

Cie Nicholson

Director of marketing—Mountain Dew, Pepsi-Cola Co.

Complete marketer helps Pepsi see Red

When Pepsi-Cola Co. rolled out its first Mountain Dew line extension, the company looked to Cie Nicholson.

A 37-year-old veteran of the tobacco wars, Ms. Nicholson was in on the super-caffeinated crimson soda, Code Red, from last year's conception to national rollout in May.

In pouring yet another carbonated soft drink into an already crowded and competitive category, Ms. Nicholson and her team needed to create a buzz. So at February's X Games in Vermont, they gave Code Red to the daring snowboarder, maniac biker and gravity-defying skier athletes but only talked about it with spectators.

HUSH-HUSH EFFORT

They were cagey even when they started advertising—using an online teaser campaign that said Code Red was coming in May but not bothering to say exactly what Code Red was.

"For most people, they didn't have an idea what it was. Was it a food product, a drink, what? Then we slowly revealed it was

Mountain Dew," Ms. Nicholson explains.

Ms. Nicholson, who was christened Cynthia but adopted Cie (pronounced "see") at college, joined the PepsiCo unit in 1997 as director of innovations in the fountain beverage division. Last summer, she became director of marketing for Mountain Dew, the country's leading non-cola soft drink and the company's No. 2 seller.

"Cie is a complete marketer," says her boss, Dave Burwick, VP-marketing for carbonated soft drinks, Pepsi-Cola North America. "She can take an idea from concept to execution faster than anyone I've ever seen. Speed is what characterizes her—how she thinks, how she talks and how she acts."

Ms. Nicholson, who rides mountain bikes, golfs and likes to gamble in Las Vegas, says she long had been interested in consumer goods marketing and was drawn to soft drinks because they're so image-driven—and have the supporting marketing dollars.

The same factors attracted her to R.J. Reynolds Tobacco

Holdings' R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Co.—her first post-MBA job.

For eight years, the non-smoker worked on the Camel and Winston cigarette brands—repositioning Winston, and beefing up direct and sports marketing, grass-roots efforts, events and loyalty programs for Camel. She moved to new-product development and worked on Eclipse, RJR's smokeless cigarette that launched in 1997 but achieved only tepid success.

"New products are uncharted territory. You're starting something from scratch. It's very interesting trying to mold something from the beginning," the executive says. "It's a big marketing challenge."

After nine years in Winston-Salem, N.C., Ms. Nicholson, a native of Chicago's North Shore, longed for more concrete than the Tar Heel State could offer, so it was off to Pepsi headquarters in Purchase, N.Y.—30 miles from Manhattan.

SAMPLING SPLASH

Ms. Nicholson was on site at the Mall of America when Pepsi's sports marketing group set up sampling at the shopping event on the outskirts of Minneapolis. They used music and break-dancers to lure people to taste Code Red.

That marketing evolved into point-of-purchase materials and radio, with TV that could follow as soon as this month. Omnicom Group's BBDO Worldwide, New York, is handling. The rollout is one of the company's largest new-product pushes, in addition to the



low-cal Pepsi One and lemon-lime Sierra Mist.

"We've been on a tear since the '90s, and we're going to continue that. It's a lot of fun being involved in that and everything we get to do," Ms. Nicholson says, referring to NASCAR races, sponsor-

ship of alternative sports such as the X Games, as well as men's and women's NCAA basketball games.

"These are huge brands, and there are a lot of different things you can do."

—HILLARY CHURA