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Case Study



Christmas in Australia is full of the usual holiday cheer. To stand out from the QSR crowd, Macca's decided to ruin it. They brought in the world's foremost Christmas-ruiner: the Grinch, who set about a nationwide takeover – promising to take all the fun out of the festive season. Spoiler alert: he failed. As much as he tried to ruin Macca's meals, their signs, their billboards, their ads, their iconic jingle – even their Golden Arches.

Their Holidays, carols, socials, sport, the radio, and everything in between…it just didn't work. All he really did was prove what Macca's fans knew all along: "Nothing can ruin a Chrissie summer day that ends at Macca's." The harder he tried to ruin Christmas, the more Macca's fans loved it. And by the end of it, Macca's had its most successful Christmas yet. Fans had more fun – and got more Macca's – than ever before.

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McDonald's Australia

Title
How The Grinch 'Ruinin it' helped Macca's reclaim summer sales and family share

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Q1 Executive Summary & why does this case deserve an award in this category?

This is the story of Grinch boy summer.

Of how Macca's Australia reversed two years of declining summer sales, and won back both the hearts and wallets of one of their most crucial segments over the summer period: families.

Leveraging a fan-to-fan led creative strategy that leant into the fan truth "The best summer days end at Macca's", the campaign re-imagined what a strategy centred around joy could look like over this period, running counter culturally to the smiling bright faces and cheery Christmas campaigns that are the norm at this time of year.

This campaign is testament to the power of fan led marketing. That celebrating what people love about your brand has immense power, and creating both campaigns and experiences designed to entertain them can have profound impacts on not only brand perception, but the business' bottom line too.

'The Grinch That Stole Summer' exceeded all objectives, leading to increases in total sales, guest counts and family share, whilst meaningfully shifting the dial on brand love among families. So much so that we sold out after only 3 and a half weeks of the intended campaign period. It also delivered the highest ever chicken sales to date, and a whopping **522% return on investment.**

While the Grinch thought he was Ruinin' It, this paper is testament to that fact that Aussies were really, Lovin' It.

Q2 - What was the strategic communications challenge?

Summer for Macca's is crucial, it's true. But recent wins were far and few.

A strong summer sales period is critical for the annual success of Macca's, with December alone making up nearly 10% of sales for the year[1]. Between road trips, long beach days and two months of school holidays, summer presents itself as a perfect storm of sales opportunities. But for the past two years running, Macca's had been under-delivering on summer successes.

Unlike many businesses, Macca's saw a boom during COVID, especially through drive thru as we were seen as a safer alternative. Yet off the back of these artificial COVID highs, Macca's had faced dwindling total summer sales two years running, [2] with the 2024 summer period down -1.6% year on year.

Alongside these sales declines, the 2024 summer period also saw critical traffic losses, with Macca's share of QSR traffic down -0.6%, as well as number of transactions (Macca's calls them Guest Counts) down -3.6%[3].

For a business whose franchisees focus most on comparative successes year on year, it didn't matter that these declines were likely due to a rebalancing to pre-covid norms as QSR spend was more equally re-distributed. We had a new standard of success we now had to meet.

Winning back Aussies over summer was key. Especially when it came to families.

[1] Macca's CBI Sales Analysis
[2] Macas CBI Sales Analysis 2021-2024
[3] Circana/ CREST® AU, QE Dec 2024

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The summer period is particularly crucial for one of our most important audiences; Aussie families. With a [redacted] higher family customer base than the rest of QSR category[4] families play a crucial role in the sustained growth of Macca's business. And yet, in summer 2024 we saw [redacted] of share of traffic losses coming from this crucial audience[5].

See source 1: Macca's CBI Family Tracking Q1-Q4 2024

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We had assumed these losses had been driven by the rising cost of living, as QSR Traffic from families had been down for the whole of 2024. But the Q4 data revealed an alarming trend: total QSR traffic from families had actually grown 2% across the category. But Macca's continued to see a decline of -5.4%[redacted]

See Source 2: Families Traffic Share Growth 2024.

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Going into summer 2025 we knew that we had a big job to do. Not only to turn the tide of the overall business, but also double crucially to win back this key audience over the summer period this year.

Digging a little deeper, we realised that in an attempt to reverse sales declines, we had in fact splintered our marketing efforts, with 6 different campaigns in the market over the summer period in 2024, each with different offers, messages and audiences. Too much disjointed activity fractured our focus and our budgets. So, going in 2025 we made a commitment to fewer, bigger, better. Seeking to focus our efforts on one singular summer campaign, designed to appeal to our key audience: families.

A single, focused campaign our target would be... But how could we stand out in a sea of glee?

Summer is also a time when many Aussie brands are out in market with big holiday campaigns, attempting to cement themselves as indispensable within this spending period. The result? A market saturated with cheerful holiday campaigns, featuring smiling Aussies celebrating the classic Christmas lunch, coming together with loved ones, and of course, gift giving around the tree or by the seaside.

See Source 3: 2024 Category Snapshot



To stand out, we needed to find a unique way to get Aussie families to fall back in love with McDonald's during this competitive time of year. However, going into summer 2025 we knew this would be a tough sell, with Aussies facing a 3.85% increase in the cash rate, and a 3.8% increase in inflation. Cost of living pressures were only mounting, all in a category that is at best frivolous, and at worst dispensable during an economic crisis[7] .

[4] Q4 2025 Macca's Brand Market Report, CBI
[5] Q4 2024 Macca's Brand Market Report, CBI
[6] ibid
[7] Q4 2024 Macca's Brand Market Report, CBI

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Our Challenge:

WIN AUSSIE FAMILIES THIS SUMMER THROUGH ONE EPIC AND DISRUPTIVE CHRISTMAS CAMPAIGN AT A TIME WHEN THEIR WALLETS WERE TIGHTENING ONCE AGAIN.

Q3 - What were your objectives? State specific goals.

Our objectives were set, our targets acquired. Success at a total market level and amongst families was what was required.

All campaign objectives and KPIs are set by the McDonald's Consumer Business Intelligence team (CBI), based on robust analysis. As a business that relies on year on year growth for our operators, all targets are based on the previous year's benchmarks, whilst also factoring in long term trends in growth and declines.

Objective 1:
Grow year on year value sales and guest counts, reversing a 2 year trend of decline

The campaign had to see positive sales increases for the first time in two years of +2%. Despite sales being the main focus, Guest Counts (number of transactions) are a key measure of business health, and a positive uplift of +1.8% was required to continue this momentum.

KPI	Target
Year on Year Sales	[redacted]
Year on Year Guest Counts	[redacted]

Objective 2:
Grow share of traffic from families

2024 had seen steep losses among families. We needed to shift this downward trajectory, with a meaningful positive contribution required during the campaign, measured by traffic share growth from families.

KPI	Target
Traffic share growth from families	[redacted]

Objective 3:
Increase brand love among families

Brand health amongst families had been steadily declining throughout 2025, so we needed to bring this crucial audience back on side. We were set the ambitious task of increasing perceptions of brand love +3% over the quarter, as it is a key long term indicator for the health of this audience.

KPI	Target (Q3 vs Q4)
'Brand I love' among families	+3%

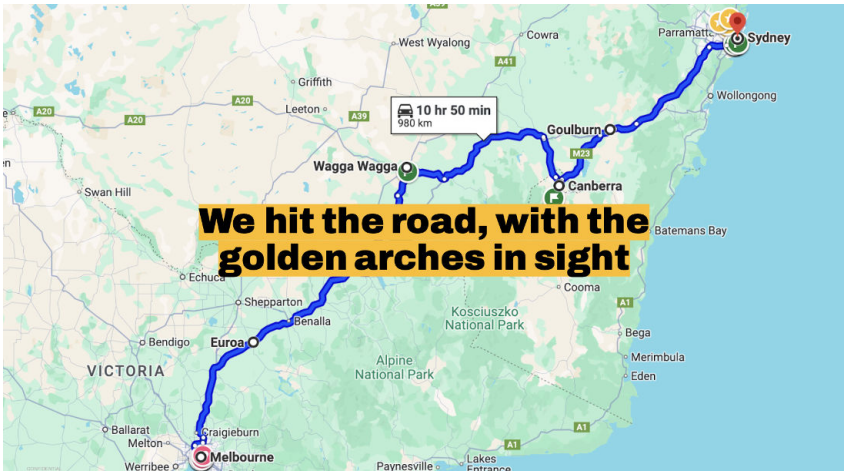
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Q4 - What was your strategy and how did you get there?

The first place to start was to speak to our fans. To dive deep and to learn of their summer plans.

To show up as a brand that's familiar and approachable, our creative thinking is always anchored around a fan truth; unique branded insights specific to Macca's and shared between fans – the small moments, memories, and rituals that make Macca's feel so special to Australians. To meet our fans where they are, we set off on a great Aussie road trip, stopping at Macca's along the way and talking to fans about their summer plans as we did so.

See Source 4 - Fan Truth Summer Road Trip Route



Our fans spoke about using a 'Macca's run' as respite from the summer sun. How Frozen Coke becomes a mandatory when the UV hits 11. How the true sign summer has begun is when you walk into a Macca's barefoot, with the cold tiles a respite from hot summer pavement. And how nothing soothes hot, antsy 6 year old like a sundae.

These moments of micro summer joys lived out under the golden arches led us to a timely Aussie summer fan truth: The best summer days end at Maccas (See Source 5)



But at a time when most competitor brands are focusing on the joys of summer, simply executing this fan sentiment would just make us blend in. Past years' campaigns had proved that merely celebrating the joy of Macca's at this time of year would fade into the background of summery festivities.

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We needed an approach that would flip the script. One that would show our fan's love of Macca's, in a way that would disrupt the usual summertime joy. And take this insight one step further.

FROM: *Celebrating the feeling of summer joy at Macca's.*

TO: *Showing that nothing can ruin the joy at Macca's over summer*

Macca's has a long history of partnering with cultural properties to co-create bespoke meals and experiences together. Afterall, as McDonald's founder Ray Croc famously said *"We are not in the hamburger business. We are in show business".* From movies like Minecraft, to celebrities' famous orders, these strategic partnerships allow Macca's to insert themselves into cultural moments and conversations with their fans in a way that other QSRs can't.

So, to help turbo charge our relevance at this time of year, we sought to partner with another cultural icon, one who could help us with this strategic shift on the joyous, summery holiday period we celebrate down under.

Enter the Grinch: the perfect icon to help McDonald's Australia disrupt holiday cheer and win over our family audience.

The ghastly green grinch is heading down under. What is he up to, you'll wonder? He thinks it's not right. He thinks it's not fair. Aussies get summer and Christmas down there!

This was the first time the Grinch was heading Down Under, meaning we needed to localise the well known global IP for our market. The regular wintery festivities wouldn't do. Our grumpy green friend would have a much bigger job to do, with a whole summer at Macca's to ruin. Because in Australia it's not just the joy of Christmas our grinchy green friend would despise, but the double whammy of a sunny, summery one too.

See Source 6 - Strategy Summary



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Q5 - How was this strategy brought to life?

THE IDEA: THE GRINCH THAT STOLE SUMMER

Little does he know despite everything he'll do. He won't ruin our summer, just make it more fun - woo hoo!

The nationally integrated campaign reimagined Dr. Seuss through a distinctly Aussie lens. Every touchpoint was an attempt by the Grinch to ruin Aussie summer, linked by a distinctly grinchy twist on Macca's iconic line, ''I'm Ruinin' It".

See Source 7 - The Grinch That Stole Summer Campaign Board



Macca's Australia collaborated with Dr Seuss Enterprises throughout the entire creative process - from the writers room through to production, casting and a joint social media strategy. This close collaboration ensured the Grinch world that we all know and love could move seamlessly within the Macca's universe, and the Aussie summer filled context.

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The fully integrated campaign ran across OOH, TV, social, radio, audio, display and owned channels and rolled out across 3 campaign phase:

See Source 8 - The Grinch That Stole Summer Comms Plan



To kick things off, the Grinch plotted in our hero film, hatching his plan from Mt Crumpet to ruin Australian summer.

He then took to the Macca's meal by creating a combination that ruined one of our classics: a Chicken Big Mac with a Frozen Sour Lemon Drink with Green Popping Pearls. He even ruined the gift with purchase, creating four snow globes filled with sand.

His scheme was set - off to Australiaville he went.

To mark his arrival, the Grinch used his chaotic energy to turn our Golden Arches a perfect Grinchy shade of green. Giving Macca's fans a chance to discover which of our stores he was starting to hatch his dastardly plans in.

But he didn't stop there.

He took to the airwaves to ruin beloved Christmas Carols, using their iconic tunes to share his dastardly plans to ruin Macca's meals, gifts and even their stores this summer.

He then hijacked our OOH to show his mischievous plans. Billboards across Australia showed the Grinch Meal, his plans for 'Grinch Boy Summer', and the sandglobe which he was sure no fan would want

The campaign balanced a uniquely Aussie tone that reflected the cheeky mischief of the Grinch, with his uniquely grinchy take on both the Macca's distinctive brand language, and the language of the internet.

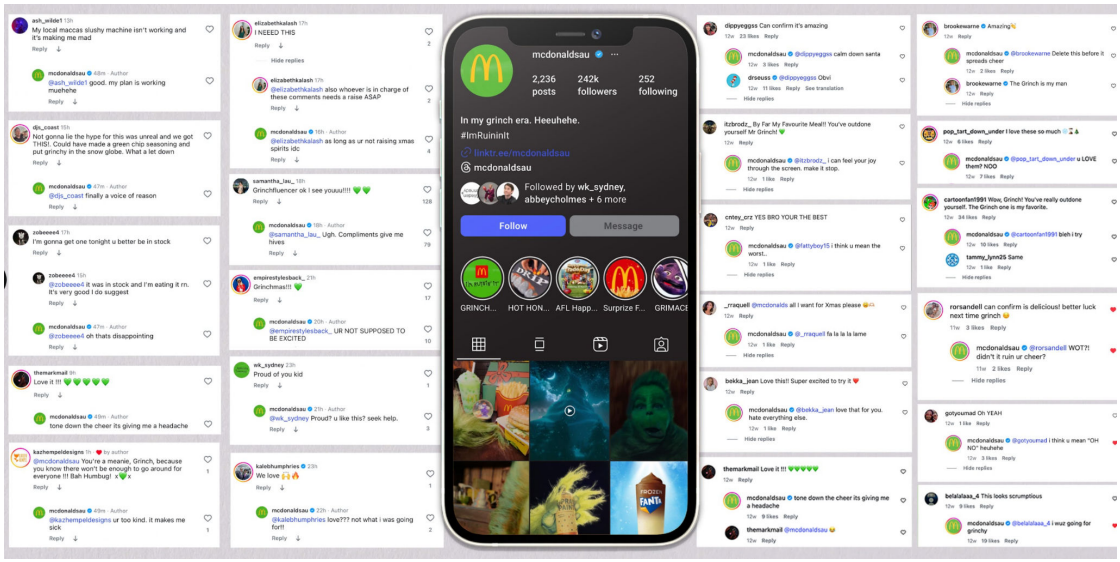
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See Source 9 - The Grinch That Stole Summer OOH



In a first for any McDonald's market, the Grinch even got his green fingers all over Maccas' Australia's social media. The takeover followed the Grinch's journey down under as he became a "Grinch-fluencer," where he took to social media to tease his arrival and his bewilderment over Australia's hot Christmas, and promoting his own items and inspiring mischievous behaviour.

See Source 10 - The Grinch That Stole Summer Social Reactions



Above all, 'I'm Ruinin' It' ensured the Grinch hijacked Aussie summer and turned it into a moment of cultural domination for Macca's Australia.

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Q6 - How do you know your campaign was successful?

What did we see, how did we go? What results could our grinchy green friend help us bestow?

The campaign was an incredible success, exceeding all campaign targets, leading to one of our most successful campaigns of the year. This success led to the Grinch Meal selling out only 3.5 weeks into a planned 5 week campaign window. As a result, parts of the campaign focusing on the meal even itself needed to be pulled early.

Across the campaign sales soared, reversing declines and moving us forward.

Objective 1: Grow year on year value sales and guest counts, reversing a 2 year trend of decline

Our unintentionally well intended Grinch helped both guest count transactions and most crucially, saw total sales soar for the first time in two years over the summer period:

KPI	Target	Result[8]
Year on Year Sales	[redacted]	[redacted]
Year on Year Guest Counts	[redacted]	[redacted]

See Source 11- Objective 1 Chart

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While these uplifts may appear small, for a business with 22% market share[9] in a category worth $37 billion AUD[10], this represents a significant contribution to the businesses' bottom line.

But among families was where real success hit. Both their hearts and their wallets saw a positive flip.

Objective 2: Grow share of traffic from families

The campaign saw a seismic [redacted] share growth for families year on year (the second largest shift for the business in the whole year), with 37% of our spend uplift coming from families in Q4 2025 vs Q4 2024[11]. This represents over $1.5 billion in sales gained[12].

KPI	Target	Result[13]
Share growth from families	[redacted]	[redacted]

See Source 12 - Objective 2 Chart

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This was achieved at a time when total QSR saw traffic losses of [redacted] among families for the same period year on year, with Macca's celebrating a [redacted] increase in traffic from families[14] during the campaign.

[8] Campaign PCA, Macca CBI team
[9] QSR Family Share Maccas CBI Analysis
[10] QSR Share, Maccas CBI, 2025
[11] Maccas CBI Sales Analysis 2024 vs 2025
[12] Maccas CBI Sales and Share Analysis 2025
[13] Q4 2025 Macca's Brand Market Report, CBI

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Objective 3:
Increase brand love among families

The campaign saw strong uplifts on key brand perception metrics among families vs the quarter prior, exceeding the hefty targets set for the campaign. This is especially noteworthy given the short window of the campaign, with significant shifts seen among the audience after only weeks of activity that will have lasting positive impacts well beyond the campaign window.

KPI	Target	Result [15]
'Brand I love' among families	[redacted]	[redacted]

See Source 13 - Objective 3 Chart

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But that is not all, no not even the start. Macca's and our Grinchy Green friend stole Australia's heart.

Beyond exceeding all campaign objectives, the 'Grinch that Ruined Summer' also delivered a sackful of delights for our Macca's fans nationwide:

- Over 7 million social post engagements with our Grinchy friend over the festive season
- $259 resale value on our sandglobes on E-bay, with fans clambering to get their hands on the full sandy set.
- Our fans even took to stores to steal signage, banners and stickers from our campaign assets for their own personal collection. Now if that isn't a fan-to-fan success story, we don't know what is!

See Source 14 - Fans stealing The Grinch That Stole Summer signage

This campaign is proof that when timings are tight, it's often proper on the ground research that gets the cut, but it's getting out of the big cities and meeting real people, who can unlock something far more powerful than any trend report, data tool, or focus group can!



[14] Q4 2025 Macca's Brand Market Report, CBI
[15] Kantar HOT tracker, M1 and M2, T3M December 2025

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Q7 - Was the campaign a good investment?

Macca's CBI team has a robust econometrics based model that allows them to isolate impacts based on specific campaigns compared to the total market effects of a campaign. As a result, all profit is directly attributed to the 'Grinch that Stole Summer' campaign.

The ROI is calculated on a profit based model, not revenue. The total campaign spend accounts for all expenses related to the campaign material, including creative, production and media spend. The ROI is calculated as profit divided by campaign spend.

Macca's sales and profit margin are highly confidential so the figures are indexed from the Incremental Gross Profit

CAMPAIGN SPEND	CAMPAIGN GROSS PROFIT	RETURN ON INVESTMENT
[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]

Q8 - Convince us that the result was not due to other factors.

All business results are calculated in isolation to the campaign.
All figures including sales, guest counts and share increases are attributed directly to the campaign and would not have been possible without the campaign in market, with Macca's' robust econometric modeling isolating the campaign impact from the broader business efforts.

There were no other large scale campaigns in market.
2025 marked a shift in our marketing efforts to consolidate all summer activity into the one campaign. While our always on comms in store and in the app continued as normal, no other campaigns ran over this period, making the results isolated to the Grinch campaign.

In fact, store sales with Green Arches saw a [redacted] sales increase.
It was no easy feat to convince Macca's leadership, let alone store operators to turn their beloved golden arches green. But the stores that did saw a [redacted] increase in average weekly units over the campaign period, making a case that increased levels of campaign activity lead to increased sales performance.

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