

Food industry changing how it markets to children

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Independent data released today reveals that some of the world's biggest food brands have significantly changed the products they advertise to children, according to World Advertising Federation (WFA).

The audit by Accenture Media Management compared data from 2005 with 2010 and found that companies representing nearly 70pc of EU food advertising spend have either voluntarily stopped advertising foods to under 12s altogether or promoted only 'better for you' options.

The audit was conducted as part of the [EU Pledge](#), a commitment made by 11 food manufacturers (Burger King, Coca-Cola, Danone, Ferrero, General Mills, Kellogg's, Kraft Foods, Mars, PepsiCo, Nestle, Unilever) in December 2007 to change the products they advertise to children under 12 years. The commitment refers to advertising on TV, print, the internet and communications in primary schools.

As part of the EU Pledge, the 11 food companies agreed to independent monitoring.

Accenture's analysis of more than 580,000 TV spots in six sample markets - Greece, Hungary, The Netherlands, Poland, Portugal and Spain - found a compliance rate of 98.9pc. In the same markets, analysis of online advertising across nearly 50 websites identified as targeting under 12s found just one case of non-compliance. Monitoring of print advertising in children's magazines in France, Spain, Portugal and the UK found 100pc compliance.

Overall, the WAF said the audit indicates that children are seeing 36pc less advertising for all food products in all TV programmes at all times.

A number of the companies, including Coca-Cola, Ferrero and Mars, no longer advertise any of their products to children, while most have adopted nutritional criteria to define healthier products within their portfolios.

The scheme is set to be extended with Cadbury and Wrigley coming on board following their takeovers by Kraft and Mars respectively. In addition, five snack manufacturers – Procter & Gamble, Intersnack, Lorenz Snack-World, Unichips–San Carlo and Zweifel Pomy-Chip – have joined up and will be monitored for the first time in 2011. The EU Snacks Association is also actively promoting the scheme to other members.

"Voluntary action can often be more effective and delivered in a shorter timeframe than government regulation," said Stephan Loerke, WFA managing director. "These independent audits show how self-regulation can help deliver on public policy objectives and why it should not be discounted from the policy mix."

The EU Pledge was facilitated and endorsed by the WAF and is a joint industry commitment to the EU Platform on Diet, Physical Activity and Health set up by the European Commission in 2005.