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Betsy Woodruff

Coke's kowtow: Proud members of the fight against obesity?

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Perhaps the oddest aspect of the campaign, though, is the precarious line it's forced to walk — between blithely ignoring the potential negative health consequences of drinking gallons of soda every day and discouraging potential customers from buying Coke's product. The campaign seems to aim to navigate that Scylla and Charybdis by bragging about its comparatively healthier options and encouraging people to exercise. That's nice of them, I guess, but it doesn't seem like it would be especially nice for their bottom line. So what does Coca-Cola stand to gain from this strange new spat of ads, besides more of the same nose-snubbing from Bittman types?

Patrick Basham of the Cato Institute has a theory. He holds that this supposedly voluntary public-health campaign is a bit more coerced than Atlanta might let on. Basham is an obesity-epidemic denier (and argued his case in his 2007 book *Diet Nation: Exposing the Obesity Crusade*), but holds that even if America's weight problem is as grave as it sounds, government pressure on food companies is still problematic. And he argues that there's plenty of that pressure to go around. In this case, he theorizes that the corporation has put out the new ad campaign, changed its packaging, and tried to encourage soda-drinkers to exercise because if it doesn't, the regulatory consequences will be worse.