

Coca-Cola's Bruno Pietracci talks African optimism and new ways of working

By  Lauren Hartzenberg

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Beverage giant The Coca-Cola Company is optimistic about the African continent's economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic, and is building back better to grow its business in the region while adapting to evolving consumer behaviour and a changing corporate landscape.



Source: [Pexels](#)

“We’re very bullish about economic recovery. We’re bullish about Africa and South Africa, and fuelling that optimism with investments – not only to connect with consumers but with the trade and our manufacturing facilities – is critical for us,” said Bruno Pietracci, president of Africa for The Coca-Cola Company.

“In 2021 and 2022, we are already above the level of investment prior to the pandemic. We are really fuelling the engine so that we can accelerate growth in Africa,” he said.

Speaking during the Consumer Goods Council of South Africa’s (CGCSA) annual summit held this week, Brazilian-born Pietracci said that Coca-Cola strives to achieve a balance of global scale and local customisation. This means tailoring the Coca-Cola strategy to regional demands so that things like pack size, packaging design, price and refrigeration reflect cognisance of a particular country’s energy supply, consumer demographics and disposable income.

The Coca-Cola Company has been present in Africa for approximately 90 years, with 22 bottling partners and more than 120 factories currently dotted across the continent.

Pietracchi also touched on the “tremendous transformation in consumer behaviour” driven by the pandemic, noting the accelerated adoption of digital platforms and the growing consumption of products in the home versus at venues. “We are stepping up our game in digital as well as in packaging and price to capture those opportunities,” he said.

Global refresh

As part of a refresh to the company’s operating model, for the first time the African business is plugged directly into the Atlanta headquarters, a move that Pietracchi said allows Cola-Cola Africa the “freedom to be the masters of our own destiny”.

The pandemic proved to be a catalyst for change at Cola-Cola, as has been the case for many organisations. Notably, in 2020 the company announced that it would streamline its portfolio by retiring over 200 brands, including Coca-Cola’s first “diet soda” drink Tab, which enjoyed a small but loyal following in South Africa.

This streamlining process slashed the company’s global portfolio down from roughly 400 brands to just 150, enabling Coca-Cola “to nurture and double-down” on the brands that showed promising performance, Pietracchi said.



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Adapting the workplace

Pietracchi, who is based in Johannesburg, also spoke to how the pandemic forced Cola-Cola to adapt to new ways of

working.

"It's challenged us to do things in a different way. I'm most proud of how we've learnt to make bolder decisions much faster," he said, adding that decisions about changes in packaging and labelling, for example, which were once made over a few months are now being actioned in a week.

Coca-Cola Africa also needed to "embrace tech on a new level", Pietracchi said, when it shifted more than 500 office-based employees to remote work overnight. The company is now actively engaging with outside parties to reimagine what the workplace of the future looks like.

As many have discovered, work-from-home culture and the lack of work-life barriers that it can be associated with presents a new set of challenges. To address this, Pietracchi said Coca-Cola introduced new processes and routines including the formation of a Wellbeing Council to promote a healthy organisational culture.

"One of our key priorities was protecting employees' wellbeing ... I don't claim that we have it all worked out. The workload and the burnout of employees have been felt, but I believe we're making good progress," he said.



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Community involvement

Pietracchi touched on the need for Coca-Cola to support the communities in which it operates during times of distress, in particular small businesses, which derive a significant portion of their income from Coca-Cola products.

"I'm proud of the role we played in supporting the development of small business, not only during the pandemic but during riots in July ... We developed specific programmes to reignite and strengthen our partnership with such a crucial part of our value chain," he said.

The beverage company has supplied governments in Africa with supply chain capabilities to help level up their response to the pandemic, while bottling partners like Coca Cola Beverages Africa made changes to their production facilities to begin producing alcohol used for sanitiser.

"We have to step up our game and be part of the solutions for the communities across South Africa and the African continent so that we can grow with them," Pietracchi said.

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