

New Coke Is Back. Sort of.

Coca-Cola revives product flop in limited cross-promotion with Netflix's retro series 'Stranger Things'



The third season of 'Stranger Things' is set in 1985, when a new formulation of Coca-Cola triggered a consumer backlash that led to the return of the original version, known as Coca-Cola Classic. PHOTO: CHARLES KELLY/ASSOCIATED PRESS

By

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Coca-Cola Co. KO 1.37% is using one of its biggest failures as a marketing tool, bringing back New Coke for a limited time in a cross-promotion with the Netflix science-fiction horror series "Stranger Things."

The third season of "Stranger Things" is set in 1985, when a new formulation of Coca-Cola triggered a consumer backlash and led to the return of the original version shortly thereafter. New Coke will appear in several episodes, and a limited run of retro-inspired cans of the 1985 recipe will be available starting May 23 on Coca-Cola's merchandise website, cokestore.com. It won't be sold in regular retail stores.

Set in the 1980s, “Stranger Things” is about a group of middle-school students in small-town Indiana who confront monsters arriving from an alternate dimension known as the Upside Down. Coca-Cola products, ads and logos have appeared on the show more than a dozen times since its first season.

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- [Coke Launches First New Flavor in Over a Decade](#) (Feb. 8)
- [How Netflix’s ‘Stranger Things’ Goes Back to the ’80s](#) (Oct. 25, 2017)

Coca-Cola executives said the soda company hasn’t paid Netflix for product placement but has provided products for the show’s use. In preparation for the thriller’s third season, executives invited the crew to visit Coca-Cola’s Atlanta archives to study New Coke packaging, memorabilia and ads. Coke will pay a licensing fee to sell bottles and cans of regular Coke and Coke Zero Sugar carrying the “Stranger Things” logo.

“We are not taking any money for this,” said Barry Smyth, Netflix’s head of global partner marketing, on the placement. Mr. Smyth said there won’t be any old TV ads featuring New Coke’s pitchman, Bill Cosby, in “Stranger Things.” Mr. Cosby is currently in a state prison outside Philadelphia after a [jury found him guilty of sexually assaulting a woman in 2004](#).

The catastrophic 1985 reformulation of Coca-Cola had an enduring impact on the beverage company, deepening a culture of caution that became known as New Coke syndrome. Chief Executive James Quincey, who took the top job in 2017, has been pushing his staff to [shake off that fear of failure and take more risks](#). In February, the company introduced its [first new flavor of Coca-Cola in more than a decade](#).

New Coke will be handed out free during the week of June 3 to ticket buyers at the World of Coca-Cola museum in Atlanta and will be dispensed free from an upside-down vending machine set to appear in several cities, starting May 23 in New York.

—*Joe Flint contributed to this article.*

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