

# A Procession of Penguins Arrives on Madison Ave.

An ad for Coke, one of many brands to feature penguins recently. One consultant said, “There’s obviously something about these little guys.”

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## Correction Appended



National Geographic released the “March of the Penguins” movie.



Club Penguin, founded in 2005, is a Web site for children.

NEVER mind what the Chinese calendar says. This is going to be the year of the penguin, at least on Madison Avenue.

Penguins have long been popular in advertising, but they have become even more so after three successful movies with penguin characters: “Madagascar” and “March of the Penguins” in 2005 and “Happy Feet” last year. They have helped turn the penguin into the new pitchbeast of choice.

There is, for example, Club Penguin, which offers a Web site for children at clubpenguin.com, and the revival by Perry Ellis International, under the Original Penguin label, of the apparel bearing penguin logos that was once sold by Munsingwear. Penguins appear in print ads for Dawn dishwashing detergent, sold by Procter & Gamble, and star in commercials for Coca-Cola Classic. Hallmark Cards centered a promotion on a “dancing penguins” Christmas tree ornament, and the National Geographic Society has spotlighted penguins in campaigns.

“There’s obviously something about these little guys” that is

leading advertisers to think “it says something about us as consumers to associate ourselves with penguins,” said Michael Megalli, a partner at Group 1066, a corporate identity consulting company in New York.

One theory Mr. Megalli offered is what he called “the Al Gore thing” — this is, “we want to reassure ourselves penguins will have a place in a world with global warming.”

That theory is reinforced by a campaign last fall from St. Martin’s Press for “Our Iceberg Is Melting: Changing and Succeeding Under Any Conditions,” a business management book by John Kotter and Holger Rathgeber. Penguins decorate the book jacket as well as the ads.

Another reason, Mr. Megalli says, may relate to the dynamic between the individual penguin and the flock.

"None of us wants to feel we're just another penguin in a sea of penguins," he said, so a penguin who strikes out on his own can be used to tell an appealing story.

That was the case in a Coca-Cola Classic commercial, by Berlin Cameron United, that teams the brand's familiar polar bear characters with a colony of penguins. The spot was introduced for the 2005 holiday season and was brought back for 2006.

The commercial shows a polar bear cub intruding into a flock of penguins. The penguins do not know how to react until one steps forward and serves the bear a bottle of Coke Classic. The spot ends as all the penguins join the cub and its parents in grooving to a Beach Boys tune.

"The bears have stood for being approachable and friendly, and the penguins are chatty and social," said Katie J. Bayne, senior vice president for Coca-Cola brands in North America at Coca-Cola in Atlanta.

The commercial "was the top-scoring spot we've ever done with the polar bears," Ms. Bayne said, referring to research conducted for Coca-Cola by Millward Brown, part of the WPP Group, "and in the top 4 percent of all spots Millward Brown has tested in the carbonated soft drink category."

Penguins have played a part in marketing and popular culture for almost a century. The imprint Penguin Books was introduced in 1926; seven years later came Willie, the brand mascot for Kool cigarettes, then owned by the Brown & Williamson Tobacco Corporation.

Willie had his own Hollywood moment in the 1949 Marx Brothers movie "Love Happy," when Harpo was chased through Times Square and climbed a neon sign advertising Kool. In the '50s and '60s, cartoons featured penguin characters like Chilly Willy and Tennessee Tuxedo.

Brown & Williamson sought to revive Willie in the early '90s, in a hipper incarnation, but in 1998 tobacco marketers agreed to end the use of cartoon characters in cigarette ads.

Penguins entered the high-tech realm in the late '90s, when Linux, the open-source computer operating system, adopted a penguin as its mascot.

The bird also appealed to the founders of Club Penguin, a Web site for children founded in October 2005 by Dave Krysko, Lane Merrifield and Lance Priebe.

Its genesis dates to 2000, when Mr. Priebe, working on computer games for children, "happened to glance at a 'Far Side' cartoon featuring penguins that was sitting on his desk," said Karen Mason, a spokeswoman for Club Penguin in Kelowna, British Columbia. Work on Club Penguin began in 2004 and the name was selected in summer 2005, she added.

Summer 2005 was also the season of the documentary "March of the Penguins," which initially had almost no advertising tie-ins because no one expected it to become the hit it did. Eventually, the National Geographic Society — whose National Geographic Feature Film unit released the documentary with the Warner Independent Pictures division of Time Warner — brought out "March" merchandise, like plush toys and books, and there were tie-ins with marketers like the Minute Maid unit of Coca-Cola.

By contrast, "Happy Feet," released in November by the Warner Brothers division of Time Warner, had numerous marketing partners lined up in advance. They included Build-A-Bear Workshop, Burger King, General Mills — and Roche Laboratories, the pharmaceutical company, for a campaign to promote a Web site, flufacts.com.

Roche, which makes a flu drug, Tamiflu, came in for criticism about the campaign.

On the blog of Shaping Youth, which studies the influences of marketing and the media on children ([shapingyouth.org/blog](http://shapingyouth.org/blog)), Amy Jussel, executive director, wrote: "It's chilling to think that an animated cartoon is being used as a product-placement hook to sell paranoia, prevention and pop-a-pill solutions to families everywhere in a big-bucks deal that would make your head spin. (And not from the flu.)"

The next significant date for peddling penguins — and penguin peddling — is June 8, when the Sony Pictures Animation division of Sony is scheduled to release an animated film, "Surf's Up," a mock documentary about a young surfing penguin (voiced by Shia LaBeouf) and his mentor (Jeff Bridges).

Trying to describe the idea, Premiere magazine wrote, "Think 'Point Break' meets 'This Is Spinal Tap,' with penguins."

Correction: January 12, 2007

The Advertising column on Wednesday, about the popularity of penguin characters among marketers, misidentified the agency that created a holiday commercial for Coca-Cola, based on information supplied by Coca-Cola. The agency was Berlin Cameron United, which previously worked for the company — not Wieden & Kennedy, the current agency. The article also misspelled the surname of a founder of Club Penguin, a Web site for children. He is Dave Krysko, not Krisko.