

Strategic Marketing Plan for McDonald's UK



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

Student Name: Yaxuan Dai

Student Number: 2420047

Programme: International Business Management

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Lecturer: Gwyneth Jones

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University of Wales Trinity Saint David Swansea Business School

Executive Summary

This report proposes a 12-month strategic marketing plan for McDonald's UK for May 2026 to April 2027. Building on the Assignment 1 audit, it focuses on one issue: defending value perception while increasing repeat visits through the MyMcDonald's Rewards ecosystem. SOSTAC structures the plan, with SMART objectives, Ansoff, STP and the 7Ps used to support the decisions.

The recommended campaign is "Value+ Rewards", a value-led loyalty plan built around app-exclusive breakfast and lunch bundles, points boosters, simpler repeat ordering and store-level delivery. The plan targets 18-34-year-old students and young workers who are price-conscious but still value speed and reliability.

The report recommends a controlled pilot before wider roll-out, supported by clear KPIs for active rewards users, repeat purchase, redemption, satisfaction, CPA and ROI. If executed consistently, the plan should improve retention, strengthen first-party data use and help McDonald's protect its competitive position without depending only on blanket discounting.

Contents

Executive Summary	2
Contents	3
1. Introduction	4
2. Situation Analysis: Where are we now?	4
3. Objectives: Where do we want to be?	6
4. Strategy: How do we get there?	7
5. Tactics: How exactly do we get there?	8
6. Action: Who does what, when and how?	10
7. Control: How do we know we are getting there?	13
8. Recommendations	14
9. Conclusion	15
References	16

1. Introduction

This report develops a 12-month strategic marketing plan for McDonald's UK, covering May 2026 to April 2027. It follows the Assignment 1 marketing audit, which identified that McDonald's has strong brand, franchise and digital capabilities but faces sharper value competition and changing customer expectations. SOSTAC is used because it gives a practical planning route: situation, objectives, strategy, tactics, action and control (Smith and Chaffey, 2022). SMART is also used because the objective must be measurable rather than a general aim (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2022).

The plan focuses on one issue: how McDonald's UK can defend value perception and increase repeat app-led purchases among younger customers. This is relevant because digital and social media marketing are now central to customer engagement, but they must still be linked to clear objectives and measurable outcomes (Dwivedi et al., 2021). A limitation of SOSTAC is that it can look linear, while real campaigns often need adjustment during delivery. For that reason, the Control section is treated as part of decision-making, not only as an end-of-year evaluation.

2. Situation Analysis: Where are we now?

McDonald's UK enters this plan from a strong position. It has a large UK and Ireland estate, a highly recognised brand and a franchise system that supports consistency across restaurants (McDonald's UK, 2024). McDonald's Corporation (2025) also reports strong growth in digital and loyalty activity, which gives the business first-party data and a direct channel to customers. This is important because the plan relies more on existing customer relationships than on attracting new customers through broad advertising.

Scale alone is not enough. The Assignment 1 audit showed rising value rivalry from food-to-go operators, supermarkets, delivery platforms and other QSR brands. Customers can compare offers quickly and switch between breakfast, lunch, delivery and supermarket meal options with little effort.

Loyalty research also shows that satisfaction, service quality, perceived value and trust matter more than brand familiarity alone (Ali-Alsaadi et al., 2025; Arli, van Esch and Weaven, 2024; Rombach et al., 2023). Customers may still like McDonald’s, but switching remains easy when another option feels cheaper, faster or simpler.

Ansoff’s Growth Matrix helps classify the direction of the plan. The strongest route is market penetration: McDonald’s should increase purchase frequency from existing and reachable customers using better value, app rewards and simpler routines. This is less risky than launching a major new product range because it uses capabilities that McDonald’s already has. There is a small element of product development because the campaign packages existing items into new value bundles, but the main growth logic is deeper use of current channels and customers. This is a realistic direction for a mature UK QSR brand.

Table 1. Link between Assignment 1 and Assignment 2

Issue from Assignment 1	Implication for Assignment 2
Narrowing value advantage	Use sharper value bundles and rewards.
Digital convenience less rare	Improve app experience, not just app availability.
Breakfast/lunch rivalry	Focus on routine, repeatable occasions.
Large franchise system	Plan must be simple enough for store execution.

3. Objectives: Where do we want to be?

SMART objectives should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time bound. This matters in this plan because a broad goal such as “increase sales” would not show how marketing performance will be improved. It also makes control easier because each KPI can be linked back to the objective rather than chosen after the campaign has already started.

The proposed objective is: by April 2027, McDonald’s UK should increase monthly active MyMcDonald’s Rewards users aged 18-34 by 10% and increase app-led repeat breakfast and lunch purchases in this segment by 6%, compared with the May 2026 baseline, while maintaining app-order satisfaction at or above baseline.

This objective is specific to a segment, channel and meal occasion, and can be measured through loyalty data, repeat-purchase data and satisfaction scores. It is realistic because it uses McDonald’s existing app and loyalty platform rather than a new operating model. It is also more useful than a broad sales target, because repeat behaviour can improve retention, first-party data and discount efficiency. Research supports this logic: convenience, trust, interactivity, satisfaction and perceived value are linked with continued app use and loyalty (Jabbour Al Maalouf et al., 2025; Lee, 2022; Londoño-Giraldo, López-Ramírez and Vargas-Piedrahita, 2024; Siddiqi et al., 2024; Teo et al., 2024).

Table 2. SMART objective check

SMART element	Application
Specific	18-34 Rewards users; breakfast and lunch occasions.
Measurable	+10% active users; +6% repeat app-led purchases.
Achievable	Uses current app, loyalty and franchise system.
Relevant	Addresses value pressure and switching risk.
Time-bound	May 2026 to April 2027.

4. Strategy: How do we get there?

The recommended strategy is a value-led omnichannel loyalty strategy. Porter's generic strategies help clarify this direction. McDonald's should not compete through price cuts alone, because rivals can copy visible discounts. Instead, it should combine value leadership with focused differentiation through convenience, rewards and reliable execution. This gives customers a reason to return without making every offer a deep discount.

STP then turns this into a clearer market choice. Segmentation divides customers by need and behaviour. The primary target should be 18-34-year-old students and young workers in urban, suburban and transport-linked locations. This group is likely to be mobile-first, time-poor and value-conscious. The secondary target should be existing app users who buy occasionally but have not built a

regular breakfast or lunch habit. These groups are not chosen simply because they are young; they are chosen because their routines fit app ordering, quick collection and repeat low-value transactions.

The positioning should be simple: “good value, quick ordering and rewards that build with everyday routines.” This fits McDonald’s strengths and avoids overclaiming. Sustainability should remain present but not become the main message; green claims work best when they are credible and connected to visible behaviour (Liu and Jiang, 2024). McDonald’s UK & Ireland (2021) already sets out packaging and environmental commitments, but in this campaign these should be background proof points, not the main reason to buy. The strategy therefore focuses on affordable routines, supported by digital convenience and practical brand trust.

The customer journey should also guide the strategy. Before purchase, the customer needs a clear value reason to open the app. During purchase, the bundle must be easy to find, pay for and collect. After purchase, points and next-step rewards should be visible immediately. This is where loyalty becomes more than a discount mechanic; it becomes a small habit in the customer’s week.

5. Tactics: How exactly do we get there?

The 7Ps are used because fast food is both a product and a service experience. Product and price may attract the customer, but people, process and physical evidence shape whether the experience is worth repeating (Ahmed et al., 2024). The proposed campaign is called Value+ Rewards.

The product tactic is to create app-exclusive breakfast and lunch bundles using existing menu items. This reduces operational risk and keeps preparation simple. The bundles should rotate, but not so often that customers become confused. For example, a breakfast bundle could link a hot drink with a breakfast item and a small points booster, while a lunch bundle could focus on a familiar saver combination.

The pricing tactic is to combine affordable bundles with limited points boosters, rather than permanent blanket discounting. This protects value perception, but the risk is that customers may treat boosters as short-term deals if they are used too often. For this reason, rewards should be limited and linked to repeat breakfast or lunch behaviour rather than one-off redemptions (Catalán and Marchan, 2024). The place decision should focus on app ordering, click-and-collect, drive-thru, delivery and restaurants near campuses, offices and transport routes. Omnichannel research suggests that restaurants need to manage online and offline channels together, because customer choice is shaped by both access and waiting time (Wang et al., 2024).

Promotion should use app push messages, student channels, short TikTok/Instagram content and in-store QR prompts. This gives low-cost reach in the target segment, but too many notifications could create app fatigue, so messages should be capped and linked to recent breakfast or lunch behaviour. The tone should remain practical, showing weekday situations such as collecting breakfast before lectures or lunch between shifts. However, the process must stay simple. Research on food delivery app quality shows that system operation, reliability and ease of use influence satisfaction and repeat behaviour (Chan and Gao, 2021; Cheng, Chang and Chen, 2021; Lin, Au and Baum, 2024). Crew should therefore be trained to explain the offer quickly and solve first-time redemption problems. The physical evidence should also be consistent: menu boards, tray liners and packaging prompts should repeat the same Value+ Rewards message.

Table 3. Proposed 7P decisions

7P	Decision
Product	Value+ breakfast/lunch bundles using existing items.
Price	App-only bundles and points boosters.
Place	App, click-and-collect, delivery, drive-thru and high-footfall stores.
Promotion	Push messages, student channels, social video and QR prompts.
People	Crew prompts and short training for redemption support.
Process	Fast reorder, clear points display and simple redemption.
Physical evidence	Menu-board, tray-liner and packaging reminders.

6. Action: Who does what, when and how?

Action turns the 7Ps into responsibilities, timing and review points. For McDonald's, the plan must also fit a franchise-led system. Knowledge transfer and system coordination are important in restaurant franchising, so franchisees and store managers should be involved before roll-out rather than treated as a final delivery channel (Moon et al., 2021; Perdreau, Le Nadant and Khelil, 2023).

The plan should begin with a two-month design stage, followed by a pilot in selected university, office and transport locations. A national roll-out should only follow if the pilot shows strong redemption without slowing service. This staged approach reduces risk and allows operational problems to be corrected early. It also gives franchisees a clearer role: they can report whether the bundle combinations create kitchen pressure, whether staff understand the promotion and whether customers can redeem rewards without support. These practical details matter because a marketing plan can fail even when the idea is attractive.

Table 4. Gantt-style action schedule, May 2026-April 2027

Action	May-Jun	Jul-Aug	Sep-Oct	Nov-Dec	Jan-Feb	Mar-Apr	Responsibility
Set baseline data; confirm bundles; build dashboard.	✓						Marketing, data, operations
Pilot in selected stores; check queue and app issues.		✓					Regional managers, franchisees
Launch student/young-worker campaign; train crew.			✓				Marketing, HR, store managers
Adjust messages and seasonal value offers.				✓			CRM and digital teams
Refresh bundles; correct weak store execution.					✓		Operations, franchise consultants
Evaluate KPIs and decide scale-up or change.						✓	Senior marketing, finance

7. Control: How do we know we are getting there?

Control is needed because a campaign can look successful in awareness terms but fail commercially.

The lecture guidance states that metrics should be directly connected to the plan's objective and should show how decisions will change during implementation. This plan therefore avoids tracking too many measures and focuses on customer behaviour, experience and financial return.

The most important KPIs are active Rewards users aged 18-34, app-led repeat purchases for breakfast and lunch, redemption rate, satisfaction, CPA and ROI. These metrics work together. If active users rise but repeat purchase does not, the campaign may be attracting one-off users. If repeat purchase rises but satisfaction falls, stores may be under operational pressure. If CPA is high, spending should be moved to better-performing channels. Digital marketing research also supports ongoing optimisation because platform data can guide message timing, targeting and budget allocation (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2022; Lee, Jang and Kim, 2024).

The control process should therefore be active, not just a final review. Monthly meetings should compare national results with pilot-store feedback, while quarterly reviews should decide whether to expand, pause or redesign parts of the campaign. If breakfast performs strongly but lunch does not, the offer mix should be changed. If students respond better than young workers, channel spend should shift. This makes the plan adaptable while still keeping the original objective clear.

Table 5. KPI and control plan

KPI	Target	Frequency	Use
Rewards users 18-34	+10%	Monthly	Track loyalty growth.
Repeat app breakfast/lunch purchases	+6%	Monthly	Test behaviour change.
Bundle redemption	10% of targeted users	Fortnightly in peaks	Improve offer design.
App-order satisfaction	Maintain/improve baseline	Monthly	Protect experience quality.
CPA and ROI	CPA within budget; positive ROI	Quarterly	Reallocate spend.

8. Recommendations

McDonald's UK should proceed with Value+ Rewards, but on a controlled basis. First, it should prioritise breakfast and lunch routines because these occasions are frequent, measurable and easier to turn into app habits. Second, the app journey should be tested before wider roll-out; the benefit is smoother repeat ordering, but poor usability would quickly weaken perceived value (Chan and Gao, 2021; Lin, Au and Baum, 2024). Third, franchise execution should be checked through training, dashboard feedback and consultant support, because inconsistent store delivery is the main operational risk in a large franchise system (Moon et al., 2021; Perdreau, Le Nadant and Khelil, 2023). Finally, sustainability should support the campaign through practical evidence such as packaging and waste improvements rather than broad claims; this reduces reputational risk while keeping the campaign focused on value and convenience (Liu and Jiang, 2024; McDonald's UK & Ireland, 2021). Rewards should be limited and linked to repeat behaviour so the campaign builds loyalty rather than becoming a discount exercise (Catalán and Marchan, 2024).

9. Conclusion

This plan uses SOSTAC to convert the Assignment 1 audit into a practical 12-month marketing proposal. The chosen objective focuses on value-led digital loyalty because it addresses a clear competitive issue while using McDonald's existing resources. The plan combines market penetration, targeted positioning and a 7P campaign that can be piloted, measured and adapted. If execution is consistent, Value+ Rewards should strengthen repeat purchasing, improve customer data and help McDonald's defend its UK value position.

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