

On Track for a Fast Food World

1 In a world where we have more and more responsibilities to juggle and less time for cooking, fast food has become an increasingly cheap and easy option. It's everywhere: in vending machines, drive-in restaurants and 24-hour convenience stores. We're addicted, and it's a difficult habit to break once you've gotten used to it.

2 And that habit starts early. Most children want to eat fast food before they've even set foot in a restaurant. Fast-food companies spend millions on child-targeted marketing. If they sell the idea of fast food to children, they will want to come with their parents and grandparents. This tactic creates brand loyalty in child customers that lasts until they are adults.

3 The system is working. There are now 40 million restaurants worldwide selling fast food. McDonalds had, at last count, 30,000 local restaurants serving 52 million people in more than 100 countries every day. You can now find fast-food restaurants almost anywhere in the world, unless you go to very isolated places.

4 But it wasn't always like this. In the 1960s, most restaurants were local businesses. Today, local companies find it difficult to compete with the big multinationals. This is because fast-food restaurants are mostly

franchises that lower costs by having self-service, standardized menus and a production-line kitchen. Instead of highly paid chefs, they tend to use part-time employees. And as soon as you enter, you notice the bright lighting and uncomfortable seating used to increase turnover by discouraging customers from staying too long.

5 The global progress of fast-food chains was initially slow in countries where café culture, local restaurants and street food accounted for a large share of the market. However, many have started to tailor their products to suit local tastes. McDonalds has veggie burgers and nuggets for the large vegetarian population of India. In China, KFC offers seasonal vegetables with its chicken instead of coleslaw. And the list goes on. Many restaurants are also adapting their menus to accommodate healthy eating. A range of salads is often provided, and some chains are starting to cook their fries in healthier oils. Dessert is as likely to be a fat-free frozen yogurt as a chocolate-covered ice cream sundae.

6 All this means that fast-food outlets will continue to conquer their target markets by thinking globally and selling locally. The winners will be the customers who can eat out at low cost, but the losers will be those who want to find authentic (and probably more nutritious) local fare on sale in their town or city.

2 Read the article. What is the writer's attitude to fast-food restaurants? Give evidence for your opinion.

- 1 very critical
- 2 mainly neutral, with some criticism
- 3 mainly positive

3  Work in pairs. Summarize what the writer says about...

1 why fast-food companies focus their marketing on children.

2 how fast-food restaurants keep their operating costs low.

3 the decoration and furniture inside fast-food restaurants.

4 how fast-food companies adapt to local needs.

5 how fast-food companies are adapting to changes in eating habits.

b What have you learned about fast food that you didn't know before?