

The Story of Coca-Cola

Atlanta Beginnings 1886-1892

It was 1886, and in New York Harbor, workers were constructing the Statue of Liberty. Eight hundred miles away another great American symbol was about to be unveiled.

Like many people who change history, John Pemberton, a Civil War veteran and Atlanta pharmacist, was inspired by simple curiosity. He loved tinkering with medicinal formulas, and one afternoon, searching for a quick cure for headaches, he stirred up a fragrant, caramel-colored liquid in a three-legged pot. When it was done, he carried it a few doors down to Jacobs' Pharmacy.

Here, the mixture was combined with carbonated water and sampled by customers who all agreed – this new drink was something special. So Jacobs' Pharmacy put it on sale for five cents a glass. Pemberton's bookkeeper Frank Robinson named the mixture Coca-Cola[®], and wrote it out in his distinct script. To this day, Coca-Cola is written the same way.

In its first year, the Company sold about 9 glasses of Coca-Cola a day. A century later, The Coca-Cola Company has produced over 10 billion gallons of syrup. Unfortunately for Pemberton, he was more of an inventor than a businessman, and had no idea that he had invented one of the greatest products in the world. Over the course of three years, 1888-1891, Pemberton sold the Company to Atlanta businessman Asa Griggs Candler for a total of about \$2300. Candler would become the Company's first president, and the first to bring real vision to the business and the brand.

Beyond Atlanta 1893-1904

Asa Candler, a natural born salesman, transformed Coca-Cola from an invention into a business. He knew there were thirsty people out there, and Candler found brilliant and innovative ways to introduce them to this exciting new refreshment. He gave away coupons for complimentary first tastes of Coca-Cola, and outfitted distributing pharmacists with clocks, urns, calendars and apothecary scales bearing the Coca-Cola brand. People saw Coca-Cola everywhere, and the aggressive promotion worked. By 1895, Candler had built syrup plants in Chicago, Dallas and Los Angeles.

Inevitably, the soda's popularity led to a demand for it to be enjoyed in new ways. In 1894, a Mississippi businessman named Joseph Biedenharn became the first to put the drink in bottles. He sent 12 of them to Candler, who responded without enthusiasm. Despite being a brilliant and innovative businessman, he didn't realize then that the heart of Coca-Cola would be with portable, bottled beverages customers could take anywhere. He still didn't realize it five years later, when, in 1899, two Chattanooga lawyers, Benjamin F. Thomas and Joseph B. Whitehead, secured exclusive rights from him to bottle and sell the beverage – for the sum of one dollar.

Safeguarding the Brand 1905-1918

Imitation may be the sincerest form of flattery, but The Coca-Cola Company was none too pleased about the proliferation of copycat beverages taking advantage of its success. This was a great product, and a great brand. Both needed to be protected. Advertising focused on the authenticity of Coca-Cola, urging consumers to “Demand the genuine” and “Accept no substitute.” The Company also decided to create a distinctive bottle shape to assure people they were actually getting a real Coca-Cola. In 1916, the Root Glass Company of Terre Haute, Indiana, began manufacturing the famous contour bottle. The contour bottle, which remains the signature shape today, was chosen for its attractive appearance, original design and the fact that, even in the dark, you could identify the genuine article.

As the country roared into the new century, The Coca-Cola Company grew rapidly, moving into Cuba, Puerto Rico, France, and other countries and U.S. territories. In 1900, there were two bottlers of Coca-Cola, by 1920, there would be about 1,000.

The Woodruff Legacy 1919-1940

Perhaps no person had more impact on The Coca-Cola Company than Robert Woodruff. In 1923, five years after his father Ernest purchased the Company from Asa Candler, Woodruff became the Company president. While Candler had introduced the U.S. to Coca-Cola, Woodruff would spend nearly 60 years as Company leader introducing the beverage to the world beyond.

Woodruff was a marketing genius who saw opportunities for expansion everywhere. He captivated foreign markets with innovative campaigns: Coca-Cola traveled with the U.S. team to the 1928 Amsterdam Olympics, the logo was emblazoned on racing dog sleds in Canada and the walls of bullfighting arenas in Spain. Woodruff pushed development and distribution of the six-pack, the open top cooler, and all innovations that made it easier for people to drink Coca-Cola. When it became clear to the Company that housewives would be more inclined to buy six-packs they could open easily at home, women were sent door to door, installing branded Coca-Cola openers. This is exactly the kind of “outside-the box” thinking that thrived under Woodruff’s leadership, and it made Coca-Cola not just a huge success, but a big part of people’s lives.

The War and Its Legacy 1941-1959

In 1941, America entered World War II. Thousands of men and women were sent overseas. The country, and Coca-Cola, rallied behind them. Woodruff ordered that “every man in uniform gets a bottle of Coca-Cola for 5 cents, wherever he is, and whatever it costs the Company.” In 1943, General Dwight D. Eisenhower sent an urgent cablegram to Coca-Cola, requesting shipment of materials for 10 bottling plants. During the war, many Europeans enjoyed their first taste of the beverage, and when peace finally came, Coca-Cola was doing a lot of business overseas. Woodruff’s vision that Coca-Cola be placed within “arm’s reach of desire,” was coming true – from the mid-‘40s until 1960, the number of countries with bottling operations nearly doubled.

Post-war America was alive with optimism and prosperity. Coca-Cola was part of a fun, carefree American lifestyle, and the imagery of its advertising -- happy couples at the drive-in, carefree moms driving big yellow convertibles -- is a wonderful reflection of the spirit of the times.

A World of Customers 1960-1981

After 75 years of amazing success with brand Coca-Cola, the Company decided to expand with new flavors: Sprite[®], in 1961, TAB[®] in 1963 and Fresca[®] in 1966. The Company’s presence worldwide was growing rapidly, and year after year, Coca-Cola found a home in more and more places: Cambodia, Montserrat, Paraguay, Macau, Turkey and more. Advertising for Coca-Cola, always an important and exciting part of its business, really came into its own in the ‘70s, and reflects a brand totally in tune with fun, playfulness and freedom. The international appeal of Coca-Cola was embodied by a 1971 commercial, where a group of young people from all over the world gathered on a hilltop in Italy to sing “I’d Like to Buy the World a Coke.” In 1978, The Coca-Cola Company was selected as the only company allowed to sell packaged cold drinks in the People’s Republic of China.

Diet Coke and New Coke 1982-1989

The ‘80s – the era of legwarmers, headbands and the fitness craze, and a time of much change and innovation at The Coca-Cola Company. In 1981, Roberto C. Goizueta became chairman of The Board of Directors and CEO of The Coca-Cola Company. Goizueta, who fled Castro’s Cuba in 1961, completely overhauled the Company with a strategy he called “intelligent risk taking.” Among his bold moves was organizing the numerous U.S. bottling operations into a new public company, Coca-Cola Enterprises, Inc. He also released diet Coke[®], the very first extension of the Coca-Cola trademark -- within two years, it had become the top low-calorie drink in the world, second in success only to Coca-Cola.

One of Goizueta’s other initiatives, in 1985, was the release of a new taste for Coca-Cola, the first change in formulation in 99 years. In taste tests, people loved the new formula.

In the real world, they had a deep emotional attachment to the original, and they begged and pleaded to get it back. Critics called it the biggest marketing blunder ever. But Goizueta, as Warren Buffett once said, had a knack for turning “lemons into lemonade.” The original formula was returned to the market as Coca-Cola classic, and the product began to increase its lead over the competition -- a lead that continues to this day.

Coca-Cola Now

1990- Now

In 1886, Coca-Cola brought thrilling refreshment to patrons of a small Atlanta pharmacy. Now well into its second century, the Company’s goal is to provide that magic every time, in 200 countries, with each of its 230+ and ever-growing brands. Coca-Cola has customers from Boston to Budapest to Bahrain, drinking brands like Ambasa, Vegetabeta and Frescolita. In the remotest corners of the globe, you can still find Coca-Cola.

In February 2000, Doug Daft was named Company chairman. Coca-Cola is a huge international company, but Daft’s vision is to have the Company operate as a collection of smaller, locally run businesses. “No one,” Daft points out, “decides to enjoy one of our products globally.” That’s why Coca-Cola is committed to local markets, to paying attention to what people from different cultures and backgrounds like to drink, and where and how they want to drink it. Every 10 seconds, 126,000 people choose to reach for one of The Coca-Cola Company brands, and it is the Company’s mission to make that choice exciting and satisfying, every single time.