

McDonald's secures customer focus through chief marketer

Industry experts say fast-food chain's promotion of UK chief marketer Jill McDonald to CEO makes 'perfect sense'.



McDonald's Big Nothing ad: Typical of the chain's focus on customers

McDonald's decision to promote UK chief marketing officer Jill McDonald to the chief executive role will ensure the fast-food chain retains its focus on customers, say industry experts.

McDonald will take up the position of UK chief executive and president for the Northern Europe division on 1 September. She replaces Steve Easterbrook, who has moved to the newly created position of vice-president and global chief brand officer in charge of marketing, menu innovation, consumer insight and "other global brand assets".

Max Jenvey, managing director of strategic marketing consultancy Oxyxygen Marketing Partnership and former McDonald's marketer, says promoting a marketer to chief executive makes "perfect sense".

"Marketing should permeate every aspect of the business and be the driving force. If it doesn't, business is not managing itself properly. Having a marketer leading the business as chief executive brings a complete and clear vision and insight across customer behaviour, and aligns it with revenue and operations across the business," he says.

A consumer analyst at a corporate advisory firm says the skills of a marketer fit well with the requirements of a CEO.

"The job of CEO is to develop and implement a strategy. To do this, they need to have a clear understanding of that market, consumers and the competitive set, and provide a strategy and vision - essentially telling a story that people buy into."

A spokesman for the company says it is "far too early" to say whether McDonald will be replaced. McDonald's is currently without a global chief marketing officer after Mary Dillon left the company in June to become chief executive of US telecoms company United States Cellular.

The fast-food chain recently reported that a strong performance in countries including the UK helped increase European sales by 5.2% in the second quarter of 2010.

McDonald joined the company in 2006 from British Airways, where she spent 16 years, latterly as general manager of global marketing. Easterbrook was appointed CEO of the UK business in 2006 and president of the Northern European Division in 2007.