Coca-Cola AI holiday adverts

IMPLEMENTED 2024–2025 · MANUFACTURING AND INDUSTRIAL · US · BAND C · PARTLY PROVED
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Coca-Cola made its "Holidays Are Coming" Christmas advert with generative AI in 2024 and again in 2025. Both drew public criticism, and an independent advert test gave the 2025 version its top score. Its US holiday TV adverts for 2026 were made without generative AI, per Marketing Dive.

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The impact band, proof marker and SEAM view are MarLuc's opinion. The organisation is not a MarLuc client and has not reviewed or endorsed this synopsis. Names and trademarks belong to their owners.

NOTICE WORDING LAST UPDATED 16 NOVEMBER 2026

AT A GLANCE

AI used: Generative AI video, made by outside AI studios (Secret Level, Silverside) with human prompting and shaping.

Implemented: 2024–2025. Grade: band C, Process change, Partly proved.

Headline result, as reported: 2025 AI advert scored 5.9 stars, the test maximum, with System1, while drawing widespread public criticism

1 · The case

The facts, as reported by the 5 sources listed at the end. Where a source is silent, the field says "Not reported".

Organisation

The Coca-Cola Company. Global soft drinks maker based in Atlanta, United States, with net revenues of $13.4 billion in the third quarter of 2026, by its results release. The advert is part of its annual "Holidays Are Coming" campaign, an homage to a 1995 advert, per The Hollywood Reporter. Canvas block: 3. Customers and proposition. Also 4. Operations and process, 8. Governance and risk.

Business challenge

The challenge. Not reported. Coca-Cola's head of generative AI said the company was taking a long view of what the technology can do and would not spend less on advertising overall.

Who implemented it

Secret Level (Industry partner): AI studio that produced the 2025 advert, per The Hollywood Reporter.
Silverside AI (Industry partner): AI studio that made another AI version of the 2025 advert, per The Hollywood Reporter; System1 credits it with the advert it tested.
The studios are outside creative suppliers. The models used are described only as several large language models.

Technology (SEAM pillar E)

SEAM types: not established; the sources do not say how the system works. Deployment: Not reported. Vendors and products: Secret Level, Silverside AI.

Where it was built in: Generative video produced by outside AI studios for a global advertising campaign; the specific models and tools are not named in the sources opened.

What changed

Before: the Christmas advert was made with conventional production. After: the 2024 and 2025 adverts were generated with AI by outside studios. The studio founder estimated about 20 people for the 2025 advert, against at least 50 for a typical one. Public criticism followed both years, and the 2025 advert still scored the top mark in System1's viewer test. [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]

What it cost

Not reported for the adverts. The Hollywood Reporter cites a reported $5 billion advertising budget and says AI could, in the long run, trim some of it; Coca-Cola's Pratik Thakar said the company will not spend less overall.

What it saved

Not reported. The only figure is the studio founder's estimate of about 20 people against at least 50. [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]

Governance and control

Coca-Cola gave the work to named outside studios and used its own archival paintings for the Santa image. System1 tested the finished advert. No source describes internal approval, accuracy checks or disclosure rules.

S2 · Accountable owner · Claimed
Pratik Thakar, global vice president and head of generative AI, speaks for the programme and calls it a companywide transformation. [1]

A1 · Safe use · Claimed
Per The Hollywood Reporter, the Santa image was generated exclusively from archival paintings that Coca-Cola owns. [1]

A2 · Human in the loop · Claimed
The trade report describes the animation as generated "with human prompting and shaping"; the studio founder says fewer people were needed than for a traditional advert. [1]

A3 · Monitoring and assurance · Claimed
Marketing Dive reports that the AI adverts exceeded Coca-Cola's internal benchmarks. System1, an independent research firm, tested the finished advert with a viewer panel; this measures reaction, not the AI's accuracy or safety. [4] [2]

A4 · Vendor AI · Not reported
Studio and model contracts and checks: Not reported.

A5 · Agent controls · Not reported
No agents described.

A6 · Standards and regulation · Not reported
Not reported.

What worked, what did not, what is unproven

WORKED

– System1 gave the 2025 advert its maximum 5.9-Star Rating and Exceptional scores for Spike Rating and Brand Fluency.

– System1 found that AI did not appear among the key associations and that most viewers took the advert as a charming animated film.

– The 2024 advert "racked up billions of impressions", per The Hollywood Reporter.

– Marketing Dive reports that the AI adverts exceeded Coca-Cola's internal benchmarks.

DID NOT

– Euronews reported widespread backlash again in 2025, with critics using terms such as "soulless", "creepy" and "boycott".

– Critics raised concerns about creative jobs and the value of human work.

– System1 noted negative comments about the use of AI and advised that the brand is wise not to mention AI in the advert.

– Marketing Dive reports that Coca-Cola's 2026 US holiday TV spots pivoted away from generative AI after two years in which the AI adverts proved divisive with consumers.

UNPROVEN

– Whether the adverts changed sales or brand health: Not reported.

– The cost of the AI adverts against conventional ones: Not reported.

– Whether the criticism affected purchase: Not reported.

Timeline

2023 Coca-Cola releases "Masterpiece", an earlier major advert using AI [1]

2024 First generative AI "Holidays Are Coming" advert; widely criticised [3]

Nov 2025 Second AI version released, made with Secret Level; criticised again [1]

Nov 2025 System1 gives the 2025 advert a 5.9-Star Rating, the test maximum [2]

Nov 2026 Coca-Cola launches its "Enjoy Joy" holiday TV spots, which Marketing Dive reports pivot away from generative AI [4]

2 · Grade and SEAM assessment

MarLuc's opinion, made on the evidence above. How cases are graded: marluc.co.uk/case-studies/how-we-rate

Level of change and impact

Claimed: B. Grade: C, Process change. Proof: Partly proved. Level of change: Process change.

Process change (Level 2, band C). Coca-Cola's head of generative AI describes a companywide marketing transformation (claimed band B); no source shows changed roles, budgets or sales.

Coca-Cola produced a whole global advert with generative AI and outside AI studios, with fewer people by the studio founder's estimate: a changed production process (band C). Coca-Cola's head of generative AI calls it part of a companywide marketing transformation (claimed band B), but no source shows changed roles, budgets or sales. In 2026 its US holiday TV adverts moved away from generative AI, per Marketing Dive.

The SEAM view and lessons learnt

The result is mixed by the sources' own account: a strong viewer test and internal benchmarks exceeded, per Marketing Dive, against an online reaction that Euronews described as an overwhelming backlash. The test measures how viewers respond to a finished advert; it cannot show whether the criticism cost the brand anything, and the advert also leans on 30 years of familiar assets, which System1 itself names as the main reason it works. Before copying the approach, a leadership team should ask how much of the effect comes from the AI and how much from the brand's existing assets, and what a public backlash would cost a less established brand.

1. Test finished AI work with real viewers, and compare it with a conventional version.
2. Separate the effect of AI from the effect of familiar brand assets.
3. Plan for public criticism of AI creative and decide in advance what you will measure.

Evidence

Score 2 of 4. Partly independent: a panel test by System1 and press reporting, with company statements for the production claims.

Evaluation method. Mixed: a panel test by System1 (independent of Coca-Cola) of viewer response, press reporting on public reaction, and interview statements by Coca-Cola and the studio. No sales or cost data.

Sources disagree. Coca-Cola and the studio say the 2025 craftsmanship is far better and tested well; Euronews describes the visuals as derivative and the backlash as overwhelming. System1 found the advert effective with panel viewers. The sources measure different things. The Hollywood Reporter says Secret Level produced the 2025 spot and Silverside made another AI version; System1 says Coca-Cola worked with Silverside AI on the advert it tested, so which version System1 tested is unclear. Euronews says the visuals are based on artists' works used

3 · Original sources

Read these in full. To challenge a fact or a grade, use the contact form at marluc.co.uk or the link on https://marluc.co.uk/case-studies/coca-cola-ai-holidays-are-coming-ad

[1] The Hollywood Reporter: Coca-Cola new AI holiday ad
https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/business/digital/coke-new-ai-holiday-ad-video-1236416491/

[2] System1: AI or No AI, Coke Gets the Christmas Love
https://system1group.com/ad-of-the-week/ai-or-no-ai-coke-gets-the-christmas-love

[3] Euronews: 'Real magic'? Coca-Cola's AI-generated Christmas ad sparks widespread backlash (again)
https://www.euronews.com/2025/11/05/real-magic-coca-colas-ai-generated-christmas-ad-sparks-widespread-backlash-again

[4] Marketing Dive: Coca-Cola pivots from divisive AI-generated ads for holiday campaign (November 2026)
https://www.marketingdive.com/news/coca-cola-pivots-from-divisive-ai-generated-ads-for-holiday-campaign/875215/

[5] The Coca-Cola Company: Coca-Cola reports third quarter 2026 results (October 2026)
https://investors.coca-colacompany.com/news-events/press-releases/detail/1176/coca-cola-reports-third-quarter-2026-results-and-raises-full-year-guidance

The Coca-Cola Company website: https://www.coca-colacompany.com

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