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Business - AP

Fan Club Seeks to Revive Surge Soda



Tue Apr 19, 5:18 AM ET

 [Business - AP](#)
By *MARC LEVY*, Associated Press Writer

CARLISLE, Pa. - Surge blasted into the cola wars in 1997, billed as a "fully loaded citrus soda" and backed by TV ads that showed kids tripping over each other to grab a bottle.

[AP Photo](#)

That year also turned out to be the peak year for sales of Surge — Coca-Cola Co.'s challenger to PepsiCo Inc.'s popular Mountain Dew.

These days, Surge is the beverage equivalent of an endangered species: Coca-Cola stopped marketing it about five years ago and has no plans to boost production of the drink, which occasionally turns up in soda fountains but is no longer sold in bottles or cans.

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But a far-flung band of devotees is clamoring for its revival and keeping the Surge legacy alive with a Web site — [www.savesurge.org](#) — featuring 500 pages of Surge testimonials, photographs of old Surge paraphernalia and even recipes for making a Surge-like beverage at home.

Bloggers log soda-fountain sightings of Surge from California to Maine. Two Arizona women planned to gather Surge petition signatures at a country music festival this month. And a Norwegian man offers trans-Atlantic shipments of Urge, Surge's orange-tinged cousin, which is sold in his country.

Web designer Eric Karkovack ties the loose ends together from inside the brick walls of his apartment in south-central Pennsylvania. Each day, an average of 500 Web surfers visit the site that he started with another Surge fan in 2002, around the time the soda became scarce.

"I never expected when I started the Web site that it would still be going three years later," said Karkovack, 27, who hasn't had a swig of the bright green liquid since 2003. "I just figured that, like most of these sites that want to save something, that it would be a fad."

Perhaps, but for now the movement has gusto.

Surge fans still rave about the taste, which hovers between lemon-lime and orange. It packs more sugar and caffeine than Coke or Pepsi, and slightly less of both than Mountain Dew.

After it came out, Drew Bizzell, of Bryan, Texas, recalled drinking nearly two dozen cans of Surge a week until his mother cut him off. Now that stores no longer stock the stuff, the 19-year-old aspiring film student has made a short movie about it.

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"It became the only (soda) I was drinking," Bizzell said. "And once it was taken away, I became insanely obsessed with it."

Twelve-packs have sold for as much as \$152 on the Internet auction site, eBay.

Dennis Howard, a trash hauler in McDonald, Kan., who regularly hawks antique cans and bottles on eBay, was surprised to see bidders recently offering \$20 or so for an empty glass bottle of Surge.

So when he discovered about 30 unopened and expired Surge cans, including a 12-pack, in a farmhouse he was cleaning out last month, he posted them on eBay.

"I thought, 'Boy, that thing's bringing a pretty good price,'" Howard said.

To pressure Coke, [savesurge.org](#) has targeted letter-writing campaigns at Wal-Mart Stores Inc., Coke's biggest buyer, and bottling executives.

Wal-Mart spokeswoman Karen Burk said she's aware of the Surge requests, but that the retailing giant hasn't contacted Coke because "we're not seeing that as a strong demand" from customers.

Coke spokesman Scott Williamson said Coke has no plans to raise Surge's profile.

"If there were to be increased demand for Surge, we would consider making it more widely available," he said.

Coke's Web site makes little mention of Surge and a customer-service operator said it is discontinued, although Williamson said the company still makes the syrup.

"It is essentially a discontinued brand," said John Sicher, the publisher of Beverage Digest.

Coke sold 200,000 cases of Surge in 2004, down from 69 million cases in 1997. By comparison, Mountain Dew, the country's fourth-biggest carbonated beverage, sold nearly 650 million cases in 2004, Sicher said.

Sicher said he doubts Coke will revive Surge and rather thinks the company will eventually introduce Vault, a new would-be Mountain Dew competitor that is currently being tested.

Why the demise?

Sicher suspected Coke didn't market Surge long enough to escape Mountain Dew's formidable shadow. Bizzell blamed the marketing itself, saying that parents were frightened by television images of teens clambering over each other to get at it.

If [savesurge.org](#) ultimately fails, Karkovack said the effort will not have gone to waste: The cause brought together a disparate group of people who, at least for a while, had a good time.

"It's more like a community than a Web site," he said.

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On the Net:

Save Surge: <http://www.savesurge.org>

Beverage Digest: <http://www.beverage-digest.com>

American Beverage Association: <http://www.ameribev.org>

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