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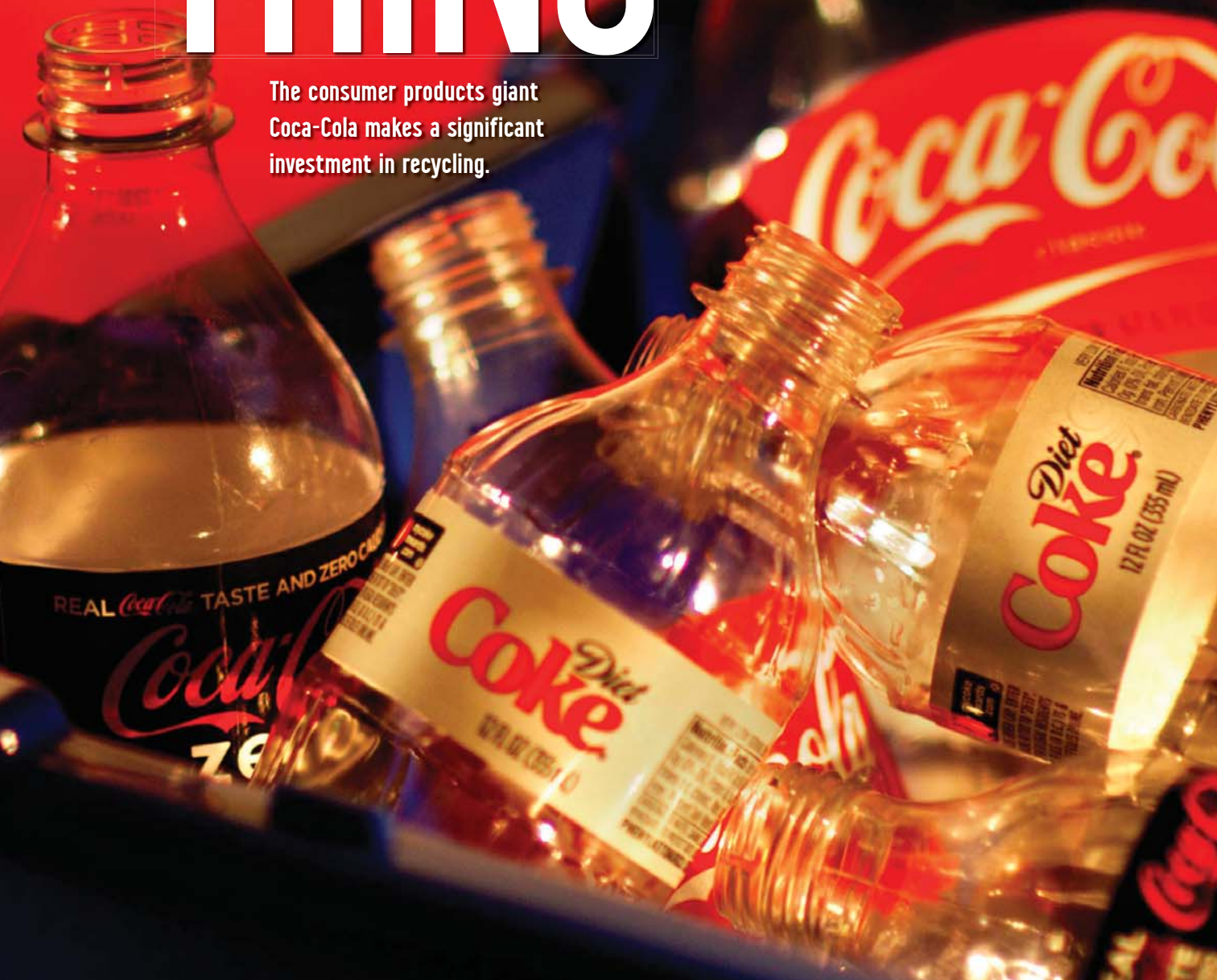
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# the real THING

The consumer products giant  
Coca-Cola makes a significant  
investment in recycling.



by dan sandoval

## THE REAL THING

The consumer products giant Coca-Cola makes a significant investment in recycling.

**W**hen it comes to global consumer brands, Coca-Cola Co., headquartered in Atlanta, has few peers. People around the world recognize the Coca-Cola logo, with its distinctive script and vibrant red color, as well as the company's range of products, which includes Dasani water and Barq's root beer.

Environmental organizations have been known to lament the low recycling rate for single-serve beverage containers and their contribution to litter. The response of Coca-Cola and its largest bottler, Coca-Cola Enterprises (CCE), has been to promote recycling and to further develop the collection and processing of post-consumer PET (polyethylene terephthalate) bottles as well as to use additional recycled content in its bottles. Additionally, programs have been designed by the two companies to not only increase the recycling of Coca-Cola products but to boost overall recycling rates for a range of secondary commodities.

In steps large and small, the two companies are helping to boost the recycling of plastics, paper, aluminum used beverage containers (UBCs) and other materials in part through the newly created Coca Cola Recycling (CCR) subsidiary. CCE also has implemented zero-waste initiatives at its operations while global brand leader Coca-Cola is putting its marketing skills to work at an international level to help increase the recycling of municipally generated material, including its array of consumer packaging.

### FOUNDED ON RECYCLING

To help reach the goal of increasing recycling, CCE, also based in Atlanta, created Coca Cola Recycling (CCR) in 2007. This wholly owned subsidiary of CCE works with the company's bottlers throughout North America to establish or expand recycling efforts wherever the company's products are sold.

The division, led by President and CEO John Burgess, consists of 25 people, many of whom have experience in the recycling industry, including Vice President of Business Development Gary Weingart, formerly with secondary aluminum company Aleris; Director of Strategic Development Steve Campbell, formerly of Anheuser-Busch; and Technical and Project Director Sandy Childs, who formerly was affiliated with the National Association for



COVER STORY



Photo by Cliff Sparkman

PET Container Resources (NAPCOR).

CCR has taken the strategic approach of working with the existing recycling infrastructure, investing in programs and facilities to increase recycling. CCR currently manages 30 recycling centers,

a commercial brokerage network and an online recycling bin fulfillment site as well as helps to coordinate several hundred recycling programs throughout the United States.

CCR claims that it recovered more

than 200 million pounds of recyclables in 2008. The company says it hopes to collect 500 million pounds of recyclables by 2010.

CCE, which is 35 percent owned by Coca-Cola Co., has undertaken various high-profile recycling initiatives such as providing recycling services at the Democratic and Republican National Conventions in 2008 and President Obama's inauguration. The company also has been visible at sporting events, including working with NASCAR to develop bottle recycling efforts at 14 of its tracks in 2009. This involved placing more than 2,000 recycling containers as well as bringing the company's Recycling Education Vehicle to races. Additionally, CCR has established recycling at a number of baseball and football stadiums, including those of the Atlanta Braves, Baltimore Orioles and Indianapolis Colts.

"We utilize our consumer engagement capabilities and marketing tools to deliver sustainability messaging to consumers—most notably through our Recycling Education Vehicles, which have interacted with millions of consumers since inception in February 2008," says Fred Roselli, a media relations officer for CCE.

High-profile events like these may be a way for Coca-Cola to publicize its recycling goals, but the company also has sought out less visible partnerships. The company works closely with groups such as the Curbside Value Partnership, a program managed by Stamford, Conn.-based Keep America Beautiful to increase participation in curbside recycling programs, and has sponsored recycling data collection through ReTrac and Ecoville for the Georgia Recycling Coalition. Coca-Cola has sponsored a number of additional programs through partners like the National Recycling Coalition, including the Coke Bin Grant Program. The company has assisted other state recycling organizations by providing scholarships to meeting attendees.

Certain efforts have generated publicity, but CCE, through its CCR subsidiary, also is working to boost recycling at its own production facilities through the Target 100 program. The goal of this program is to recycle 100 percent of the scrap material generated at CCE's facilities. According to the company, the first group

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of facilities participating in the program is collecting more than 95 percent of its scrap for recycling. All of the company's production facilities are participating in the program. Through the Target 100 program, as of August 2009, the 61 production facilities that CCE operates in North America have diverted more than 53 million pounds of material from landfills, according to the company.

The company notes that its Bellevue, Wash., facility, which recycles as much as 99.8 percent of the material it generates each month through the Target 100 program, was named the state of Washington's recycler of the year.

The company has partnered with International Paper, one of the largest paper companies in the world, to handle much of the paper collected at its plants.

**HIGHER EDUCATION**

Coca-Cola Co. and CCE also sponsor a number of programs designed to educate consumers on recycling. Coca-Cola Co. has partnered with RecycleBank, a company that uses incentives to encourage recycling, to introduce recycling programs to schools.

Coca-Cola Co. also has launched a recycling consumer education and marketing program known as "Give it Back." The graphics and slogans promote recycling of used beverage containers and remind consumers to "give back" their used beverage containers so they can be recycled into something new. The program, now in its second year, is being rolled out to college campuses across the country.

Another Coca-Cola Co.-sponsored program geared toward college campuses is RecycleMania, which encourages competition among colleges to divert materials for recycling. Throughout a 10-week period that ends in March, schools report their recycling and trash collection data. The schools are then ranked according to which one collects the largest amount of recyclables per capita, the largest amount of total recyclables and the least amount of trash per capita as well as by the highest recycling rate. Updates are provided weekly so participating schools can see how their results fluctuate compared with other colleges and use this information to rally their campus communities to increase recycling.

**COMPLETING THE CIRCLE**

Collecting recyclables is one matter, while having end markets for the material is another.

Coca-Cola and CCE have opted to develop an end market for PET plastics.

Through a joint venture with United Resource Recovery Corp. (URRC), Spartanburg, S.C., Coca-Cola created New Resource Recovery Corp., which resulted in the construction and operation of a plastics recycling facility in Spartanburg.



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## COVER STORY



We utilize our consumer engagement capabilities and marketing tools to deliver sustainability messaging to consumers—most notably through our Recycling Education Vehicles, which have interacted with millions of consumers since inception in February 2008. — **FRED ROSELLI**

Coca-Cola invested roughly \$50 million to expand URRC's pilot plant in Spartanburg. The company says the facility can produce roughly 100 million pounds of food-grade recycled plastic per year.

Similar to its arrangement with International Paper, the partnership with URRC has allowed Coca-Cola to partner with a company with what it calls extensive knowledge of recycling to ensure the company maximizes its efforts.

Meanwhile, CCE's products use recycled-content in 17 countries, according to the company. Since investing in its first PET plastic recycling plant in 1996, CCE says it has advanced recycling throughout the world. The widely publicized Spartanburg plant is the sixth of its type for CCE, joining facilities in Austria, Mexico, Australia, the Philippines and Switzerland. CCE says it is looking to build on its successes in recycling, not only in the United States but throughout the world.

### BIO-DIVERSITY

In addition to its recycling initiatives, CCE also has developed a PET plastic bottle containing roughly 30 percent plant-based material. The PlantBottle can be recycled along with other PET plastics, while not losing any of the advantages that a pure resin-based plastic can provide, according to the company.

The plant-based materials come from sugar cane and molasses, a byproduct of sugar production. Dasani and Coca-Cola brands in North America began using the PlantBottle in January 2010. The company says its longer-term goal is to bring to market plastic bottles made with 100 percent renewable and recycled raw materials.

### GOING FORWARD

While CCE has taken strides to boost recycling of its product packaging and to lessen its carbon footprint, the company also is taking steps to reach its goal of recovering the equivalent of 100 percent of its packaging by 2020. To help accomplish

this, CCE is targeting three areas:

- Educating consumers through its Recycling Education Vehicle and the Give It Back initiative that includes point-of-sale, point-of-collection and on-air messaging;
- Encouraging Coke customers (businesses that sell Coke products) to create consumer recycling programs and helping them to establish back-end solutions for effective recovery and reuse of the company's packaging materials; and
- Providing increased access to recycling opportunities by increasing recycling bin availability, working with communities to develop or enhance curbside programs and exploring new technology to make recycling more convenient for consumers and businesses.

While using its marketing muscle has helped boost recycling, especially for plastics, CCE says it is not looking to take over the traditional recycling network. Rather than establishing its own closed-loop recycling network, the company interacts with the recycling community; non-government organizations interested in recycling; industry groups; and state and national forums designed to develop best practices for increasing material recovery.

The company says it envisions a world where Coca-Cola's packaging is no longer seen as waste but as a valuable product with many future uses. To accomplish this, the company says it seeks to provide support and expertise to existing recycling programs and to collaborate with various partners to pilot new recovery technologies.

"We're working throughout our supply chain to increase supply and demand for these valuable post-consumer commodities," Roselli says. **rt**

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