

## INNOVATION

# The Shape of A New Coke

Under David Butler, a top-to-bottom redesign goes far beyond a mere makeover

By Jessie Scanlon

When David Butler joined Coca-Cola almost five years ago, he was given "the Post-it Note mandate: 'We need to do more with design. Go figure it out.'" Butler, who had come from the interactive marketing and consulting firm Sapient, wrote a 30-page manifesto laying out a design strategy. But if the now vice-president for design has made an impact at the beverage giant, it's not because of some heady proclamation. It's because he learned the most effective way to implement design at a company as large and complex as Coca-Cola: Avoid the word "design" as much as possible.

"If I'm at a meeting with manufacturing people, I'll say: 'How can we make the can feel colder, longer?'" he says. "Or, 'How can we make the cup easier to hold?'" In other words, he talks about the benefits of smart design in language people understand. It's tough to assess the impact of the strategy, but reaction to several brand redesigns and such innovations as an aluminum bottle and a new family of retail display coolers implies the approach is working.

While few companies have a richer design heritage than Coke, the company seemed in recent years to have lost its verve. The iconic "contour" bottle, originally introduced in 1916, had given way to a plastic bottle or aluminum can on which the logo had to compete against random bubble graphics, extraneous marketing messages, or seasonal images. When Butler reviewed the state of design at

The aluminum bottle: recyclable, resealable, less costly to make, and it feels cooler



Coca-Cola on his arrival, he found a lot that needed fixing. Coke had 450 brands, more than 300 different models of vending machines, innumerable bottling and retail partners, and no consistent global design standards.

As Butler focused on basic problems that design can solve, he pinpointed three areas critical to Coke: brand identity, user experience, and sustainability. Several projects combine elements of all three. Take the aluminum contour bottle, introduced in 2005. From a branding perspective, it's a sexy update of the glass bottle, a new version that feels more modern but is less expensive to produce. From a user's viewpoint, the aluminum feels colder than glass and has a resealable cap. As for sustainability, the bottle is made from recycled aluminum that is itself recyclable.

## TRIUMPH AT CANNES

A new family of sleek, sculptural coolers, which use 30% to 40% less energy, illustrates new ways of thinking about Coca-Cola's complex partner relationships. Coke doesn't own the coolers, which are bought by retail stores. For vendors not wanting to replace working equipment but reluctant to appear outdated, Butler's team designed inexpensive modular panels that can be attached to the outside of an older cooler. It's a win-win. The retailer gets a fresh look; Coke gets consistency of brand message.

Now, Butler and his team have begun a review of the 450 brands in the company's portfolio, focusing first on megabrands such as Cuke. That redesign commission went to the branding and packaging firm Turner Duckworth. The result—a cups-to-trucks redesign—won the Grand Prix at this year's Cannes Lions advertising festival. David Turner, principal of Turner Duckworth, says Butler and the design leaders at Coca-Cola North America "have tirelessly advocated for good design. That's really why the good stuff is happening." | [BW](#) |

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