

- Why did new coke fail in 1985?

When Coca-Cola was launched in the 1880s it was the only product in the market. As such, it invented a new category and the brand name became the name of the product itself. Throughout most of the last century, Coca-Cola capitalized on its 'original' status in various advertising campaigns. In 1942, magazine adverts appeared across the United States declaring: 'The only thing like Coca-Cola is Coca-Cola itself. It's the real thing. By launching New Coke, Coca-Cola was therefore contradicting its previous marketing efforts.

The simple fact is that all the time and money and skill poured into consumer research on the new Coca-Cola could not measure or reveal the deep and abiding emotional attachment to original Coca-Cola felt by so many people. In 1985, a century after the product launched, the last word people associated with Coca-Cola was 'new'. If you tell the world you have the 'real thing' you cannot then come up with a 'new real thing'. To borrow the comparison of marketing guru it's 'like introducing a New God'. This contradictory marketing message was accentuated by the fact that, since 1982, Coke's strap line had been 'Coke is it'. Now it was telling consumers that they had got it wrong, as if they had discovered Coke wasn't it, but rather New Coke was instead.

Pepsi was, perhaps unsurprisingly, the first to recognize Coca-Cola's mistake. Within weeks of the launch, it ran a TV ad with an old man sitting on a park bench, staring at the can in his hand. 'They changed my Coke,' he said, clearly distressed. 'I can't believe it.'

However, when Coca-Cola relaunched its original coke, redubbed 'Classic Coke' for the US market, the media interest swung back in the brand's favour. Within months Coke had returned to the number one spot and New Coke had all but faded away.

In other words, Coca-Cola had learnt that marketing is about much more than the product itself. Despite the thousands of taste tests Coca-Cola carried out on its new formula, it failed to conduct adequate research into the public perception of the original brand.

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