

# Appetite flickers in the neon of US giants



Phillip O'Neill

AFTER about 9.30pm the Central Coast and lower Hunter turn into an eating desert. Unless, of course, you are happy to front up to a fast food outlet.

Be careful at night if you want for a meal. Prepare for the worst.

I've identified 181 fast food outlets in the urbanised strip between the F3 and the ocean, between the Hawkesbury and Port Stephens. That's one outlet for every 1700 households.

Allow me to describe the food terrain for you. The largest supplier in our fast food fatty strip is Subway, which runs 47 stores. McDonald's is second with 35 outlets.

Subway, with 35,000, has more stores than McDonald's worldwide – but only just. Maccas give you a choice of 33,000 outlets. It serves 740 customers every second, round the clock. As if you need telling, both Subway and McDonald's are American owned.

Third on the F3 fat strip is KFC, which usually comes in a location package with Pizza Hut, for these are owned jointly by a US company called Yum! Brands. Yum also operates the popular Mexican-style chain Taco Bell. There are 15,000 KFC stores worldwide and 13,000 Pizza Huts.

Then fourth is the US pizza giant Domino's, which are not so much stores as kitchens with cash registers and parking bays for Hyundais. There are 22 of them on our strip and another 9000 worldwide.

Our next US guest comes with a confusing brand name package. On our strip of fat there are six Hungry Jack's stores. Hungry Jack's is the Australian franchise name for the giant Burger King chain which operates over 12,000 stores worldwide.

So if you are hungry after dark, on the road, on a break during shift work or study, or needing carbs after a night out, then you're pretty much stuck with gifting your readies to a US corporate giant.

Unless you choose one of Eagle Boys' 15 stores or Red Rooster's six.



CHOMP!: The old-style fast food joints have pretty much been gobbled up by big US-owned chains.

These are Australian owned and each has about 300 stores nationally. Or you can visit one of the 13 locally owned Henny Penny stores. Or you could pop into one of four Oporto stores, another Aussie chicken chain with 100 outlets, some overseas.

Or you could eat spicy Portuguese chicken at one of two Nando's stores. Don't ask me how, but Nando's is South-African owned, operating in 30 nations worldwide.

Despairing of real food, though, you could stop at a service station. But, oh dear, by late evening the remnants of the pie oven look daunting, the dribbles of fatty gravy through pastry long since hardened into black shards, and the racks of potato crisps and chocolate bars have you fearing the depths that hunger can make you plumb.

Last week I heard SBS food guru Costa Georgiadis urge us to better control what we eat. You are custom officers for your bodies, he said. You should inspect what goes

in your mouths. You should open all those food boxes and wrappers and ponder their contents.

Some food items, like a delicious Mangrove Mountain orange, pass straight through the customs check, don't they?

But something in a box or a bag from Maccas, KFC, Domino's, even Subway? The customs bells should ring and the red lights flash.

It's not that fast food is forever bad. It's the tedious sameness that repels me. Last week I surveyed some former students of mine, lively lads at the University of Newcastle from the mid 1990s, the sort who were up for a munch in the wee small hours, after a night of jollies.

A place called Slicks, said one, run by two nice guys just around the corner from the Pink Palace in Denison Street, was good for a burger. And the lads named others like Slicks, scattered in unusual places but everyone knew where they were, what they sold, and what

time they shut. And each shop had its distinctive merits, even though they all sold the same stuff.

When McDonalds and its ilk rolled out their stores, and especially when Maccas went 24 hours in King Street, the lads said, the old-style fast food joints pretty much folded.

There's still a good burger and hand-cut chips to be had, they said, at Mega Burgers at Mayfield West, and at the ever-wandering Hamburger Haven on Hunter Street.

But, lads, what about a risotto, a few grilled pink lamb chops, or a shredded duck pancake, or buttery salty mushrooms on thick toast, when hunger strikes after 9.30pm?

Or have the 181 new-style fast food joints won the night fight, forever?

Professor Phillip O'Neill is the director of the Urban Research Centre, University of Western Sydney.

## Spirit of giving goes beyond merchandise

It's not about the trinkets and coffee mugs, writes Tracey Edstein.

"SHOW some heart" proclaimed the workplace poster promoting the sale of seriously pink items to fund breast cancer research, prevention, information and support services.

Next month we will be urged to wear white ribbons symbolising the condemnation of violence towards women.

In September it was Buzz Day (bee diabetes aware); in August Jeans for Genes (for children's medical research); in June, Red Nose Day (being silly for a serious cause); in March, Bandaged Bear Day (Children's Hospital at Westmead) and in February, Teal Ribbon Day (research into ovarian cancer).

Maybe there is a special day in

January but I'd be surprised – January in Australia is the time to relax, listen to the cricket, host barbecues and generally kick back.

What do all the days listed above – and there are many more examples – have in common?

Each uses a signature product (or range of products) to promote the cause. Everything from badges, key rings, coffee mugs, toys – and of course, red noses, which are surely in a category all their own!

Don't get me wrong; the causes are uniformly worthy, and the associated websites carry stories which sheet home the need for research and increased awareness.

What troubles me is that we seem to have become people who expect some tangible sign of recognition of our donation, our worthiness, our goodness as socially aware, generous individuals. Is it that we need others to recognise our merit?

Certainly, seeing another sporting a lapel badge – or red nose – can encourage similar support, and no doubt every little bit helps.

Over a year, one could accumulate quite a collection of merchandise, much of which is, effectively, useless. Designing and producing the merchandise, promoting it, transporting it all over this vast country, collecting and depositing the proceeds and acknowledging same are all huge tasks, requiring hours of both paid and voluntary labour, I suspect.

And what happens to all those items? Recently a colleague told me that earlier this year, she gave \$10 for a Legacy badge – perhaps the original "cause-merchandise"? – and before long, threw it away because, really, what else was she to do?

How often do we bemoan the amount of stuff, the number of things, that we accumulate.

All right, I'm probably getting a little carried away, but remember, as Paul Kelly and Kev Carmody wrote, "From little things, big things grow!"

Would it not be preferable if we could make a donation and not require a trinket in return, like children scrambling for the toy in the bottom of the cornflakes box?

I know people who choose, as a family, a variety of charities to support substantially during the year. Their considered commitment surely makes more difference than many small donations/purchases with the attendant costs listed above.

Perhaps there's another way to "show some heart".

Tracey Edstein is the editor of Aurora, magazine of the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle. This article is submitted by the Churches Media Association.



### A plane debate

The decision by Qantas to ground its fleet sparked plenty of online debate over the weekend.

It's about time people were put before company profits and share dividends. Let's stop the rich from getting richer. Will Alan Joyce hand back his bonuses for poor performance?

Greenie

Union members, do you know that the airline industry is struggling with planes grounded due to lack of passengers? Do you know that most privately owned full service airlines are running at a loss? Do you know that most, if not all, of the full service airlines that aren't having financial problems are being bankrolled by their national governments? I bet your two leaders couldn't care less if Qantas went under, because they earn more than you anyway.

cardiffresident

The shareholders gave him (Alan Joyce) the pay rise. Heading a large corporation like he does, he deserves it. It is chicken feed compared to the bank bosses' wages. Another union inspired Labor party stuff up.

Well done, champ

No one is worth that amount of money and I cannot believe it was allowed in the midst of all this. It is disgusting and provocative to the unions, minority shareholders and those stranded at airports. I have a flight booked with Qantas and I wish I had never done it.

Muriel

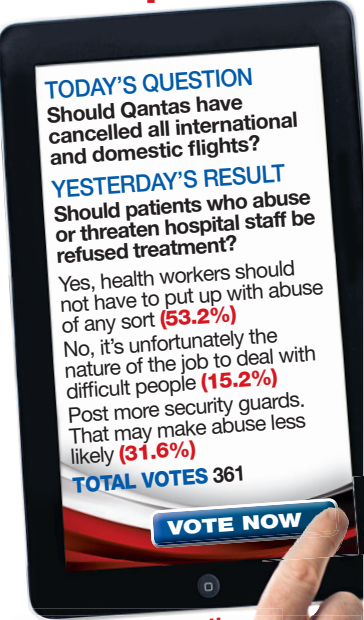
I support Alan Joyce completely. The unions have dictated terms for too long now, without regard for the business reality in the current climate.

Jones

It's about time the unions and management realise that business people will simply not use Qantas any more as they do not provide a reliable service. I spend over \$20k per year on flights with Qantas. They can now kiss my future business goodbye.

Nick Foran

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