

Context matters

Coca-Cola's Creative Strategist, Tom Hidvegi, explains how the brand remains relevant and connects with consumers emotionally.



Tom Hidvegi
Creative Strategist, Coca-Cola

What is your role at Coca-Cola and why did you join this organisation?

My current title is: Intergalactic Ignitor of Magic & Logic in the Magic Galaxy of Coca-Cola.

Recently our business unit went through a massive cultural change, moving from a hierarchical company model to a flat, creativity centred one where empathy, creativity and technology can turn our amazing products into amazing experiences.

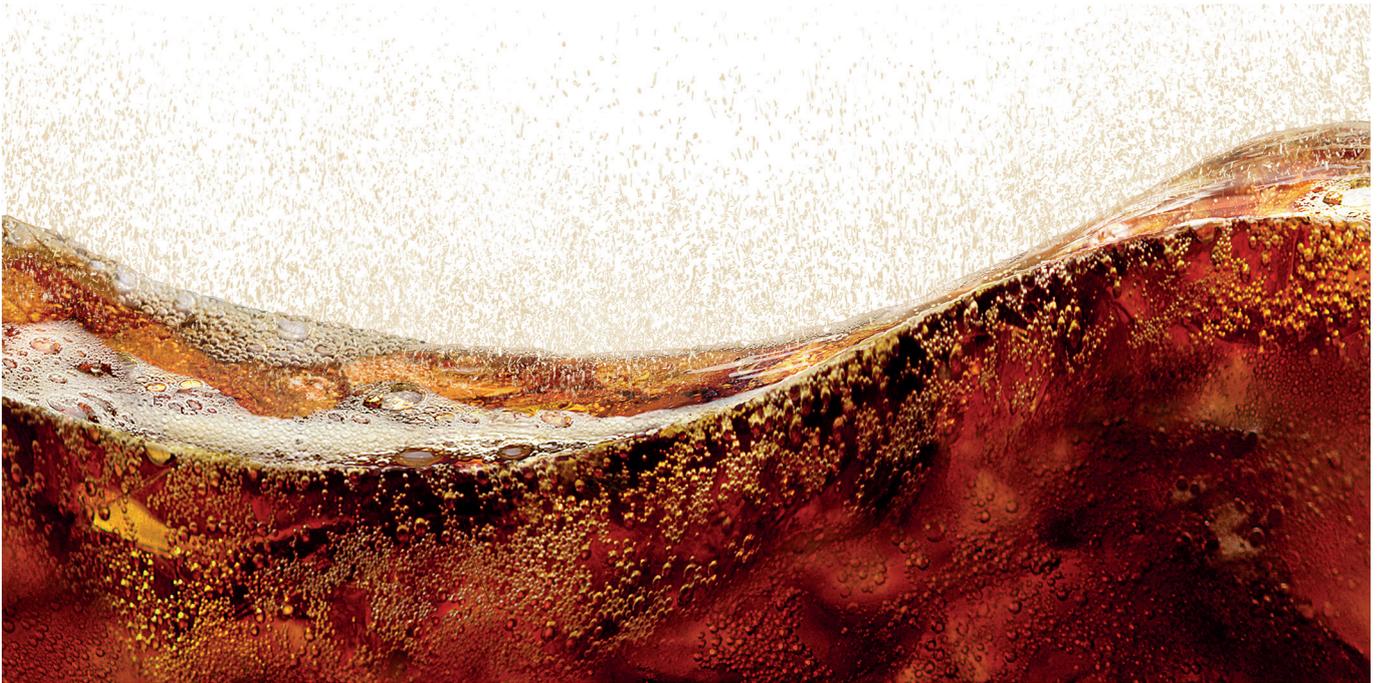
But way before that, what really lead me to this organisation was its legacy.

I was curious to find out about the branding power of the Coca-Cola Company with its 133 years of heritage yet which is still relevant and remarkable. Interestingly enough, its marketing communications unit always looked for talent from the agency side to gain fresh perspective on creativity.

I truly believe that it's all about magic and logic so to do what I love, and what I am good at, was the greatest trigger to join the company.

What do you love the most about your job?

The limitless opportunities. The freedom of failing and the empowering values of encouragement and curiosity. At the Coke side of life, everyone is working in a super collaborative environment bringing not only our 'A game' to work but our 'A profile' of simply being nice.



Can you talk about Coca-Cola, creativity and emotional connections?

For me creativity is about speed, connecting the dots faster than others. Using the right tools to accelerate thinking and by thinking, I mean being able to fuse lateral thinking, design thinking and critical thinking. We are not just landing on observations. We always dig deeper to find insights. Landing on true emotions behind consumer behaviour; understanding what they feel, and how they feel when certain actions are taken. This is quite universal, just like motion pictures manage to crack the code, we are keen on doing it so allowing us to move from simple storytelling to story branding.

How do you keep the brand relevant year after year, decade after decade?

I think the key challenge is to be able to listen and learn and think before any actions are taken. In today's interconnected world vibes and impulses must be picked up by brands on a regular basis. Emotions are always at the core of what we do, so the moment you understand why we do what we do, is the secret to creating story branding that

consumers would love to engage with. The main challenge is not to jump to quick assumptions, but to nurture a creative environment where invisible project development phases like collective thinking and learning are allowed.

What's the secret to getting people to want to watch your ads?

I think the secret is to allow yourself to step back and see the full picture. Nobody is against great stories. Nobody would block things that are adding entertainment value. The key is timing, to make the best impression as fast as possible to avoid losing their attention and to build on their trust by delivering something they would be excited about. Brands

are in their lives forever. If audiences skip things, then find other ways to make them fall in love with you again. It's like the movie *50 First Dates*.

How complex is the job today, compared with 10 years ago?

Certainly our job has become more complex. Cutting and pasting the same content into new formats would not do the job. →

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*Great content
only lives
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Each screen means a different consumption moment and even different consumer tribes. The very same story has multiple angles, so we need the best team and the right time to deliver. I see it as ‘smartketing’. Not only did your route to market multiply, so did your route to communication. Your marketing 5P (product, place, promotion, price, packaging) is now at least 8P also including: prediction, people and passion.

How do you decide on the best creative lead to follow?

My colleagues would tell you that I use a very simple test called ‘magic word’. It sticks to you like a Post-It. Often you cannot explain it, but just feels right, makes you want to run to each and every person and share it.

Gut feelings are important; the catch is that your gut can only react to learned things. So, in order to trust your gut and be innovative enough, you need to unlearn and relearn a lot. While you are unlearning make sure you do it with the audience and listen to their gut reaction to learn from it.

At Cannes Lions 2019 you said that ‘context matters’ – could you elaborate?

Great content only lives in equally great context. Your story branding needs the best show-host who adds value to your equity and represents the same principles.

Also, great content is the amplifier for new contexts to be born. It’s like a chain reaction – where my great content can become the trigger for you to create a context using my content. So content marketing is no longer within a single focus on content sharing, but context generating.

How do you view technology in your job?

I believe as a storyteller that technology itself is not the story, but it helps to tell the stories the best way. I am a massive fan of AI and lucky enough to know one of the best, if not the best, creative technologist of our time. Machine learning with our empathy will create endless opportunities. There are several initiatives in the pipeline using AI technology.

We’re bombarded with social and media trends – are there any that you rely on to build your creative strategies?

I am a fan of searching for the untold. It is kind of like mental branding. Trend reports spend so much on verbal rather than non-verbal findings.

How would you describe the Coca-Cola magic?

I think it’s one word: The People with a capital P. Think about it!

What difference do you think you make through your work at Coca-Cola?

Working with a purpose is the main difference. Knowing why you are doing what you are doing and seeing how it creates impact is simply amazing.

What do you think is the future of the creative advertising industry?

Brighter than ever! It’s the best time for our industry, nothing is true and everything is true at the same time. With great opportunity comes great responsibility, whatever you create is infinite or forgotten in 10 minutes.

What does the future hold for you as a creative strategist?

I have a favourite quote that says “I don’t know what the future holds, but I know who holds the future!”

What are your views on diversity, social and environmental responsibility matters in advertising and content?

Diversity and social responsibility are like diet. People in general like to talk about it more than doing it. I don’t want to sound too cheesy, but actions speak louder than words.

So it’s our job to promote action! /

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