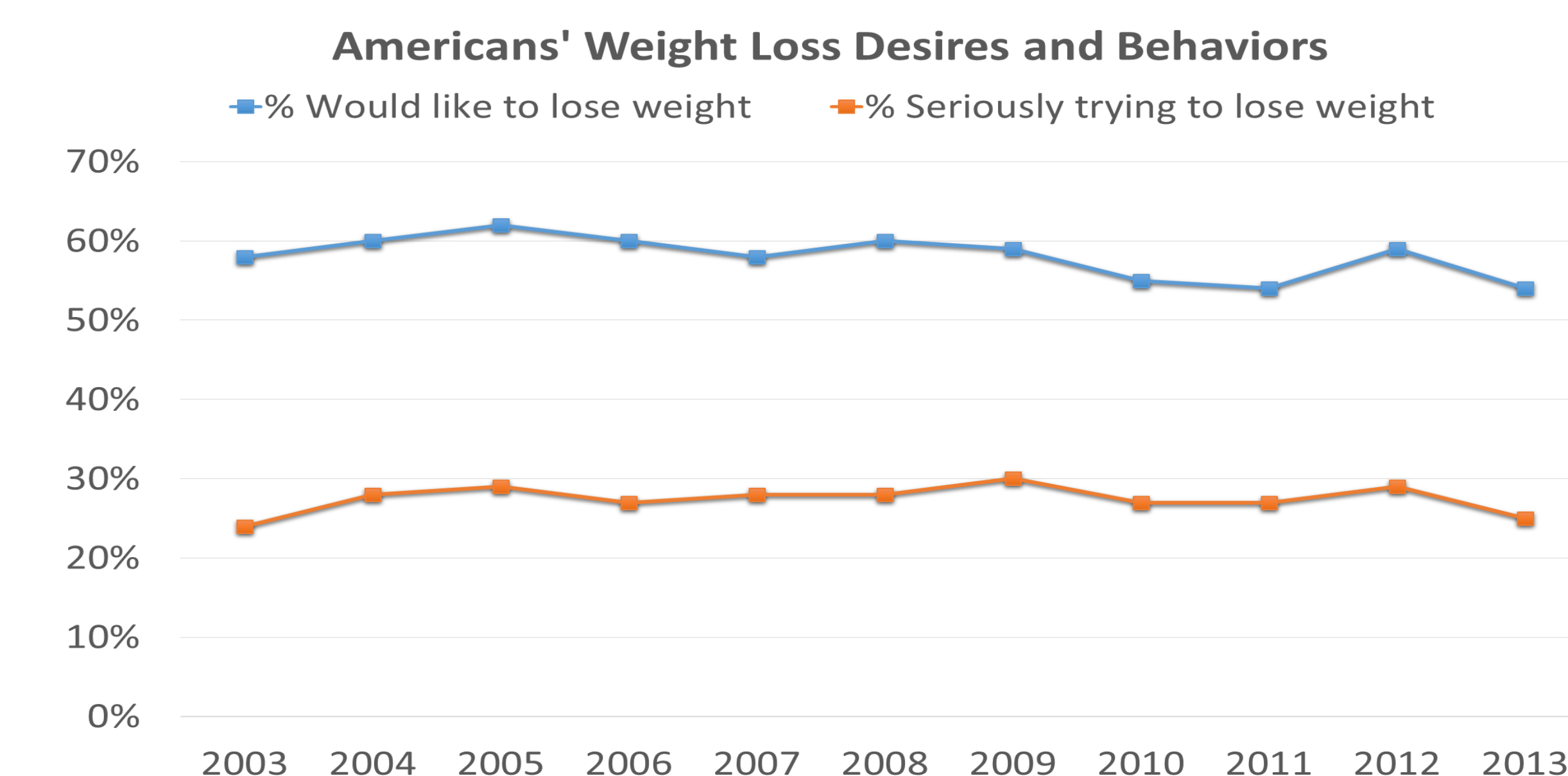
Subway's total sales rose 47.5% after one year of advertising Jared's story



Subway has a very large success story by branding the company's image through a healthy perspective. If other fast food restaurants were looking to follow suit with the philosophy, there would be several benefits both immediately and in the long term. Since the majority of QSRs have not seriously invested into a healthier image, it is a strategy for a restaurant to differentiate themselves from the competitors. Subway has been able to blow away the competition related to consumer health perceptions. According to "Consumers' Overall Health Rankings of Menu and Food Options at Select QBR's" of the Huffington Post, Subway has separated themselves by being the only fast food restaurant that consumers view as more healthy than unhealthy. (Dick).

Establishing an Exercise Program Campaign

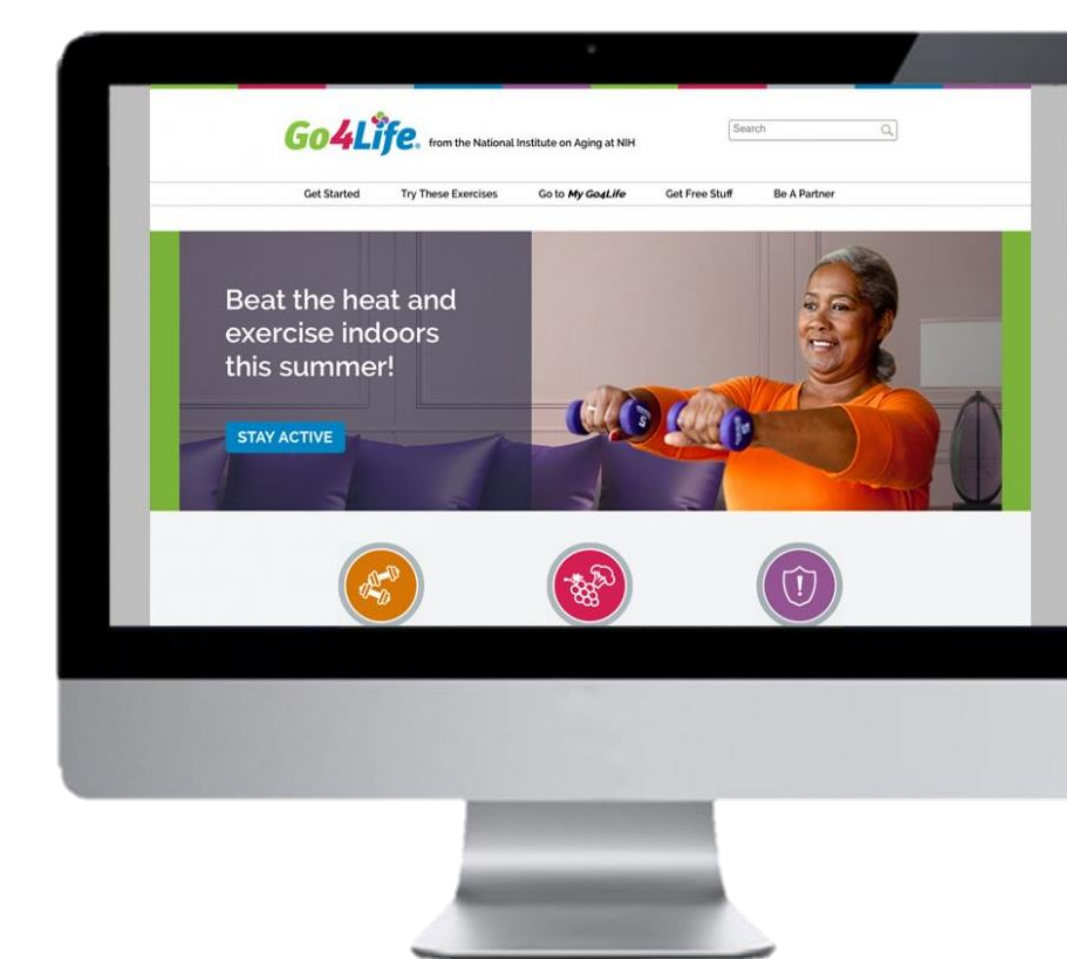
The second alternative for a QSR company is a unique scheme to differentiate themselves from their competitors. Rather than tearing down the food menu, a fast food restaurant would create an exercise-incentive program to position the company as "healthy". It is true that with enough exercise, an individual can maintain a moderate weight while having an above-average calorie diet. The fast food company would target customers that are not physically active, and offer workout plans, online community support systems, and promotional offers for healthy menu products. Ultimately, the QSR company would hope to create a draw for customers to do business with a restaurant that creatively encourages a healthy lifestyle.



Stagnant activity represented through Gallup's research chart signals a massive opportunity for QSRs. The perception that exercise is too time consuming or impossibly difficult for an obese individual could be blown away by the introduction of a low-intensity fitness program – similar to the standards set by Go4Life. If a fast food restaurant created a physical fitness campaign geared toward a healthier nation, customers will walk through that company's doors more often than any other competitor.

Expanding on the point, McDonald's restaurant customers were surveyed to evaluate the amount of people who exercised on a regular basis. Only 34.8% responded that physical activity was a part of their weekly routines (Satran). The combination of high caloric fast food and nearly 65% of QSR customers admitting to no exercise is a driver in America's obesity challenge.

"If we want to become a healthy, fit nation, we need to increase the number of Americans who are healthy at every stage of life. We want to shift the focus of our healthcare system from sickness and disease to wellness and prevention" - Regina Benjamin, Former US Surgeon General



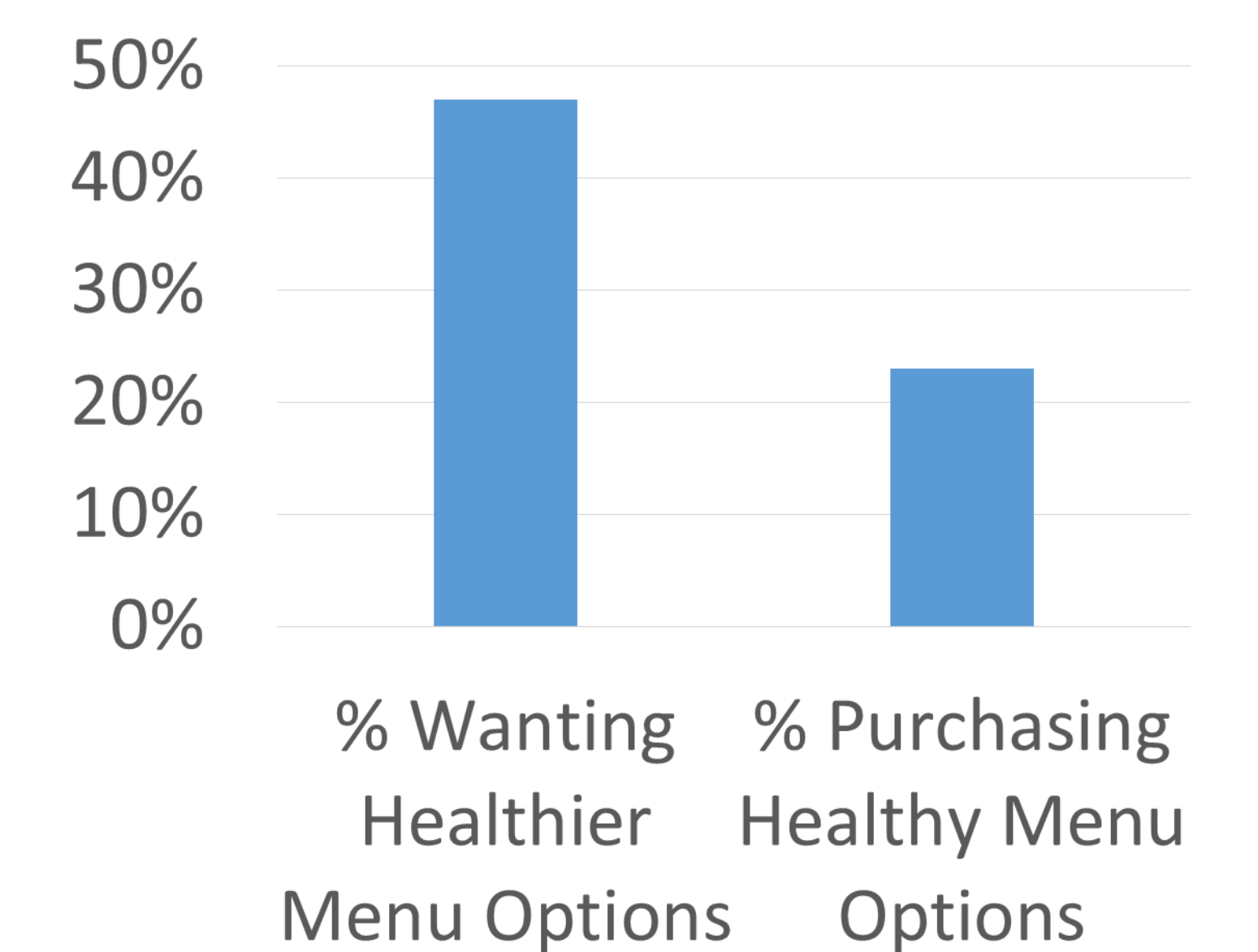
Creating a Health Education Campaign

A major concern for QSR companies is the fact that children are being pushed away from fast food by health-conscious parents and school staff members. The children will then grow into adults who will have been taught to avoid eating fast food. To save the business for the long-term, QSRs could choose to help in the education of a well-balanced diet. By entering into schools and highlighting nutritional values of salads and healthy wrap sandwiches, along with general information about leading a healthy lifestyle, the growing market of children would be more attracted to purchasing fast food. The same strategy can be replicated for current adult consumers who have strived to maintain a healthy diet.

A positive result from a health education campaign, which compares to the second solution – an exercise program, is directly aligning goals with Michelle Obama's "Let's Move!" program. The first lady is extremely passionate about educating children on eating healthy, and "Let's Move!" has a central focus of nutritional diets.

Recently, Tussing Elementary School in Reynoldsburg, OH enhanced fresh produce within the cafeteria's meal options. The motivation behind the upgrade in food quality was because of Michelle Obama's program. Strong support has also come from the community for the responsible actions of the school. The Church Brothers Produce donated plenty of goods for the children to eat during the lunch hour. Principle Jeannette Henson expressed personal and community enthusiasm, "We already offer salads to our students about once or twice a week, but (donations from Church Brothers Produce) will allow us to offer them daily, and prove more options... We're finding that, believe it or not, students are wanting more vegetables and this will allow us to give them more than just lettuce and tomatoes" (Ellis).

Consumer Fast Food Preferences



Acknowledgements & References

A special thanks goes to faculty advisors Prof. Mark Miller and Prof. Jon Bruning.

1. Dick, John. "The Quick-Service Restaurants' Healthy Food War." The Huffington Post. TheHuffingtonPost.com, 14 Apr. 2014. Web. 18 Oct. 2014.
2. Brown, Alyssa. "Americans' Desire to Shed Pounds Outweighs Effort." Gallup, 29 Nov. 2013. Web. 23 Oct. 2014.
3. "NIH, Surgeon General Launch Go4Life Campaign at Capitol Hill Briefing." National Institute on Aging. N.p., 23 Jan. 2012. Web. 21 Oct. 2014.
4. Satran, Joe. "The Fast Food Chains Whose Customers Exercise The Least." The Huffington Post. TheHuffingtonPost.com, 23 Mar. 2012. Web. 23 Oct. 2014.

5. "Adult Obesity Facts." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 09 Sept. 2014. Web. 05 Oct. 2014.

6. Shavin, Naomi. "Fast-Food Nation." Forbes. Forbes Magazine, 18 Aug. 2014. Web. 05 Oct. 2014.

7. Ellis, Nate. "Let's Move! Initiative Brings Salad Bar to Tussing." ThisWeek Community News. Pickertington Times-Sun, 15 Oct. 2014. Web. 25 Oct. 2014.

""All other source references may be referred back to the original research document, "Marketing Health: Alternatives for Fast Food".