



Knud Wassermann

Books Replace Plastic Toys

Books are increasingly being seen by fast food chains as an alternative to plastic toys. It's a trend that's sweeping more and more countries in Europe.

In the whole sustainability debate, international fast food chains such as McDonald's or Burger King were made aware of their responsibility for the environment by society very early on. Packaging and its recyclability, in particular, was an appropriate target. Depending on the sensitivity of customers and the legal situation in individual countries, things have changed for the better here in recent years.

Petition from two girls

For decades, cartoon characters and plastic superheroes have been a staple of children's menus and a very important part of the marketing strategy to encourage children's appetite for burgers and fries. In 2019, two girls in the UK and Ireland launched a [petition](#) signed by 500,000 people calling on McDonald's and Burger King to stop giving away plastic toys.

In their introduction, the two girls write, „We all learned about the environmental issues associated with plastic in school. It makes us very sad how plastic harms fauna and flora and pollutes the oceans, and we want to change that. That's why we're calling on Burger King and McDonald's to completely eliminate plastic toys from their children's menus.“

Different reactions

The two chains reacted differently to this action. Burger King decided to completely eliminate the plastic toys as part of its King Jr. Meals in the future. As a result, Burger King was able to save 320 tons of plastic per year in the UK and Ireland. McDonald's, on the other hand, has opted for a mixed approach – children can choose from a soft toy, a cardboard toy such as a puzzle or a book.

Burger King launched another campaign in Sweden and Denmark in June 2021, replacing its plastic toy offering entirely with children's books from its „Peppy Pals“ series. Later this year, there will be another campaign with coloring and craft books as well as books for children up to the age of 12. Burger King has hired [Toy Promotion](#), a specialist in promotional products for children, to implement the campaign. The company has developed a concept under the name PromoBooks, which tentatively includes two projects: a hardcover book used for children's books and a softcover book for coloring and craft books.

Both product ranges are produced at Muller Martini customer [Livonia](#) in the Latvian capital of Riga. Per Wahlqvist, managing director of Toy Promotion, says of the project, „We have found a European manufacturer and ensured sustainable production with the Nordic Swan eco-label. In terms of content, our concept is completely independent, and we can attract very different publishers and authors for it. The collaboration with Burger King is to be rolled out across Europe!“ Between 15 and 20 million books are to be distributed to kids in 2022.

Beating the legislature to the punch

In France, McDonald's has completely banned plastic toys from its gift range as of the beginning of April this year. The French offshoot is thus pre-empting a national law regulating the circular economy, which will come into force at the beginning of 2022 at the latest. In 1,500 stores, children can choose between a coloring book, a book or a cardboard toy with a Happy Meal.

McDonald's Germany points out in this context that it has included books as an alternative in its gift portfolio since 2016. 10 cents are donated to the company's own [Ronald McDonald Foundation](#) when guests choose a book. In 2019 alone, the company gave away around 7 million books, he said.

Whether the plastic toys will soon be completely abolished in Germany as well, the company did not comment on this when asked by the daily newspaper „[Neue Westfälische](#)“. However, McDonald's emphasizes that it has pursued its sustainability goals even in these challenging times and that it is continuously working on reducing plastic packaging. Since December 2020, the toys would be increasingly packaged in paper instead of plastic.

Yours,
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