

No diet on brand spending!

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Diet Coke Is In Decline, But Ad Spending Is Not

Diet **Coke** sales keep falling. But the **marketing** investment behind the struggling soda will keep flowing in the U.S. this year -- even as **Coke** adopts a "one-**brand**" strategy globally meant to unite sub-**brands** under one campaign.

Coca-Cola Co. is planning significant media support for a new Diet **Coke** packaging **design** program launched last week called "It's Mine." The initiative involves dressing cans and bottles in millions of unique, colorful **designs**. A new 15-second TV ad debuting tonight on CBS during "Super Girl" shows a woman dressed in a business suit flying through the air as she pursues a colorful Diet **Coke** bottle and finally catches it. The spot -- which includes a cover of the Queen song "I Want it All" -- is shot entirely in black-and-white, except for the bottle. Another new TV ad will begin running in late February.

The agency on the campaign is [CAA Marketing](#). [Droga5](#) remains Diet **Coke**'s lead agency, executives confirmed.

The creative approach continues the kind of fashion-forward, female-centric tone Diet **Coke** has frequently deployed. As part of the new campaign, Diet **Coke** signed up Brad Goreski, host of the E!'s "Fashion Police" show, to host an "It's Mine pop-up fashion house" in New York City during Fashion Week.

Globally, **Coke** wants to move away from typecasting for sub-**brands** like Diet **Coke** and **Coke** Zero, which the marketer now calls "variants." The new "Taste the Feeling Campaign" includes images of all of the variants.

Under the old segmented approach, "implicitly we were saying that **Coca-Cola** is no longer for everybody," Global Chief **Marketing** Officer Marcos de Quinto told Ad Age recently, as he outlined the "one-**brand**" strategy. "We were damaging the pure core of what the **Coca Cola brand** is -- that it's a **brand** for everybody."

But in the U.S., where Diet **Coke** remains a big **brand**, **marketing** executives are in no hurry to

dump Diet **Coke** specific **marketing**, even as "Taste the Feeling" ads run here.

"In North America, Diet **Coke** has so much equity," said Rafael Acevedo, group director for Diet **Coke**, **Coca-Cola** North America. "You will continue to see future executions that will be completely based on Diet **Coke** by itself and communicating its own personality and really connecting with the loyal consumer base that it has."

Diet **Coke** got \$44 million in measured media support in 2014, the latest full-year available from Kantar Media. The company did not share dollar spending plans for 2016. But a company spokeswoman said Diet **Coke** is putting a "strong media investment" behind the "It's Mine" campaign, including in-store, print, out-of-home, **digital** and **social** media. TV ads will run on network and cable outlets including ABC, NBC, CBS, E!, [Bravo](#) and more. The "It's Mine" 30-second TV ad will air in primetime today on "Super Girl" on CBS.

Last year, Diet **Coke** ran three ads during the Academy Awards. The **brand** has not yet confirmed its 2016 Oscars plans.

The line "It's Mine" in the new ads come from an insight that "Diet **Coke** lovers absolutely love the taste of Diet **Coke** and it's not something they want to share with others," said Danielle Henry, group director for integrated **marketing** content. The unique packaging **designs** were created in partnership with HP, which automated millions of unique graphics based on 36 base **designs** that were inspired by the "bubbles, fizz, taste and spirit" of Diet **Coke**, according to a statement.

But some of Diet **Coke**'s sales fizz has gone flat in recent years as the **brand** continues to lose drinkers amid headwinds in the total diet soda category. Last year marked the tenth straight year that sales volumes of major no-calorie soda **brands** declined, Beverage-Digest reported last week. Retail sales of Diet **Coke** fell 5.9%, while Diet [Pepsi](#) dropped 7%, the publication reported. The report noted that diet soda **brands** appear to be losing drinkers to sparkling waters. Talking Rain's Sparkling Ice **brand**, for instance, grew retail volumes by 6.4% in 2015, according to Beverage-Digest.

If Diet **Coke** continues to fall, the **brand** must decide if it will continue spending on **marketing** to slow the decline, or "Do you just give up?" Beverage-Digest Editor Duane Stanford said in an interview. But he added: "If there is one thing about **Coke**, you can expect they are not going to give up." Diet **Coke** "is still a profitable product that provides a lot of cash."

Said Mr. Acevedo: "The best way to continue to improve our trend within the category is to remain consistent with our strategy" which includes **marketing** that touts Diet **Coke**'s taste.

ABOVE - Diet Coke's 'It's Mine' Packaging Credit: Coca-Cola

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