

included building coalitions, coordinating messages, influencing the media, questioning science, and lobbying at every level of government.

Coca-Cola has waged a coordinated campaign to oppose or undermine public health legislation around the world, including opposing soda taxes in [14 countries](#), according to a trove of leaked emails. Amid the leaks aimed at the campaign of Hillary Clinton, the website “DCLeaks” in October published a number of internal Coca-Cola emails detailing the tactics that the corporation, as well as the broader beverage industry, has used to undermine policies from soda taxes to GMO labeling to junk food marketing restrictions.

It is noteworthy that many of these tactics mirror those used by the tobacco industry to derail tobacco control policies in the US and around the world. Coca-Cola’s tactics include:

1. Misleading journalists and altering news reporting. Coca-Cola and the American Beverage Association worked to actively influence media coverage to shape public perceptions regarding soda taxes.

Industry front groups such as the American Beverage Association sought to suppress or discredit credible research showing that soda taxes can be effective. They misled or confused reporters with their own biased, industry-funded research and insisted failure to give their research equal weight would reflect a lack of “balance”. Targeted reporters included [Candace Choi](#) (AP), [Margo Sanger-Katz](#) (New York Times), [Mike Esterl](#) (Wall Street Journal), [Anahad O'Connor](#) (New York Times) and [Jennifer Chaussee](#) (WIRED). Coca-Cola even tried to prevent Choi’s article on industry-funded research from being published by [urging editors](#) to remove the story.

2. Shifting the blame. Coca-Cola attempted to shift the focus from soda taxes to other issues to influence the public and elected officials.

Coca-Cola employed this tactic to derail a soda tax in Israel by mobilizing a bottling company to adopt its messaging.

“Any discussion about taxation on SSBs must be steered towards addressing ALL added sugars in all foodstuffs.” – Hamis Banks ([4/18/16](#)). Coca-Cola executives also encourage its anti-soda tax campaign messaging to focus on challenging the proposed economic benefits of a soda tax.

3. Voluntary self-regulation. The soda industry also tried to evade a soda tax in the Netherlands by presenting itself as capable of its own regulation through a “calorie commitment.”

“As anticipated earlier this week, our calorie commitment in the Netherlands is now out and is getting massive media traction locally. It’s a key element



Coca-Cola lobbyists are “committed to effectively managing the national, state and local public policy issues and strengthening our social license to operate so that our business can grow.”

in our strategy to fight discriminatory legislation and to improve category perception by taking the lead on innovation, choice, transparency and balanced lifestyles.” Salvatore Gabola (6/25/15).

4. Influencing international agencies. The leaked emails even suggest that Coca-Cola targeted international regulatory bodies like the World Health Organization (WHO) when the company announced support for sugar taxes.

Coca-Cola attempted to influence an internal accountability policy of the WHO designed to protect against conflicts of interest, seeing it as a barrier to their engagement with the WHO. The corporation attempted to position itself as a partner to public health rather than an entity whose interests are at odds with it. “Through our trade associations we have advocated for the potential of the private sector to positively contribute to public health challenges.” – Wouter Vermeulen (5/18/16).

5. Positioning itself as part of the “solution”. Despite its attempts to position itself as a partner in public health, the emails reveal that Coca-Cola is clear about its goal: “strengthening our social license to operate so that our business can grow.” (Kate Rumbaugh, 12/18/15) ■

Sources

[Leaked: Coca-Cola’s Worldwide Political Strategy to Kill Soda Taxes](#)

[Coke Lobbies Media To Include Biased Soda Tax Research](#)

[Hacked emails show how Coca-Cola fights the soda tax at local and global levels](#)

[Leaked Coca-Cola emails reveal an opportunity for advocates](#)

[ABA President Neely op-ed: Soda tax not the answer](#)

American Beverage Association pushes Balance Calories campaign

The American Beverage Association (ABA) is going full throttle with its campaign to promote “balance” – the notion that you can drink all the sugary drinks you like as long as you exercise. With an onslaught of social media and other advertising, the ABA and key members – Coca-Cola, PepsiCo and Dr Pepper Snapple Group – are encouraging people to “balance what you eat, drink & do”, a transparent effort to distract people from role that the beverage industry plays in



contributing to diet-related diseases. It misleads by ignoring the direct metabolic effects sugar has in addition to being a source of empty calories.

On the campaign website and TV [advertisement](#) that aired on “Meet the Press,” “This Week,” CNN, MSNBC, and Fox, ABA President and CEO Susan Neely suggests that corporations such as Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, and Dr Pepper Snapple Group, are working to reduce the amount of sugar in their products and are collaborating with public health groups. Since 2014, they have been working in cities, including Los Angeles, New York City, and Little Rock, and counties in Alabama and Mississippi, where obesity rates are the highest in the country. These efforts to reduce caloric intake throughout the country are part of the Balance Calories Initiative, in which the soda giants are partnering with the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, founded by the Clinton Foundation and the American Heart Association, to reduce the number of calories that people consume from beverages nationally to 20 percent by 2025. The ABA, Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, and Dr Pepper Snapple Group have recently created a website, entitled [balanceus.org](#), which encourages people to “balance what you eat, drink & do.”

The Balance Calories Initiative emphasizes messages reminiscent of those spread by the [Global Energy Balance Network \(GEBN\)](#), a front group that was founded by Coca-Cola’s former chief science and health officer, Rhona S. Applebaum. GEBN was disbanded in 2015 due to pressure from public health groups. The research that GEBN funded was intended to show that exercise, rather than reducing sugar intake, should be the focus of reducing obesity. [Recent studies](#) have shown that the sugar industry has an over 50-year history of influencing research results on the links between diet-related diseases and sugar through funding.

The ABA’s [balanceus.org](#) website suggests that it is promoting healthier choices by providing more beverage size options and calorie labels. Coca-Cola, Dr Pepper Snapple Group, PepsiCo, and the ABA have also created a website entitled “[Delivering Choices](#),” which presents the same message of balancing calories and making choices based on the corporations’ increased options. One of the group’s commitments, called “[Mixify](#),” is an educational campaign designed to encourage teens to “balance what [they] eat, drink, and do.” The corporations have also committed to removing full calorie sodas from schools in the United States, only advertising juice, water, and milk-based drinks to kids under the age of 12, and written a set of guidelines for drinks in schools, called the “National School Beverage Guidelines.” In the TV advertisement, Neely indicates that the progress of the energy balance campaign will be measured by an independent third party. ■

Sources

[ABA video “Real Change”, featuring ABA President Susan Neely](#)

[ABA’s “Balance” campaign home page](#)

[ABA’s “Delivering choices for balance” page](#)

[Coke’s Chief Scientist, Who Orchestrated Obesity Research, Is Leaving](#)

[American Beverage Association weighs in to combat obesity rates](#)

[What Happens When ‘Big Soda’ Funds Health Studies?](#)

How the beverage industry markets to vulnerable groups worldwide



The beverage industry uses a variety of tactics to market its products. Some of its most targeted marketing includes marketing to kids, marketing in the Global South through environmental stewardship campaigns, and marketing to people of color. ■

Tactics	Examples
Marketing to children	1. The Coca-Cola caravan visits more than 25 US cities and 44 cities in the UK and donates toys to teens.
	2. Coca-Cola aired its Christmas commercial , featuring the Coca-Cola Christmas truck and enthusiastic children.
	3. Nestle chocolate milk brands, Milo and Nesquik, sponsor FC Barcelona and market to children around the world through nutritional and physical education.
Marketing: sports sponsorship	1. Monster Energy will sponsor Tiger Woods in his return to competitive golf.
New products and brands	1. Coca-Cola Israel created a selfie-taking device that attaches to the bottom of its 0.5-liter bottles.
	2. Coca-Cola released a new ginger flavor in Australia in the hopes of compensating for falling sales.