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US Coca-Cola

Persuading teens to 'Share a Coke'

Agencies: Starcom Mediavest Group,
Wieden + Kennedy, Fast Horse

The first cross-industry collaboration between



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Executive summary

This case study describes how Coca-Cola encouraged teens to 'Share a Coke' with their friends by showing them how exciting it was to get a Coke bottle with their name on it.

In the US, 10 million teens had not had Coca-Cola in the preceding year, so Coca-Cola imported the globally successful Share a Coke campaign to increase its sales and make a more personal connection with US teenagers.

Two elements differentiated this campaign from others in the category. First, packaging became an incredibly important piece of owned media. Second, the hashtag #ShareaCoke created a depth and breadth of content and ways for teens to get involved and use the functionality of social media to amplify the idea.

The result was that 1.25 million more teens tried a Coke during the following summer and sales of participating Coca-Cola packages rose by a phenomenal 11% in the US. 'Share a Coke' in the US was more successful in driving sales than in any previous market that had run the campaign.

Market Context

These are tough times for the carbonated soft drink category. Health concerns, the threat of regulation and an explosion of other drink choices such as smoothies, waters and juices have contributed to volume declines for the past nine consecutive years.

In 2013 carbonated soft drinks were down 3.3% (source: Beverage Digest, 2014). Coca-Cola has not been immune to these pressures. For generations, Coca-Cola has been one of the world's most iconic brands. But something is different for teens today. There are so many more beverage options that 'iconic' does not readily translate into 'for me.' In fact, half of all US teens had not enjoyed a Coke in the past year (source: client research).

Many teens think Coca-Cola is their parents' drink – "trusty but dusty" – and only 13% think it is unique (source: Coca-Cola Teen Attitude and Usage Study).

We needed to help secure the future of the brand through recruiting a new generation of regular teen drinkers by building a deeper connection between them and the brand.

Teens increasingly thought of Coke as an old-fashioned drink, a perception we needed to overcome by improving our brand health scores among teens (i.e. "favourite brand", or "a brand for someone like me").

We also needed to translate these improved brand health scores into increased trial of the brand (defined as having had a Coke in the past four weeks) in a category where sales were down. Our 2020 goal is to get one in two teens to enjoy a Coke.

To do so we need to grow volume in immediate consumption, primarily 20-ounce bottles.

Insight and channel strategy

In order to increase sales, Coke needed to make a personal connection with teens. There is nothing more personal than your name. That is where the 'Share a Coke' concept was born: take the Coca-Cola brand name off 20-ounce bottles and replace it with 250 of the most common teen names, a simple, powerful idea that would connect teens to Coca-Cola.

We knew from running the 'Share a Coke' campaign in other countries that we could get teens to buy a bottle of Coke with their own name on it. Our key insight was to increase sales further by encouraging teens to purchase and share bottles with their friends' names on them. To propel Coke sales, we needed to ignite the nation's teens to share a Coke.

The major elements that differentiate this campaign from others are twofold. First, packaging played a pivotal role in this campaign.

The second element was social. Social was at the heart of the campaign right from the start, as sharing is a very social behaviour. The hub of the campaign was the hashtag #ShareaCoke. We created a depth and breadth of content and ways for teens to get involved in the campaign and use the functionality of social media to amplify the idea.

Creative/media implementation

First, we used socially driven and search-related content to make finding your name on a Coke bottle feel organic. We intentionally launched small, allowing teens to discover the programme on their own terms and feel ownership of it.

Custom 20-ounce packaging with 250 popular teen names generated instant interest as word-of-mouth spread through the social sphere. The only paid media was search, which we used to react to organic interest and drive traffic to ShareaCoke.com. Search ran from the start to the end of the campaign (mid-June to August) at a 5% weight of spend.

After an organic launch, we built a base of teen-targeted TV and online video. We layered in mass digital takeovers as well as a hefty digital outdoor plan centred on surrounding key teen hangouts. Video, digital takeovers and outdoor all launched in July (and ran to the end of the campaign) at a 60% weight of spend.

Then, to get teens to go beyond finding their own name, we propelled and celebrated the act of sharing. To make the Share a Coke movement really take off, we invented show-stopping ways for teens to participate.

- In our top markets, we created interactive human-sized Coke bottles on bus shelters. Teens could type in their names, see it on the bottle and share a picture of it.
- Have you always wanted to see your name in lights? We created iconic digital outdoor in Times Square solely from names of teens who opted in via text.
- We also exploded onto the social media scene, which inherently became the heart of the campaign with significant paid support behind organic content across Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Tumblr.
- Finally, we tapped into teens' favourite online personalities to ignite further sharing. We enlisted teen idols and influencers to communicate how they would share a Coke.

Social and content partnerships with influencers both launched on 30th June and ran to the end of the campaign at a 35% weight of spend.

We first teamed up with top 'College Humor' talent, Jake and Amir. As the largest teen comedy destination on the web with over 100 million monthly page views, Jake and Amir's ongoing comedy web series is their biggest draw (source: comScore Media Metrix, College Humor internal data).

Cameras were rolling as Jake and Amir challenged each other to see who could give away the most Cokes at Venice Beach. From hilarious encounters with total strangers, to getting help from a street performer and taking over a taco truck, the duo showed how 'Share a Coke' was also a way to make new friends this summer.

We then gained access to a dozen top teen influencers and social media celebrities with combined communities totalling 40 million+ followers. These influencers created and published snack-able social content that creatively invited and illustrated how to share a Coke.

From social media stars such as Carter Reynolds catching his mum sipping his personalized Coke to Kayden Stephenson sharing a Coke with his best pal and Klarity throwing Cokes to his friends from his convertible, 49 posts were created across Vine, Instagram and Twitter.

We also leveraged teen YouTube star Cameron Dallas, who is famous for taking selfies while shirtless.

Due to Cameron's 11m actively engaged followers, we gave him Coke bottles with his and his best friends' names on them along with a much needed day off.

These close friends gathered poolside for an epic slip-and-slide party. On July 29, #ShareaCokeWithCam became the number 1 global trending topic on Twitter, as Cameron promised to follow every fan who tweeted (source: Twitter Trends Dashboard, 29th July 2014).

As we entered the final weeks of our programme, user-generated content took off with some pieces going viral. The most compelling example came in a video shared by the McGillicuddy family announcing they were becoming parents using 'Mom' and 'Dad' Coke cans. The video received four million views on YouTube, plus 50 million earned media mentions across news outlets both in the US and globally (source: FastHorse, September 2014).

Insights summary

Social effects

We encouraged teens to share their experience:

- Fan-led activity occurred at purchase as thousands shared the exclusivity of finding their name or the names of their friends and families with their online communities
- #ShareaCoke had 89,000 uses on Twitter and 496,000 uses on Instagram
- Fans of the programme were also eager to share virtual bottles on ShareaCoke.com
- There was better than a 1:1 ratio of visits (6.8 million) to virtual bottles made (6.1 million)
- The 14% share rate (against a benchmark of 3–5%) meant over 800,000 virtual bottles were shared on Facebook.

The #ShareaCoke hashtag connected all social activity and shares:

- 70% of public relations-driven social posts included the campaign's #ShareaCoke hashtag
- Organic celebrity posts generated approximately 13.6 million impressions and 381,424 expressions
- Coca-Cola's owned social channels generated significant engagement. A robust content calendar of organic work helped provide a strong paid social cadence throughout the life of the campaign.

Twitter:

- There were 51 million impressions with an average engagement rate of 7.8% (the benchmark being 1.5%)
- Influencer tweets promoted via @CocaCola delivered an engagement rate of 13.88%.

Instagram:

- There were 3.79 million impressions with an average 'like' rate of 8.7% (the benchmark being 2–4%)

The platform quickly became home to 75% of Share a Coke public mentions. As a result, we gained more than 100,000 new followers.

Facebook:

- Paid support of organic posts generated 105 million impressions by the campaign's end
- There was a click-through rate of 2.16% and 11,760 shares

Tumblr:

- There were 9.1 million impressions and over 204,000 engagements resulting in an overall 2.3% engagement rate (on a par with the benchmark of 2.5%)
- Coca-Cola gained 9,000 new followers since the start of the campaign bringing the total follower count to over 118,000 followers (+8%)

Our content partnerships further fanned the flame of social engagement:

College Humor:

- Content was amply promoted with 50 million impressions across the College Humor site and social, including Jake and Amir's personal Twitter and Facebook accounts.
- The associated video delivered over 1.3 million YouTube/site views and 18,000 likes.

Niche.co:

- There were 67.6 million impressions and 1.6 million expressions.
- Sixteen Vines were created and there were more than 43.9 million views/loops that generated more than 900,000 total engagements.
- Impressions by post averaged two million (twice the benchmark) and engagements by post ranged from 40,000 to 190,000 (30,000 is considered successful).

Awesomeness TV:

With over 1.4 million mentions, #ShareACokeWithCam became the number 1 trending topic worldwide organically.

There were 2.1 million video views on YouTube across all three stars. Fans took ownership of the 'Share a Coke' campaign throughout the summer driving a significant amount of organic buzz. Most notable was consumer-generated content from Pat and Whitney McGillicuddy, who used 'Share a Coke' cans to announce that they were expecting a baby. The video took the internet by storm. It generated attention for 'Share a Coke' on The Huffington Post, BuzzFeed, Perez Hilton, the Hollywood Gossip, HLN and broadcast outlets around the country.

To date, a campaign video has generated more than 50 million impressions and four million views on YouTube.

Business Effects

The campaign drove dramatic increases in sales volume and revenue

Share a Coke delivered unprecedented sales impact:

- Volume (+11% versus a year ago)
- Revenue (+11% versus a year ago)
- Share (+1.6% versus a year ago)
- Velocity (+10% versus a year ago)

(Source: Nielsen Databank, Total U.S. AMC, Coke/Diet Coke/Coke Zero, 20oz+2L+Fridgepack, 13 WE 08.30.14).

Share a Coke also realized a 2% unit price increase amidst competitor discounting.

The four weeks of July were the best four weeks of sales that Coke had seen since the start of 2009 and the largest YOY growth the brand had observed with the history available to us.

Almost half of the 20 ounce sales gains during the campaign were via increased household penetration for the Coke trademark (Coca-Cola, Diet Coke and Coke Zero).

This brand's key performance indicator is expressed as 'at least one Coke consumed in the last four weeks' and is typically a hard-to-move metric with little variance. But 'Share a Coke' helped teen incidence significantly increase five points in just eight weeks from 2nd June to 28th July. That translates to about 1.25 million more teens having tried a Coke last summer! (Source: Coca-Cola's brand health tracker – B3).

Agency convergence modelling analysis using Bayesian methodology showed how the 'Share a Coke' campaign was uniquely experiential and share-worthy, with significant correlations between paid and earned media and Coke 20-ounce sales.

Overall, paid media drove 10% of incremental sales; it also drove sales directly and indirectly through owned/earned channels which in turn generated another 9% of incremental sales lift.

Static and interactive outdoor drove 3.3% of sales and our paid influencer content programmes 2.1% - the highest paid media contributions.

Social buzz and interactions were key to driving sales with earned media directly contributing 5% to incremental sales, led by Instagram – a popular teen platform.

Offline media primarily generated traffic towards owned assets (the ShareACoke.com microsite and experiential kiosks)

with another combined 4.3% contribution.

Key Lessons

Social at the heart means providing useful, interesting, compelling stories which are worthy of being retold. We think in terms of ideas and campaigns that are social (share-worthy) at their core and then we think about how we can amplify the ideas and campaigns.

'Share a Coke' was our most successful campaign to date in delivering on the social-at-the-heart mantra.

The idea was share-worthy at the core. Every amplification of the idea was share-worthy, too.

Teen influencers are not necessarily mass-reach celebrities and athletes, but there is a growing number of social teen superstars who carry greater credibility with teens than mainstream, broad-stroke influencers.

To build credibility and scale for your teen platform, consider how you can rally these influencers to support your message.

This case was submitted to the 2015 Warc Prize for Social Strategy, and appears here with the permission of Warc.

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