



Insight & Strategy: Shades of Red /

COCA-COLA

How a global icon found a powerful way to support small businesses by turning faded storefronts into brand statements

12 JUN 2025

► https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-_QKXWPA8t4

In May 2025, **Coca-Cola** transformed 12,700 old, weather-damaged, branded shop awnings in Mexico and renewed them at no extra cost to support local businesses and celebrate the brand's 100 years in the country.

The new awnings featured personalised statements to support each business and what it represents. For example, one shop featured a new awning that said, 'We have changed this awning so that the corner that finds out about everything doesn't change.'

Coca-Cola used the old awnings to create bus shelters, billboards, bespoke memorials for the stores and exclusive merch, which people could get their hands on in some of the small businesses that took part in the activation. The brand also gave store owners limited-edition cans of the drink, packaged in a muted red to mimic the old awnings.

Shades of Red was created with **David**, Madrid. The initiative honoured the store owners on social media to share their stories and promote the stores. The campaign was amplified with a film and the brand will continue to upgrade the awnings of small businesses across the country over the coming month.

Results / According to the agency, the campaign had **380 million** impacts, prompting a **2%** increase in share of voice and a **90%** positive sentiment.

Coca-Cola plans to reach over 900,000 stores by the end of 2025.

The campaign won a Gold in Outdoor at the 2025 Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity.



To find out more about the initiative, we spoke with David's global chief creative officer, **Pancho Cassis**, and chief creative officer in Madrid, **Saulo Rocha**. They told us that:

- **The seemingly mundane can be cause for celebration** / What started as a routine refresh became something bigger: a nationwide celebration of Coca-Cola's 100 years, rooted in local culture and community pride
- **Internal alignment was crucial** / Behind the campaign's success was a huge coordination effort, aligning multiple Coca-Cola teams across functions, regions, and partners to deliver a truly national rollout
- **Old awnings became new art** / By repurposing worn-out awnings into billboards, the campaign found beauty in waste, and gave sustainability a story people could see
- **Diversity fuels local relevance** / The agency's international makeup is key to creating locally resonant work for global brands

► <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KMqiaGgALp4>

Jump ahead to... /

1. [Brand objective](#)
2. [The brief and the idea](#)
3. [Execution and promotion](#)
4. [Challenges](#)
5. [Results and reflections](#)

BRAND OBJECTIVES

Why are small businesses such a focus for Coca-Cola in Mexico, and how did the campaign go beyond sentiment to offer them real support?

Pancho Cassis: Small businesses represent about 48% of businesses in the country. More than the sales, these shops are part of the culture and an extension of the brand. In a country so big, they are an important part of how people interact with the brand every day.

The heart of the campaign was to provide support to the shop owners but also celebrate them in what could have been a very boring B2B effort. We found a way with the client to turn it into a campaign for consumers, for our shopkeepers. A B2B campaign, a consumer campaign, and something big in the history of the brand in Mexico.

Saulo Rocha: The fact that 48% of the business that Coca-Cola, as a company, does in Mexico depend exclusively on the relentless efforts of these small store owners is already quite impressive. But it isn't that this is particular to Coca-Cola. Mexico's economy is run on small businesses. We're not inventing anything; we're just bringing this to the spotlight. We're giving it the tribute that it deserves, because the brand will be nothing without them in Mexico.

We've been working with Coca-Cola for years, and you start understanding how the brand has different nuances and ways of working depending on the markets that they are in. Coca-Cola is a big global company, but it is also a very Mexican company. It is also a very Spanish company when you go to Spain, or a very Brazilian company when you go to Brazil. It's amazing to be able to understand the context in that market, and bring an idea that is so deeply rooted culturally, but also from a market and business point of view.



THE BRIEF & THE IDEA

Tell us about the place of these shop awnings Mexican culture.

Cassia: It's sheltering stories and sheltering in life. In that sense, it shelters Mexican culture. What we like the most about this campaign, and what we hear from clients and real people, is that it's totally 100% a Coca-Cola campaign, but it's also 100% the Mexican campaign. We work with global brands, and we understand how hard it is sometimes to do something that is global, but then it's super local.

Rocha: While we were interviewing shop owners, they told us that some of these awnings were opened once, and they were never closed again, because they're literally like a roof where people can stay below, whether it is because of the sun or the rain. They never roll it back, because it becomes a meeting place and it's for the people more than it is for the stores. That's how important this unsung hero object is.

What was the brief from Coca-Cola?

Cassia: The original brief was around a campaign for Coca-Cola's 100 years in Mexico, and the teams were already thinking about ideas and one Saulo and I thought was the fact that Coca-Cola is famous for its iconic red. It's the brand's trademark and something that people identify in a second. But when you go to the street, that red is not actually red. If you look at it, people see red, but it's not red. It's been faded through time. Sometimes it's whitish, sometimes it's kind of orange, sometimes it's cherry, but it's Coca-Cola red.

One of our amazing planners was thinking about the strategy and how to implement it in Mexico, and they realised that the client was already planning to change the awnings in a big effort – I think it's the biggest effort they've ever done in Mexico in 100 years. They were going to change a lot of awnings and point of sale, and the team was fast and clever enough to recognise that we have something big here.

What I like the most about this campaign is that this could have just been an email saying, 'We're going to send people to change your awning.' It could have just been a boring communication, but suddenly, we turned it into a celebration that perfectly matched the 100 years with this effort from the brand.

Rocha: What's beautiful is that we had this broad insight of the effect of time on our iconic brand, which could come to life in any random object from the brand. But when we saw the opportunity that [Coca-Cola] was going to change the awnings, we started thinking about the importance of that object that is so ignored and overlooked. It's that unsung hero. You start understanding the importance of the awning in a place such as Mexico, in a country where the weather is so ruthless, so the awnings are fundamental.

The more information we got during the process, the more we worked with the client, the stronger the idea became. It became clear how important this object was, as it would be changed nationwide. It was the duty of protecting not only the store but the lives and the stories that happen beneath them.

Ultimately, you're selling Coca-Cola to store owners for them to sell to customers. They are that middle step along the way, but most of the time, their importance and sentiment are underestimated

Saulo Rocha, David



EXECUTION & PROMOTION

How did you identify the 12,700 shops involved?

Rocha: What we have right now in the video case is just a selection of the first owners who were being changed. But the idea is we're not picking – it's really a nationwide effort, and it's happening in every single small store across the whole country, so it's more than 13,000 stores that will be impacted by this. There isn't a casting – it's based on a relationship that exists already.

For that initial film that we wanted to put up, we went for the initial group of businesses that were being impacted. We met them, we interviewed them, and we went for the ones that had a longer story with Coca-Cola, so that we could really understand the

importance of the brand for them.

This is also something that you learned along the process, which is, ultimately, you're selling Coca-Cola to store owners for them to sell to customers. They are that middle step along the way, but most of the time, their importance and sentiment are underestimated. Having them be proud to sell Coca-Cola and knowing that this big company acknowledges them and sees their effort has a huge impact on the sales to the final customer.

How important was sustainability in the decision to repurpose the old awnings?

Cassis: Today, sustainability isn't an option. It's an obligation. In this sense, we found a way to use them again, to create a celebration with the awnings. Seeing the beauty of the rawness of the material was a bonus? The beauty in the ageing and the beauty in the colours helped us decide that this should be something big. Again, squeezing the last drop.

The merch we made was available on social, but we also left it in some of the stores. That's what we did with the initial [transformations], so this will keep growing as long as we keep changing the awnings, but we know that the merch worked really well and people were happy with it.

Rocha: Just the sheer fact that you're using them as the canvas for your out-of-home campaign. It's already a fabric that you've printed, a process that you're sparing, and do not need to do. In one of the big billboards, which is a wall, we used the old awnings and people would come and touch them. Besides being beautiful, it's a purposeful way of reusing this material.

At one point, we were worried about the conditions of what was going to be brought to us, both from a physical and visual aspect, but we were stunned by how beautiful something that is considered ugly and old and useless can be.

How did social media help you amplify your out-of-home?

Rocha: We created a full collection of assets because we interviewed every single store in the five days we were in Mexico, shooting the change of the awnings and everything. So, we had a lot of material that was intentionally captured, so we could use it for social media.

You go to Coca-Cola's profile, and you see product communication most of the time, and then all of a sudden, you see these 15 posts of 15 store owners talking about the relationship they have with the company and when they started selling it. In some of the stories, their parents or grandparents were the first ones to sell it.

Social was fundamental, especially because we were telling stories. And it's just the perfect place to do that.

Coca-Cola does a lot of limited-edition packaging; what made this execution different, and why did it feel right for this market?

Cassis: We [produced the cans] as memorabilia. We didn't want to make a huge thing about it, so we did it as memorabilia because we thought, after hearing all the stories, it would be a pity if they lost the reference of how their awning was. It was also a very complicated thing, but we matched the colour of every awning that we took away, and we produced the can for them, so they kept it as a souvenir in their stores forever.

It's not for sale. It's just for them. We thought it would be better to make it a thing that you see and they see every time they open the shop, rather than just making it massive [for anyone].

One interesting thing that we found out is that you could have a whole palette of reds depending on how long they had their awnings: it goes from red to whitish, depending on the sun and how time has played a role.

CHALLENGES

What internal or client-side hesitations did you have to overcome to make this happen?

Cassis: We had been preparing this campaign for over a year, and just like many other campaigns that we've done, this was a little bit challenging in the preparation, but when the clients saw what we wanted to do, they fell in love with it. It was a true collaborative effort, because they gave us access to the partners, to the shop owners, to talk to the people in the neighbourhoods, and they knew that because we're celebrating such an important part of Mexican culture, they went all in.

In Spanish and in Brazil, we have an expression, 'milking a stone'. When you milk a stone, it's like squeezing every drop of an idea. For example, the film wasn't part of it, so we thought about how we could elevate it. We came up with the out-of-home first, then we came across so many stories, like from one shop that opened the awning 27 years ago, and they never close it because it doesn't rain, so they never close it.

There were so many stories that we thought, let's do a film. We wrote the script, then the copywriter went crazy. The guy wrote it in a way that is very Mexican, called La Décima, which is a form of poetry in Mexico.

And then someone said, 'We're going to put new awnings in, so shouldn't the new awnings also be a testament to the past?' And then someone came up with the idea that no other brand had done before, which is to put a hidden message below the new

awnings, so when people go there to have a smoke, to have a Coca-Cola, to gossip about the neighbour, they're going to see the message. The client loved it from the beginning.

Rocha: There are so many different parts of the company that you need to engage in to be able to do everything that we did. If you know the ecosystem of a company such as Coca-Cola, you know that there is the marketing team, and it's just a fraction of the many other teams that you need to align to have them all on the same page to get an idea like this out.

You have the media team that's working with you to be able to have these different out-of-home configurations that we were looking for, you need to talk to the legal team, because of a campaign like this, where you were taking a trademark asset from the brand, and just allowing other expressions of it to live in a Coca-Cola campaign. Then you also need the bottlers [partners that manufacture, package, merchandise and distribute final branded Coca-Cola beverages], who are the biggest muscle of companies such as Coca-Cola, to fall in love with this idea.

We were lucky to have the marketing team in love with the idea very quickly and understand the vision we had.



RESULTS & REFLECTIONS

What metrics mattered most to you here, and what did success look like beyond the brand video?

Rocha: It's an ongoing campaign, so the metrics are still coming in, but I think that the first important metric that we got was from the sentiment and the brand perception with store owners and how this had an immediate impact on sales for them.

What's interesting is that for a company such as Coca-Cola, just going up 1% is a massive thing. From what they shared with us, this campaign made an impact just by putting the spotlight on objects from small stores and the owners who run them.

This is supposed to be running for months, so we do not have final results yet. The only thing that we know is that the bottlers are asking for more and more.

How do you keep a global brand like Coca-Cola surprising, especially in markets that know it inside out?

Cassis: Trying to find something in the brief, or the challenge, or the business problem that can make it a bit more special. We tried to find that special nugget that can make it different from just another brand campaign, whether it's rooted in the context of the market, or whether it's, like here, with the opportunity because of something else the brand is doing.

Coca-Cola is such an inspiring brand to work on, and ideas just come a bit easier. Also, it's a client who is willing to approve [ideas] and move forward with them. In that sense, we've seen a lot of work around the world where Coca-Cola has shown its creative and strategic power.

Rocha: We all grew up dreaming of working with Coca-Cola, and it's been the benchmark for what creativity looks like for decades. There is the positive part of it, which is very inspiring, but it is also the challenging part, which is, everything has been done, right?

That what's beautiful about this brand, and we've been seeing it recently, that Coca-Cola went from being a very scripted brand with beautiful stories that are being told through a beautiful script and a beautiful film, to a very unscripted brand that is much more spontaneous, that is much more open to sharing the narrative of the brand with other things that make up their universe. Because Coca-Cola is a universe, it's not a small thing.

If another brand wanted to pull off a campaign this local, what's one thing they'd need to get right?

Rocha: The composition of David Madrid and David overall is very international. We're 50 people, and we have about 17 different nationalities in our team. It makes you think, 'How can an office that's based in Madrid work on a local campaign for Mexico?'

But often, brands underestimate the power of having a diverse composition in the team to come up with local work. We see that having an international team is actually what allows us to do relevant local work, because we know that although sometimes you

have different expressions and nuances, there are universal things that move us as human beings that are just that universal. We always joke that if an idea survives 17 different nationalities, it means we're onto something.

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