

## Coke's new formula: sweet on entertainment

**With Columbia, Embassy and Griffin purchases, company wants to become premiere film and TV program supplier**

The Coca-Cola Co., which long ago introduced one of the world's most popular soft drinks, is now trying to become the world's premiere supplier of motion picture and television entertainment. It is trying to do that in a way nearly as old as the soft drink itself: expand the product by owning the concentrate formula and leave the physical distribution to someone else. In this case the secret formula dispensed through a vending machine has given way to program rights aired over a local television station.

That is the basic game plan behind Coca-Cola's strategy of increasing its entertainment holdings through the purchase of such major television program suppliers as Embassy Communications and Affiliates and, subject to a definitive agreement, Merv Griffin Enterprises. By and large the executives behind this move at Coca-Cola—Fay Vincent, Dick Gallop and Frank Biondi—are from outside the Hollywood mainstream. They apprenticed as Wall Street attorneys and investment bankers, not producers and agents. But their ambitions are really no different from their scrappy predecessors: To build an entertainment empire that is the envy of the industry.

Excluding Griffin's 14 hours per week of

first-run programming, Coca-Cola, through its Columbia and Embassy subsidiaries, has nine series on the networks totaling five and a half hours every week. That does not take into account several joint ventures it has with smaller suppliers or the discussions going on at Tri-Star Pictures in which Coke has a big stake to set up a distribution for series produced by Steven J. Cannell Productions or Witt/Thomas/Harris Productions.

To an outsider, Coca-Cola's entertainment interests look like the British Empire at the close of the 19th century—it is spread wide and far and seems to have an outpost in even the most remote corners. Lending to this colossus image is the perception that several of these stand-alone enterprises operate inde-

### What the Coke team has brought under its umbrella



Columbia Pictures' *What's Happening Now!*



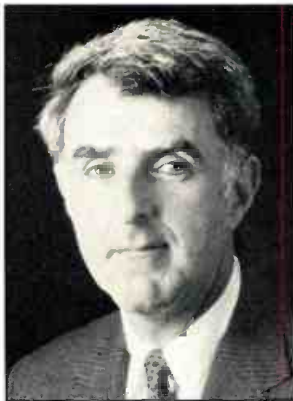
Merv Griffin's *King World*



Biondi



Vincent



Gallop



From the film and home video library: *Ghostbusters*



Embassy's *Silver Spoons*