Coca-Cola’s Profit Rises on Growth Overseas

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NEW YORK (AP) — Coca-Cola says its profit rose 13 percent in the fourth quarter as growth in emerging markets offset a decline in Europe and a modest performance in the U.S.

The Atlanta-based company said global sales volume rose 3 percent, driven by gains in countries such as Russia and Turkey. Volume in Europe fell by 5 percent. In North America, its biggest market by revenue, volume rose just 1 percent, boosted by its Powerade sports drinks and bottled teas. Soda volume declined 2 percent.

The results come as Coca-Cola, which also makes Fanta, Minute Maid and Dasani water, relies on a shifting mix of drinks for growth in North America amid intensifying criticism of sugary sodas. Give the saturated U.S. and European markets, Coca-Cola is also increasingly looking for growth in countries where the ranks of middle-class customers are growing and its products aren't yet as widely consumed as they are back at home.

In the U.S., Coca-Cola has been dealing with a broader decline in soda consumption for years. Although Coca-Cola said soda volume for North America declined in the quarter, the company said it increased its share of the market in both carbonated and non-carbonated drinks. The exception was bottled water, where Coca-Cola noted that it kept its higher prices steady on Dasani.

Overall volume in Europe declined 5 percent, which the company blamed on the uncertain economy, bad weather and price competition. Sodas declined 5 percent and non-carbonated drinks fell by 3 percent.

In China, where U.S. companies of all stripes are looking for growth, volume declined 4 percent, after growing 10 percent in the year-ago quarter. The company said the business in the region was impacted by a slowing economy, bad weather and a later Chinese New Year.

For the October-to-December period, The Coca-Cola Co. earned $1.87 billion, or 41 cents per share. That's compared with $1.66 billion, or 36 cents per share, in the year-ago period. Not including one-time items, the company said it earned 45 cents per share.

Revenue rose 4 percent to $11.46 billion.

Analysts on average expected an adjusted profit of 44 cents per share on revenue of $11.53 billion.

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