

# IN THE BEGINNING — A HISTORY OF THE MARKETING POWER OF

# Santa!

THE SATURDAY EVENING POST



“MY HAT’S OFF to  
*the pause that refreshes*”

Old Santa, busiest man in the world, takes time out for *the pause that refreshes* with ice-cold Coca-Cola. He even knows how to be good to himself. And so he always comes up smiling. So can you. Wherever you go shopping, you

find a cheerful soda fountain with ice-cold Coca-Cola ready.

The Coca-Cola Co., Atlanta, Ga.

•  
LISTEN IN  
Grantland Rice—Famous  
Sports Champions—  
Coca-Cola Orchestra,  
Every Wed. 10:30 p. m.  
Easter Standard Time.  
• Coast-to-Coast  
NBC Network.  
•

OVER NINE MILLION A DAY . . . IT HAD TO BE GOOD TO GET WHERE IT IS

# Coke Lore Coca-Cola and Santa Claus

(From Coca-Cola's Web Site)

Most people can agree on what Santa Claus looks like -- jolly, with a red suit and a white beard. But he did not always look that way, and Coca-Cola® advertising actually helped shape this modern-day image of Santa.

2006 marked the 75th anniversary of the famous Coca-Cola Santa Claus. Starting in 1931, magazine ads for Coca-Cola featured St. Nick as a kind, jolly man in a red suit. Because magazines were so widely viewed, and because this image of Santa appeared for more than three decades, the image of Santa most people have today is largely based on our advertising.



Before the 1931 introduction of the Coca-Cola Santa Claus created by artist Haddon Sundblom, the image of Santa ranged from big to small and fat to tall. Santa even appeared as an elf and looked a bit spooky.

Through the centuries, Santa Claus has been depicted as everything from a tall gaunt man to an elf. He has worn a bishop's robe and a Norse huntsman's animal skin. The modern-day Santa Claus is a combination of a number of the stories from a variety of countries.



Thomas Nast • 1869



Thomas Nast • 1881

The Civil War cartoonist Thomas Nast drew Santa Claus for Harper's Weekly in 1862; Santa was shown as a small elf-like figure who supported the Union. Nast continued to draw Santa for 30 years and along the way changed the color of his coat from tan to the now traditional red. Though some people believe the Coca-Cola Santa wears red because that is the Coke® color, the red suit comes from Nast's interpretation of St. Nick.



**John Leech • 1843**

The Coca-Cola Company began its Christmas advertising in the 1920s with shopping-related ads in magazines like *The Saturday Evening Post*. The first Santa ads used a strict-looking Claus, in the vein of Thomas Nast.

At this time, many people thought of Coca-Cola as a drink only for warm weather. The Coca-Cola Company began a campaign to remind people that Coca-Cola was a great choice in any month. This began with the 1922 slogan “Thirst Knows No Season,” and continued with a campaign connecting a true icon of winter -- Santa Claus -- with the beverage.

In 1930, artist Fred Mizen painted a department store Santa in a crowd drinking a bottle of Coke. The ad featured the world’s largest soda fountain, which was located in the department store of Famous Barr Co. in St. Louis, Mo. Mizen’s painting was used in print ads that Christmas season, appearing in *The Saturday Evening Post* in December 1930.



Archie Lee, the D’Arcy Advertising Agency executive working with The Coca-Cola Company, wanted the next campaign to show a wholesome Santa as both realistic and symbolic. In 1931, The Coca-Cola Company commissioned Michigan-born illustrator Haddon Sundblom to develop advertising images using Santa Claus -- showing Santa himself, not a man dressed as Santa, as Mizen’s work had portrayed him.



For inspiration, Sundblom turned to Clement Clark Moore’s 1822 poem “A Visit From St. Nicholas” (commonly called “’Twas the Night Before Christmas”). Moore’s description of St. Nick led to an image of Santa that was warm, friendly, pleasantly plump and human. For the next 33 years, Sundblom painted portraits of Santa that helped to create the modern image of Santa -- an interpretation that today lives on in the minds of people of all ages, all over the world.

From 1931 to 1964, Coca-Cola advertising showed Santa delivering (and playing!) with toys, pausing to

read a letter and enjoy a Coke, playing with children who stayed up to greet him and raiding the refrigerators at a number of homes. The original oil paintings Sundblom created were adapted for Coca-Cola advertising in magazines, store displays, billboards, posters, calendars and even plush dolls. Many of those items today are popular collectibles.

The Coca-Cola Santa made its debut in 1931 in *The Saturday Evening Post* and appeared regularly in that magazine, as well as *Ladies Home Journal*, *National Geographic*, *The New Yorker* and others. The instantly popular ad campaign appeared each season, reflecting the times. One ad even featured Santa in a rocket!

Sundblom continued to create new visions of Santa Claus through 1964. For decades after, Coca-Cola advertising has featured Santa's image based on Sundblom's original works.



These original paintings by Haddon Sundblom are some of the most prized pieces in the art collection of our Company's Archives Department, and have been on exhibit around the world, including at the Louvre in Paris, the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago, the Isetan Department Store in Tokyo and the NK Department Store in Stockholm.

The Coca-Cola Santa has had a powerful, enduring quality that continues to resonate today. Many of the original paintings can be seen on display at World of Coca-Cola Atlanta or touring during the holiday season.

Did you know?

It's a common misconception that Santa wears a red coat because red is the color of Coca-Cola. In fact, Santa appeared in a red coat before artist Haddon Sundblom painted him for Coca-Cola advertising.

People loved the Coca-Cola Santa images and paid such close attention to them, that when anything changed, they sent letters to The Coca-Cola Company. One year, Santa's large belt was backwards (perhaps because artist Haddon Sundblom used himself as a model and painted by looking in a mirror). Another year, Santa Claus appeared without a wedding ring, causing fans to write asking what happened to Mrs. Claus.





In the beginning, artist Haddon Sundblom painted the image of Santa using a live model -- his friend, Lou Prentiss, a retired salesman. When Prentiss passed away, Sundblom used himself as a model, painting while looking into a mirror. After the 1930s, he used photographs to create the image of St. Nick.

The children who appear with Santa Claus in Haddon Sundblom's paintings were based on Sundblom's neighbors. However, the neighbors were both girls, and Sundblom simply changed one to a boy in his paintings!

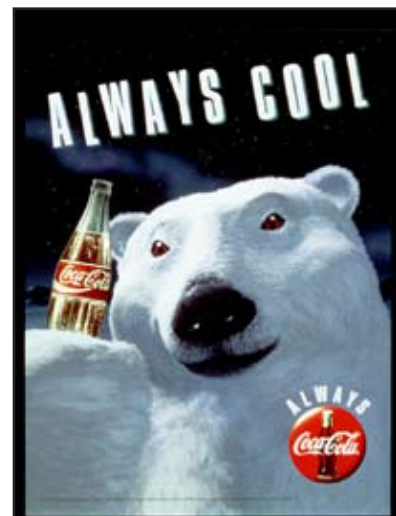
The dog in the 1964 original Santa Claus painting by artist Haddon Sundblom was actually a gray poodle belonging to the neighborhood florist. Sundblom painted the animal with black fur, instead, to make the dog stand out in the holiday scene.



The image of Santa Claus has appeared on cartons for bottles of Coca-Cola since 1931, when artist Haddon Sundblom first created his version of St. Nick. Early cartons completely covered the bottles of Coke -- almost as if they were inside a box -- and had a handle at the very top. The carton itself was created -- and patented -- by the Coca-Cola system. Introduced in 1923, it allowed people to take home more bottles of Coke.

The Coca-Cola Polar Bear stars with Santa Claus on the 2006 store advertising for the U.S. Hispanic market. The Coca-Cola Polar Bear was introduced in 1993 as part of the "Always Coca-Cola" campaign. The first commercial featuring the bear showed was called "Northern Lights" and showed a group of bears watching a "movie" (the aurora borealis) and drinking from bottles of Coca-Cola.

The "Sprite Boy" character, who appeared with Santa Claus and was used in Coca-Cola advertising in the 1940s and 50s, was also created by artist Haddon Sundblom. Though The Coca-Cola Company does have a drink called Sprite®, the Sprite Boy character was not named





for the beverage. Sprite Boy's name came because he is a sprite -- an elf. Sprite Boy first appeared in ads in 1942, while the drink Sprite was not introduced until the 1960s.

In 2001, the artwork from Haddon Sundblom's 1962 original painting was used as the basis for an animated TV commercial starring the Coca-Cola Santa. The ad was created by Academy Award-winning animator Alexandre Petrov.