

# Burger King's Whopper Detour Case Study

In 2018, Burger King introduced the Whopper Detour campaign, a marketing initiative designed to attract attention and engagement within the fast-food industry. The offer was straightforward: **a Whopper for just one cent.**

What made the campaign unique was the requirement for **customers to be near a McDonald's location to activate and redeem the offer via the Burger King mobile app.** This strategy showcased Burger King's use of technology and humor to create a memorable promotional experience in a competitive market.

Below you will find a case study summary of the campaign and its results, along with a summary video, please review this information and then address the discussion questions at the end.

## Campaign Overview

Let's start with what the campaign was trying to achieve - Whopper Detour campaign had a number of marketing objectives, including:

- **To Increase Digital Engagement** - that is, boost downloads of the Burger King mobile app and encourage active user participation
- **To Drive Sales Growth** - use the one cent Whopper as a tool to capture new customers and an increased share-of-customer over time  
Convert digital engagement into measurable sales, enhancing overall revenue through targeted promotions.
- **To Enhance Brand Likeability** - make the brand more likeable by showcasing innovation, humor, and a willingness to have some fun
- **To Generate Earned Media** - to create a buzz across both social and traditional media channels
- **To Boost Store Traffic** - drive more customers into Burger King restaurants through the one cent offer and hopefully beyond
- **To Help Position BK as a Fun Competitor in the Fast Food Market** - build a position of Burger King being a fun, tech-savvy, interesting and innovative player in the market
- **To Strengthen Customer Relationships** - enhance long-term loyalty by engaging consumers in a way that feels fresh and fun

## The Campaign Concept

At the heart of the Whopper Detour was an extremely attractive offer: a Whopper priced at only one cent. This "crazy" discount was designed to grab immediate attention and create widespread word-of-mouth.

The offer was delivered using geofencing technology, where users had to be within a designated area (i.e., within 600 feet of a McDonald's location) to be able to unlock the deal using the Burger King mobile app. Luckily, there are thousands of McDonald's stores across the US, especially in the major cities - meaning that many people were frequently in a geofenced area.

But why did they include the necessity to be near a McDonald's outlet, rather than be near a Burger King? Good question. Well, there are several reasons for this move, including:

- McDonald's is the fast food market leader - so Burger King wanted to challenge them directly
- By doing this, hopefully some fast-food customers (after the campaign is over) will think of Burger King whenever they see a McDonald's - in other words, part of the plan was to embed with consumers that Burger King is a great alternative to McDonald's and changing ongoing purchase behavior and market shares
- The campaign was far more fun and interesting to consumers with this added twist - an offer triggered by being close to a Burger King outlet would not be as exciting
- Likewise, this twist on the deal made it more newsworthy and would have gained far more earned media as a result

### **How the Campaign was Implemented**

The campaign was accessible exclusively through Burger King's mobile app. Consumers had to download or update the app to participate, which immediately increased Burger King's digital footprint.

Then with the app installed, using geolocation technology, Burger King set up digital "fences" around McDonald's outlets. Once a consumer (app user) entered one of these zones, the app would send a notification offering the one-cent Whopper deal. Obviously, the deal had to be redeemed at a Burger King store, hence the term "detour" for the campaign - as the customer was at or near a McDonald's but then made a detour for a Burger King to redeem the deal for the one cent Whopper.

In addition to the app, the campaign also included teaser videos, playful posts, and media releases across various social media platforms. These channels helped spread the message and encouraged users to share their experiences, fueling the viral effect.

### **Recap: What is Geofencing?**

Let's get a little technical here - Geofencing is a location-based service that creates a virtual boundary around a specific geographical area using GPS, RFID, Wi-Fi, or cellular data. When a mobile device enters or exits this defined area, it can trigger a pre-set action, such as sending notifications, alerts, or targeted advertising messages.

As we know, many mobile devices and apps (with user permission), use location services to continuously or periodically check their position relative to the geofenced area, and when a device crosses the virtual boundary, software automatically triggers a specific response, such as a promotional alert or message.

Geofencing is used to offer deals and information directly to potential customers when they are near a point of interest, such as a store or shopping area. And by reaching consumers at the right moment, geofencing increases the likelihood of immediate interaction, with the goal of boosting sales and customer loyalty.

But brands need to be aware to use geofencing appropriately. This is because some users may feel uncomfortable with brands tracking their movements and/or the brand is breaching their privacy, which can erode trust in the brand and potentially alienate the customer (which is the opposite of the brand's intent).

## **Campaign Results**

The Whopper Detour campaign delivered outstanding results by generating substantial consumer buzz both online and offline, with the campaign achieving an astounding 3.5 billion earned media impressions.

On the digital front, the campaign drove the Burger King app to be the number one downloaded app during the promotion, with an impressive 1.5 million downloads in just 9 days.

Existing users were re-engaged while many new consumers joined the BK digital community, helping to triple mobile sales during the campaign and eventually doubling mobile sales in the post-campaign period.

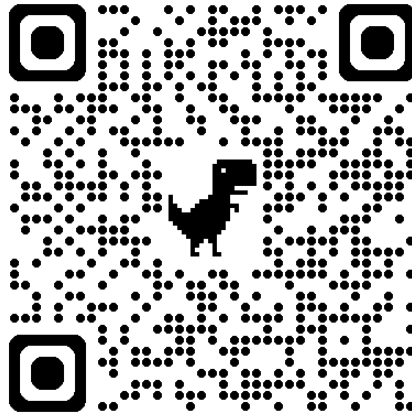
From an outlet perspective, the campaign significantly boosted traffic, with BK recording the highest number of in-store customers in four years.

Although not publicly disclosed, no doubt Burger King's additional in-store purchases to complement the one cent Whopper, such as fries and beverages, would have increased significantly during the campaign period.

The campaign also had a profound impact on brand perception and likeability. By embracing a bold and humorous challenge, along with an innovative approach to digital marketing, plus (of course) the amazing discount, BK helped reposition itself as a fun, fresh and modern, and customer-centric brand.

And most importantly, overall, the campaign delivered a remarkable 37:1 return on marketing investment, underscoring the success of this innovative approach to competitive marketing.

## Whopper Detour Video Case Study Overview



### Student Discussion Questions

1. If you got a one-cent Whopper offer, would it influence you to redeem the offer, rather than going to another fast-food player?
2. Review the list of campaign's objectives - how well did Burger King do in meeting these objectives?
3. How did BK make a 37:1 return on investment, given that they gave away lots and lots of Whopper burgers?
4. Do you agree with the geofence approach where the consumer needed to be near a McDonald's store (as opposed to being near a Burger King store)?
5. Do you see any concerns with geofencing in terms of tracking people and privacy? Do brands need to consider this in planning their campaigns?
6. Why might geofencing be more effective than a simple coupon given away at a store or stuffed in a letterbox?
7. Why did the one-cent Whopper campaign generate so much earned media? List the key factors in play.
8. Do you agree that this type of "fun" digital campaign can help brand likeability, or do consumers just want a discount deal?