

How Coca-Cola remade its Christmas truck ad with AI video

Facts as of 2026-10-28

At a glance

For Christmas, and again the next year, Coca-Cola had outside studios remake its old holiday truck ad with AI video instead of a film shoot. An AI video generator is a program that turns a typed description into a few seconds of moving picture. People write the descriptions, pick the good clips from thousands, fix them and edit them into an ad. Taken together, the AI made the ad faster, and ordinary viewers who did not know it was AI enjoyed it. It also made visible mistakes, angered the people who make ads and art for a living, and nothing outside the company shows whether the ads changed Coke sales.

1. What they did with AI

The 2024 ad kept the story of the 1995 film: Pratik Thakar, who leads generative AI at Coca-Cola, said the AI was never asked for a plot^[1]. Thakar said people made every creative decision, retrying and rewording each clip until it worked^[1], and real musicians, not AI, re-scored the music^[1]. What the AI made was the pictures. For 2025 the company ran it again, and The Hollywood Reporter found only animals on screen, with Santa the one person^[2], generated only from old Haddon Sundblom paintings Coca-Cola owns^[2]. This time, The Grocer reported, a label on screen told viewers the ad was made with AI^[3].

2. What the AI did

The AI made the ad fast. For the 2025 ad, Secret Level, one of the studios, said five AI specialists sorted more than 70,000 generated clips in 30 days^[4]. In November 2025, marketing chief Manolo Arroyo told the Wall Street Journal that a shoot used to start a year ahead, and that production now took about a month^[5].

Ordinary viewers enjoyed the result. In 2024, System1, which tests ads on panels of ordinary viewers, gave the AI ad 5.9 stars, its top score^[6] and the same System1 had given the filmed original^[7].

The company is sure of it. Coca-Cola told Marketing Week that the 2024 ad cost a tenth of what it would have cost before^[8]. In November 2025, Coca-Cola's Islam ElDessouky called the 2025 ad one of its top-tested ads in history^[9]. ElDessouky said the company would keep using AI because it brings business results^[9].

Outside the company, the public mostly agreed. Sprout Social, which tracks social media, found that 61% of the conversation about the 2025 ad was positive^[10]. PetaPixel reported that the 2024 ad sat badly with creative professionals, not with the general public^[11].

Our view: on the brief Coca-Cola gave it, the AI delivered. But the figures on time and saving come only from the company and the studios it paid, who gain from telling it that way.

3. What it did not do

But System1 said that in 2024 it never told its panel the ad was AI-made.^[6] It shows enjoyment, not acceptance: most people in a Harris Poll survey said AI-made ads make them less likely to buy.^[12]

On feeling, it fell short of film: in DAVID's test, the warmest AI version was 38% less likely to make people feel warmth than the filmed 2020 ad.^[13] It could not keep the brand's own truck consistent: in the 2025 ad, only two of 11 truck scenes show the same truck, a Drum columnist counted.^[14] Creative Bloq and TechRadar saw its look shift from shot to shot.^{[15][16]}

Artists and ad creatives attacked it. Gravity Falls creator Alex Hirsch wrote that Coke is made "from the blood of out-of-work artists".^[17] A Dentsu strategist said it handed "the tools of creativity to the machine".^[18] In 2025, the illustrator Karla Ortiz called for a boycott.^[19]

What we don't know

- What either ad cost next to a filmed one, since Coca-Cola would not say and the saving is the main reason to try this.
- Whether the ads moved Coke sales or brand standing, which would show whether the backlash cost customers.
- How people rate the ad once they know it is AI-made, the answer a brand worried about its customers needs.
- Whether Coca-Cola makes another AI Christmas ad, which would show it thinks they paid off.

4. What it means for any business

For a small business the risk is different. An ad tester wrote that the pushback over AI is less of a worry for small brands^[6]. An agency head told MediaPost that a smaller or newer brand making the same move could face lasting damage^[20]. So try it on a short seasonal clip, not your main ad.

The owner, or whoever runs your social media posts, has to own it. In Canada, Ad Standards' October 2025 guidelines say content made or heavily changed with AI should be disclosed^[21], and a label cannot rescue an ad that misleads overall^[22].

A shared AI video subscription costs \$144 to \$420 a year, against \$500 to \$2,980 a year to hire a local videographer for a short video^{[23][24]}.

This week, make a short AI clip of a holiday scene, not of what you sell, and post it beside your usual post to compare. Keep your products real: a diner in Ontario told Daily Hive they refuse to go to a restaurant that uses AI images of its food^[22].

5. What we can learn from them

Decide, before the first clip, which jobs stay with people. Coca-Cola kept the story, the choices and the music in human hands, and that is why the ad still felt like theirs. A tool can make the pictures; it should never own the message a customer feels.

Know what your test asked. A good score from people who liked an ad is not the same as people accepting how it was made, so ask both questions.

Give one person the job of checking every shot against the last. The AI changed the brand's own truck, and nobody caught it before the public did.

Say how it was made before anyone has to find out. Coca-Cola put a label on its second ad; putting it on the first would have cost nothing.

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