

# The Coca-Cola Company partners with SHL to *identify future Senior Marketing Leaders.*

## Summary

The Coca-Cola Company place great importance on the capability of their marketing practitioners. There is a direct relationship between effective marketing and the phenomenal business success seen over the years.

In order to ensure continued success, Coca-Cola worked with SHL's assessment consulting business on the strategic management of their talent pipeline.

In support of Coca-Cola's People Development Forums (PDFs) which discuss talent development and identify gaps that call for new skills and capabilities, Coca-Cola has developed a set of competencies to define the 'ideal' skills and behaviours of a senior marketing leader.

SHL worked with Coca-Cola to devise and deliver a bespoke and rigorous two day development centre programme for high potential marketers aspiring to be future senior marketing leaders.

So successful has the development centre been that Coca-Cola and SHL now run programmes every three to six months in locations around the world in a bid to ensure that Coca-Cola will never have to look outside its own talent pool to fill key strategic marketing positions.

## The Background

When you are one of the world's leading brands in an understandably fickle consumer market and operating against fierce global competition, marketing is key. This is the dynamic and challenging environment in which The Coca-Cola Company finds itself.

The company markets four of the world's top five nonalcoholic sparkling brands including the arguably ubiquitous Coca-Cola and other leading brands such as Fanta and Sprite. It has a number of market leading positions to hang on to in many drink varieties from juice and juice drinks to ready-to-drink teas and coffees and, more recently, sports drinks and packaged water.

When the target audience is being bombarded with media messages around obese children and the dangers of sugar-saturated drinks, Coca-Cola marketers need to be fleet of foot to react either with new products or with a challenging proposition. Its pool of marketing practitioners therefore, needs to include the crème de la crème of the global marketing world.

“Its value is recognised across the globe as we build a team which consists of the crème de la crème of the global marketing world. It is now officially part of the way we develop our people; making sure that the right people with the right skills and behaviours are in the right place at the right time.” *Stevens J. Sainte-Rose, Group HR Director for Coca-Cola*”

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The Coca-Cola logo, featuring the brand name in its signature white script font on a red rectangular background.

## The Challenge

The Coca-Cola Company has a reputation for growing talent from within. As such it has People Development Forums (PDFs) that provide a framework for enabling its leadership teams to routinely discuss talent development and identify gaps that call for new skills and capabilities. Marketing has been a prime example of a function that grew its talent internally so it came as a surprise when it was forced to look outside its own highly-talented pool of marketers when looking to make senior marketing appointments.

Stevens J. Sainte-Rose, Group HR Director for Coca-Cola said: "The uniqueness of Coca-Cola is in engaging consumers with the brand, so marketing talent is key. Without the right people we can't deliver the winning formula."

Coca-Cola therefore embarked on a pioneering bespoke programme to not only identify its rising marketing stars but to plan their development ensuring the Company had a strong pipeline of highly creative and innovative thinkers that could be the marketing leaders of tomorrow filling senior vacancies across the world.

## The Solution

In developing a bespoke programme, Coca-Cola chose to partner with international assessment consultancy, SHL who worked with Coca-Cola's talent professionals and senior marketing leaders to create a two day development centre for high potential marketers aspiring to be future senior marketing leaders.

Looking to its strongest performing marketers, Coca-Cola developed a set of competencies to define the 'ideal' skills and behaviours of a senior marketing leader. This was undertaken with the global backdrop in mind to ensure that competencies were calibrated internationally allowing for a level playing field that did not disadvantage any participants.

Eight handpicked marketers were then chosen to undertake a two-day pilot in Europe. Although the pilot ran in Paris, Coca-Cola participants came from all over the world. The aim was for existing marketing leaders of the business to see and develop potential from as many geographies as possible making selection of the best as equitable and as representative as possible.

The programme was also designed for participants to bond and establish a global alumni network of supportive colleagues that would continue beyond the event. The fact that extremely senior Coca-Cola marketers made up an observer panel alongside highly experienced occupational psychologists from SHL, proved the Company's commitment and dedication to the programme.

Its content was designed to put probable marketing leaders of tomorrow through their paces to see how they performed under pressure both operationally and behaviourally. Day one is a rigorous and challenging 'day in the life of' a senior marketer where participants are given real-life corporate issues to test their intellectual abilities and their leadership potential. Many of the sessions are also filmed to provide material for feedback sessions and also for participants to review and identify areas of development which can be supported with a career development plan that they take away from the programme.



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The day starts with a development session where participants are invited to reflect on their own “personal brand” considering how others perceive them as well as identifying what they can do to positively manage their impact. Then it is quickly into the “day in the life” of a senior marketing leader, with participants facing a number of realistic challenges to test their ‘mettle’ as well as identify strengths and development areas.

It is not just about individual exercises; participants have to demonstrate how they can work collaboratively with others. For example, at a marketing strategy meeting where they discuss the consumer, commercial and creative issue around a new product launch. Observers are looking for participants who show ability for collegiate working whilst also confidently stating their own case and acknowledging the needs of others.

Just when there seems to be time in the day, participants are presented with a potential real-life crisis management issue to cope with, such as dealing with a competitor threat, an issue at one of the bottling franchises or the need to revisit global marketing plans in the light of new business plans. The participants have to create an on-the-spot strategy to deal with the issue urgently as well as identify imaginative and strategic solutions. The demanding day also includes some time for participants to discuss their track record and leadership experiences with the observers. Throughout the day observers are looking for participants to demonstrate evidence of what Coca-Cola has termed its DNA – its company-wide ethos which mixes science with art.

Coca-Cola Company Senior VP of Global Brand Marketing and Creative Excellence, Marc Mathieu, explains: “The Coca-Cola DNA is the true balance of art and science and lies at the very core of our people and our way of doing things. We want people with a sparkle in their eyes, passion in their hearts and a belief that they can move mountains and change the world. We are not just looking for technical marketing skills but leadership qualities. The science is in data analysis and logical skills to gain consumer insight whilst the art side is about brand love, passion for the brand and emotionally connecting with the consumer. The marketers of tomorrow need to embody the Coca-Cola DNA; they need to represent the art and science of the brand.”

A change of pace greets participants when they return for day two of the programme which is focused on self development. The morning is dedicated to a leadership workshop and the chance to review videos of sessions from the day before in order to identify strengths and development areas. Participants also receive feedback from SHL’s 360° development tool which has gathered views from colleagues and also its Occupational Personality Questionnaire (OPQ) which pinpoints particular behaviours and workplace potential. Participants also benefit from an all encompassing and detailed developmental coaching feedback session jointly conducted by Coca-Cola and SHL observers. By the end of the session participants have identified their key strengths as well as potential career ‘de-railers’. The resulting development plan will form a living development map that will enable participants to know what they need to do in order to achieve their career goals.

“The idea of the two days is to take people out of their comfort zones and observe them as they face problems and issues that they would have to deal with in a more senior role. Key to the programme was that we were not just assessing participants on their marketing skills but on their potential leadership behaviours – the brand love and brand value which



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are the art and science of the Coca-Cola DNA model,” said Rebecca Messina, Director, the Coca-Cola Way of Marketing.

And she added: “Whilst it is a demanding two day development centre where participants are pushed to their limit and observed during the process, it is also hugely rewarding. These are senior people who are keen to develop and who leave the programme fully motivated, inspired and aware of their strengths and areas where they need to build skills. They also know that they were picked because they are deemed to be the marketing leaders of Coca-Cola tomorrow and this, along with the opportunity to demonstrate their potential to the company’s existing leaders who attend the programme as observers, is a huge plus in their career development.”

Sainte-Rose added: “Just as participants have had access to senior marketers, so those people have been able to see future leaders in real-life scenarios. It has given them the opportunity to be hands-on in assessing and developing their potential successors. ”

### The Results

So successful has the development centre been that Coca-Cola and SHL now run programmes every three to six months in locations around the world in a bid to ensure that Coca-Cola will never have to look outside its own talent pool to fill key strategic marketing positions that are vital to maintaining the iconic Coca-Cola brand image.

Whilst the company’s mission is ‘To Refresh the World...in body, mind and spirit’ it accepts that to do this, its vision needs to include ‘being a great place to work where people are inspired to be the best they can’.

Stevens J. Sainte-Rose, Group HR Director for Coca-Cola said: Coca-Cola’s development centre is much more than just a development tool, it is about identifying the best of the best and investing in them to ensure Coca-Cola keeps its competitive advantage and maintains its position at the top. Few companies recognise the importance of developing and retaining their top marketing talent, the Coca-Cola development centre aims to do exactly this by supporting our senior marketers and demonstrating in a very tangible way that they are of great value to the company.

He added: “SHL has been a fantastic partner to work with and every person who has been through the development centre has loved it. Its value is recognised across the globe as we build a team which consists of the crème de la crème of the global marketing world. It is now officially part of the way we develop our people; making sure that the right people with the right skills and behaviours are in the right place at the right time.”



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