



**Jamil Janjua,**  
ceo, Octara & Chief Editor  
janjua05@gmail.com

*Dear Reader,*

“Na raheyga baans. Na bajeygi baansuri...” That pretty much synthesizes this edition’s column Nature Calling for Action Stations, the 32nd in the series, which brings into stark relief the trials and tribulations of the Amazon Rainforest, the critical lungs of the Earth, bruised and blackened by humanity’s greed for gold. That’s at the back-of-the-book.

Front-of-the-book is our cover story by **Jason Del Rey** that deals with the corporate world’s increasing inroads to our private lives, and all in the name of providing a better customer experience. He writes about the Coca-Cola Freestyle dispenser that debuted in 2009 and lets customers choose from more than 100 drinks and flavors. More than 50,000 of them are in public use. Why do many of them have what appears to be a small camera lens embedded above the touchscreen? Coke spokesman Scott Leith has said that camera capabilities were included in earlier designs and tested in a laboratory setting in 2018 and 2019. “The company has no plans to use cameras in the future.” Hmmmmm....

**Peter Vanham** in his CEO DAILY column has talked of “Re-shoring” and “Near-shoring” as tactics to provide relief from possible trade disruptions resulting from the Middle East conflict in the Strait of Hormuz or the Suez Canal. But, he says, no one can run away from rising oil prices, inflation, a recession, or a drop in the stock market. “Resilience” and “Geostrategy” are Peter Vanham’s nominees for the buzzwords of 2023.

**Eddy** “everything will be alright” Quan has written about what to do when nothing is working, as in when it rains, it pours. He says so long as business is decent all is well. “As long as I am building and monetizing my email list, growing my audience, putting out content and delivering for my clients I know I’ll be just fine even when everything else seems to be going to sh!ts.”

**Cal at Reword** <cal@reword.com> has advocated borrowing ideas, and quotes Robert Rose as saying that uniqueness isn’t a requirement for content marketing success - and it never was. Rose provides 3 tips on how to reuse or repurpose ideas. Borrowing ideas is not merely recycling. It’s about exploring concepts and making them your own.

**JJ** is back with his selection of Lifelong Learning Tips, and they’re all spot-on! The one that resonated most concerned withholding information, billed as one of the fastest ways to destroy trust. Tell people everything you can, even when the news is bad. Always tell the truth; it’s simpler. As Richard Heckert, the retired chairman of DuPont, once noted: “If you always tell the truth, you won’t have to remember what you said.” And on that thought, enjoy your read! 😊

---

Explore JJ’s curated articles for expert insights on managing people, business, and personal growth. Gain valuable knowledge and prepare for future challenges with confidence.

---

## INSIDE:



**Wait, why is there a camera hole in that Coke vending machine?**

By **Jason Del Rey** | 8 min read

---



**CEO Daily**

By **Peter Vanham** | 4 min read

---



**what to do when nothing is working**

By **Eddy Quan** | 5 min read

---



**Your Best Content Might Come From Borrowed Ideas**

By **Edward de Bono** | 4 min read

---



**Lifelong Learning Tips**

JJ’s Selection

---



**Nature Calling for ACTION STATIONS!**

Adil Ahmad | 11 min read

# Wait, why is there a camera hole in that Coke vending machine?

Jason Del Rey | 8 min read

If you've recently visited a fast-food restaurant like Wendy's or Burger King or a movie theater like AMC, there's a good chance you've grabbed a drink from a modern-looking soda fountain with a touch screen.

The machine in question, dubbed the Coca-Cola Freestyle, debuted in 2009 and lets customers choose from more than 100 drinks and flavors—from the traditional Coke or Sprite to fringe faves like flavored ginger ales. Though carbonation snobs have been known to complain that these soda fountains allow remnants from one drink to seep into the next pour, the Freestyle devices have been popular enough that more than 50,000 of them are in public use.

And yet, one mystery about the machines has popped up occasionally over time... if you are looking closely enough: Why do many of them have what appears to be a small camera lens embedded above the touchscreen?

This question began with a tip passed along to this reporter: A salesman for a Big Tech company had boasted that Coca-Cola was capturing images of soda fountain customers through cameras, and then working with said cloud-computing giant to gain insights on customers' facial reactions when they blend certain flavors together to



create a custom drink. With that data, the thinking went, Coca-Cola might have new insights into new flavors it should consider producing.

A source who worked for Coca-Cola for many years told Fortune they had heard a similar rumor, but couldn't confirm it for sure. A [few Reddit posts](#) also pondered the question of the camera hole with mostly unsatisfactory responses. And a [Coca-Cola spec sheet found online](#) for one of the Freestyle models lists an embedded camera as one of the soda fountain parts, along with "future capability for motion sense and facial recognition." Hmm.

While a camera embedded in a soda machine might sound absurd, businesses and event venues are increasingly using new facial analysis and recognition technologies in public settings. MSG Entertainment, which owns the Madison Square Garden sports arena as well as other venues like Radio City Music Hall, has [recently used facial recognition technology to bar lawyers](#) working for firms engaged in legal battles with the company from attending any events at its New York venues. More [airports are adding it](#) at security checkpoints too. And just this February, students at the University of Waterloo pressured its administration to remove [vending machines secretly embedded with facial analysis technology](#).

## So what does Coke have to say about all of this?

A spokesman for the company, Scott Leith, said in a statement that, “Camera capabilities were included in earlier designs and tested in a laboratory setting in 2018 and 2019. The company has no plans to use cameras in the future.”

Leith did not elaborate on whether the machines in the field still have cameras in them nor on the exact nature of the testing. But a patent application filed in the summer of 2018 by two former Coca-Cola employees may provide a snapshot of the intent, saying the system “may be able to determine the sentiment of the consumer.”

“For example, whether a consumer who appears angry seems to appear happier after dispensing a beverage and/or whether the consumer enjoyed the beverage,” it says. “Such data also may be used to identify new mixes that are preferred by consumers...Entirely new beverage combinations thus may be created and promoted.” This reasoning sounds a lot like the original tip this reporter received.

The application also cited the potential for a soda machine to identify demographic information about a customer “for marketing purposes as well as for an improved consumer experience.”

“The method may include the steps of sensing physical characteristics of the consumer, matching those physical characteristics of the consumer with demographic characteristics, promoting a beverage selection to the consumer based upon the matched demographic characteristics, and providing a beverage to the consumer,” the application read.

But there’s a bit more. As of last month, a case study on the website of an AI company called Quantiphi referenced working on a facial recognition project related to the Coca-Cola Freestyle machine.

“Each vending machine comes with a camera installed, in which an image is captured for every customer interacting with the machine,” the case study on Quantiphi’s website read. “Coca Cola’s Marketing team aspired to use these images to generate insights on consumer preferences and usage patterns,” including to “analyze the types of ‘mocktails’ preferred by their consumers.”

The mocktails in question reference when a Freestyle soda fountain customer creates their own drink by mixing two or more flavors available from the machine.

The case study also said that Quantiphi built “a custom machine learning model trained on 8 to 10 thousand images, capable of detecting customer demographics...using facial feature recognition. As a result, Coca-Cola’s Marketing team is able to capture and evaluate demographic details of customers, which are then used to develop focused marketing strategies and launch potential individual products, consequently driving growth.”

A Quantiphi spokesperson, Hadley Mayes, said the partnership occurred in 2017 but that it was just an experiment. Quantiphi later removed the case study from its website after Fortune inquired about it, saying it did not reflect the company’s current capabilities. Mayes declined to provide any more details on the initiative, such as where it took place or whether it was in a public setting, citing a nondisclosure agreement.

Today, thousands of Coca-Cola Freestyle machines remain in public view with a clear slot for a camera and some questions about how the company has used the cameras to date. If you have more info, this reporter would very much love to learn more.

And with that, here’s what else is happening in tech news today ■

### Source:

<https://fortune.com/2024/03/29/coke-freestyle-machine-camera/>

# CEO DAILY

*by* PETER VANHAM

4 min read

---

Good morning, Peter Vanham here in Geneva.

The Israel-Hamas war has deeply divided societies around the world, including many companies and institutions. But as the Israeli offensive in Gaza intensifies, companies will have to shift gears from talking about the conflict and its impact on employees to dealing with its economic ramifications.

Those could be so severe that they could plunge the world back into a recession, cause oil prices to surge to \$150, and depress stock prices by some 20%, EY-Parthenon's chief economist Gregory Daco told me. Even companies that have no business in the Middle East would then be caught in its economic fallout.

"If your market is 90% U.S.-based, in the Midwest, why should you care about the [conflict]? Well, you will have to care because it will have consequences that will affect your business," Daco said. "Depending on how diffuse the situation becomes, the consequences could go from very marginal to significant."

The hypothetical situation outlined above,

which Daco dubbed the "uncontained" scenario, includes a widening of the front to Lebanon and Syria, direct involvement of the U.S. and Iran, and wider social unrest in the Middle East. That outcome isn't more likely than a more contained scenario, which would limit the war to a ground offensive in Gaza and have almost no long-term global economic consequences. Still, CEOs better take all possibilities into account as they plan ahead.

The prospect of long-term economic consequences also points to a definitive end to the days in which multinational companies could simply forecast economic growth, trade, and manufacturing costs for their global markets. They must also factor in the constant threat of disruptive forces like political and social turmoil and war.

"Reshoring" and "nearshoring" can provide relief from possible trade disruptions resulting from the Middle East conflict in the Strait of Hormuz or the Suez Canal, but no one can run away from rising oil prices, inflation, a recession, or a drop in the stock market. "Resilience" and "geostrategy" are my nominees for the buzzwords of 2023 ■

**Peter Vanham** <peter.vanham@fortune.com>

# what to do when nothing is working

By **Eddy Quan** | 5 min read

What to do when nothing is working  
Ever heard that expression “when it rains, it pours”?

I hope so because it accurately describes the kind of week I’ve had.

First off, let’s start with the gas. We have a gas stove in our kitchen and as you know, since I’m on a strict diet....

I’ve been eating 99.99% of my meals at home so I can stay healthy and lean down.

Well early this week we got a letter from the mayor saying the entire city’s gas supply will be shut down “until further notice” because there’s some issue with the central gas pipes overheating.

This was on Tuesday.... On Wednesday, as I went to cook my breakfast eggs, the gas went out.

Thankfully, we have ONE electric burner that we’ve never ever used so I turned that sucker on and made my breakfast.

It’s one of those old ones so it took a while to heat up but it got the job done and I was glad we have at least one burner to cook our meals in.

Cool right?

Well later that day, while I am at the gym and my girl is at home prepping lunch, it all goes belly up.

Just as she’s halfway through cooking the meat, the electric burner explodes and the stovetop (which is made of glass) shatters into a million pieces leaving my kitchen covered in broken glass.

So now we have no stove to cook with. Great.

So we’re doing all of our meals in the air fryer and microwave while the landlord sources a new stovetop.

Right after the explosion, we get a call from the building administration that the gas is back on and we can go back to cooking again.

I forgot to mention while all this is happening, our internet cut off randomly right before the gas went out on Tuesday.

Normally, it drops out for 5 minutes at most but

this time it was out for a full 24 hours.

So I spent a full day working off my phone data which is shoddy at best.

And this morning? It went out again which is why I’m writing this to you from my phone.

Which brings me to today...

I have no stove and no internet. My gas is back but since there’s no stove, I still need to cook with my air fryer and microwave.

I tried making poached eggs in the microwave yesterday but it overheated and exploded leaving bits of water and egg all over my microwave so my girl is mad at me because she ended up cleaning it up.

Anyway....

Despite all this, business has been decent.

I got a hot new lead for a new ghostwriting client who has 100k followers on Instagram, my clients are crushing it, and the sales are continuing to pile in.

All this even when everything seems to be collapsing around me.

My point is this; sometimes it feels like nothing is working out and we’re the victims of “bad luck.”

And maybe that’s true. But the way I see it, I can’t control bad luck.

I can only control the things I do and in my case that’s to show up everyday and keep going no matter what.

For me, that’s building and monetizing my email list, growing my audience, putting out content and delivering for my clients.

As long as I do that no matter what? I know I’ll be just fine even when everything else seems to be going to sh!ts.

Hope that helps

Your man

Eddy “everything will be alright” Quan ■

**Eddy Quan** <[eddy@eddyquan.com](mailto:eddy@eddyquan.com)>

# Your Best Content Might Come From Borrowed Ideas

3 min read

Ever sat staring at a blank screen, struggling for a new topic to create content around?

You're not alone.

Marketers and content creators constantly attempt to differentiate their brand and products through content.

But complete differentiation is nearly impossible.

Mark Twain said, *“There’s no such thing as a new idea. It is impossible. We simply take a lot of old ideas and put them into a sort of mental kaleidoscope.”*

In his article, [Out of Content Ideas? Try Borrowing One or Two](#), Robert Rose states that uniqueness isn't a requirement for content marketing success - and it never was.

His tips on how to reuse or repurpose ideas include:

## 1. Borrowing ideas

This doesn't mean copying or plagiarising.

It refers to picking up concepts, strategies, or insights from other sources and applying your own perspective.

One of the best ways to generate fresh content is by observing what your competitors are doing.

## 2. Choosing the right ideas to borrow

A key part to successfully borrowing ideas is to

give them your own unique spin.

It's all about taking an existing idea and molding it into something that fits your brand and appeals to your audience.

This way, it doesn't feel like a rip-off but rather a fresh, new take on a proven concept. [See this example.](#)

## 3. Use the 'parallel play' concept

In a nutshell, parallel play describes a scenario where children are playing in close proximity to each other but, instead of interacting directly, they are deeply involved in their own activities.

Even though they're not physically playing together, they remain observant of what others are doing.

Interestingly, they borrow ideas to help them achieve something.

[Businesses targeting new markets echo this kind of play.](#)

Remember, borrowing ideas is not merely recycling.

It's about exploring concepts and making them your own.

*“Creativity involves breaking out of established patterns in order to look at things in a different way.” ■*

- Edward de Bono

---

Cal at Rework <cal@reword.com>

# Lifelong Learning Tips

Selection by JJ

## ▪ If your staff is focusing on a special skill or behavior,

choose a word that describes it—such as “quality”—then come up with a list of words that begin with each letter (q.u.a.l.i.t.y) to describe what “quality” means to them. Print these ideas on colored paper and post them in a central location as a visual reminder.

## ▪ Discourage chatty co-workers

by using verbal clues that you need to sign off. “You must have important things to do” or “I’ve taken enough of your time” are diplomatic ways to let others know it’s time to get back to work.

## ▪ Is your workspace set-up working for or against you?

What does your body tell you after a day at work? If it responds with aches and pains, you might think about how you work and how your office is arranged. A few minutes spent reorganizing could save you from muscle spasms and other uncomfortable responses from an overworked body.

## ▪ You can determine whether your writing is too formal

by following this guideline: If you couldn’t or wouldn’t say it, don’t write it.

## ▪ Receive meaningful feedback

from employees by asking for advice on how you can improve. Instead of asking “How am I doing?” ask staffers to tell you how you handled a specific meeting or responded to their requests for help. That encourages them to be more precise in their comments.

## ▪ One of the fastest ways to destroy trust

is to withhold information. Tell people everything you can, even when the news is bad. Always tell the truth; it’s simpler. As Richard Heckert, the retired chairman of DuPont, once noted: “If you always tell the truth, you won’t have to remember what you said.”

## ▪ Keep attendees alert

during long meetings by following the 60/10 rule: Every 60 minutes, give attendees 10 minutes to stretch, mingle and freshen up.

## ▪ Approach prickly co-workers without seeming pushy

by using gentle words. When a co-worker’s attitude screams “mind your own business,” use these phrases when giving advice: “Would it help if ...?” or “What if we tried ”

*Extracted from Communication Briefings*

Nature Calling for Action Stations (NCfAS#32)

# From Tree Hugging to Counting Trees



**Sizing up Earth's lungs, tree by tree, in a Mission beyond Herculean**

“Amazon wildfires have got some scientists saying that the rainforest is nearing a tipping point where it would shift from capturing carbon dioxide to becoming a net emitter of it” – Max Bearak, NYT

## Data – Management's bedrock

Upon reading The New York Times cover story (Monday, September 9, 2024) on the Amacayacu National Park in Colombia, two thoughts immediately came to mind – you cannot manage that which you do not measure, and, where there's a will there's a way.

In what constitutes a stupendous show of spunk and concern for the future, a team is working to measure how much carbon the Amazon stores, one tree at a time. It is a multimillion dollar effort underway in dozens of patches of forest across the world aimed at figuring out, to an unprecedented degree of precision, the extent to which forests perform an epic service to humanity by capturing and locking away huge amounts of carbon dioxide, the main planet warming greenhouse gas.

A tiny patch of the Amazon rainforest in Colombia is the focus of one such attention wherein 125,000 individual

**“Truly accurate carbon measurements need combining satellite data with ground-truthing”**

plants, with a trunk size at least one centimeter in diameter, are being documented in a month long process of painstaking measurements. The Amazon is vast, and amid that emerald expanse this infinitesimal patch of less than one-tenth of a square mile is a stand-in for the larger whole.

## Inhospitable terrain

The team wears gumboots caked with mud and, armed with measuring tape and magnifying glasses, the scientists and their helpers negotiate slippery roots and dense undergrowth, and use “fallen carcasses of giant matamata and oje trees as makeshift gangplanks across swampy whorls of muddy detritus.... For most of the year this parcel of forest is flooded and accessible only by canoe, and is crawling with scorpions, tarantulas, and chiggers that burrow into skin.” While this level of risk and hardship may appear excessive just to put a tape measure around a tree, at a global scale this kind of hand-gathered data fills a major gap in understanding the forests.

## Calculating forest biomass

In 2023 the Bezos Earth Fund put US\$12 Million toward creating at least 30 such sites across the world, mostly in the tropics. The effort is spearheaded by the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute (STRI) which pioneered the calculation of forest biomass, and hopes to have 100





If your plan is for one year plant rice. If your plan is for ten years plant trees. If your plan is for one hundred years educate children.

Confucius



of these sites in the near future. More accurate carbon accounting will strengthen the fledgling efforts to put a realistic trading price on carbon dioxide emissions as a way of creating financial incentives to discourage deforestation and to pollute less. In addition, this data could also improve the complex models that scientists use when trying to

**“The Amazon is vast, and amid that emerald expanse this infinitesimal patch of less than one-tenth of a square mile is a stand-in for the larger whole”**

understand global warming. For the local indigenous people it means employment that draws on generations of inherited wisdom.

The data gathered at sites like these will be married with data from satellites that peer down from space and categorize trees that are visible from above. But most satellites cannot reliably penetrate the forest’s thick canopy, and truly accurate carbon measurements need combining satellite data with ground-truthing, as in tree-hugging.

Tropical forest and other land absorbs one-third of all the world’s planet warming carbon dioxide emissions. Work of this kind sheds light on the dynamics in the Amazon that are far from obvious. For instance, new studies posit that, despite the arboreal biodiversity, about half of the region’s

## “More accurate carbon accounting will strengthen the fledgling efforts to put a realistic trading price on carbon dioxide emissions”

carbon is contained in just 2 percent or so of its species. These are typically enormous hardwood trees that may be most susceptible to climate change and illegal logging, and the most effective steps to take would focus on protecting those trees. It takes this kind of research to know that.

### Tipping point getting closer

The Amazon, despite its immensity, is actually particularly fragile. This year fires in the Brazilian Amazon hit a 14-year high and the whole area was bathed in smoke as the team did its work recently. Scientists have been warning for years that the Amazon is nearing a tipping point where it shifts from capturing carbon dioxide to becoming a net emitter of it. As it shrinks it becomes less able to pull water from the ocean and sustain its lushness which in turn impacts its ability to store carbon.

### Carbon offsets & reforestation bonds

Combining satellite data with ground-truthing will further fortify a wide array of efforts to protect and expand forested land, like carbon offsets, which are credits representing investment in projects that avoid, reduce or store emissions that individuals and companies can buy to compensate for their own greenhouse gases. There are also reforestation bonds which are tradable security designed to give investors a higher financial return when the money is used to plant trees that can extract more carbon from the atmosphere.

There is already a market for instruments like these worth almost US\$1 Trillion. However, for them to be priced to work properly, better data is needed to precisely compute how much carbon different forests hold. “Bad data can equal junk credits, and that problem is incredibly difficult to solve,” says Khaled Diab of Carbon Market Watch, a nonprofit organization. Doubts about this data are one of the reasons that the carbon offset market shrank last year for the first time in seven years.

## “You cannot manage that which you do not measure; where there’s a will there’s a way”

### Pantanal ablaze!

Meanwhile, Brazil’s Pantanal is in the throes of an existential crisis as precious creatures disappear into ash (Ana Ionova, NYT 29-8-24). It’s a maze of rivers, forests and marshlands that sprawl over 180,000 square kilometers, the world’s largest wetland and a natural laboratory of species, 80 percent of which lies within Brazil, with the rest in Bolivia and Paraguay.

Usually flooded for much of the year, the Pantanal in recent years has been parched by a string of severe droughts that scientists have linked to deforestation and climate change. Since the start of the year wildfires have burned over 18,000 square kilometers in Brazil’s share of the Pantanal, the world’s largest tropical wetland and one of the most important biodiversity sanctuaries on the planet.

### Ecocide

The blazes, the worst on record since Brazil started tracking wildfires in 1998, are taking a deadly toll on wild animals, including at-risk species that scientists have been working for decades to protect. It’s too early to estimate how many animals are dying in the blazes, they say, since many are perishing in remote regions that rescue workers cannot reach. But they fear the toll could exceed that of the fires which ravaged the region in 2020, killing some 17 million animals and burning nearly one-third of the Pantanal in Brazil.

Even as the Amazon rainforest shrinks and becomes less able to pull water from the ocean to sustain its lushness, the world’s oceans are close to becoming too acidic to properly sustain marine life or help stabilize the climate, according to a report by the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (TNS 24-9-24). As carbon dioxide emissions increase more of it dissolves in seawater making the oceans more acidic, says Boris Sakschewski who is one of the lead authors of the report. Clearly humanity is falling way short of our role as Allah’s khalifah on earth, and would do well to reverse course on the double ■

Column by Adil Ahmad, Correspondent, TCS Octara.Com