Hard Seltzer Brands Emphasize What Makes Them Unique to Stand Out in a Crowded Space

Ever since the hard seltzer summer of 2019, alcohol and beer brands big and small have been clamoring for a sip of the category's success.

Off-premise sales of hard seltzer—drinks purchased at a retail store or through an app rather than at a bar or restaurant—grew $2.4 billion from the end of summer 2019 through summer 2020, according to Nielsen. And 95% of that growth came from just five brands: White Claw, Truly, Bud Light Seltzer, Corona Hard Seltzer and Vizzy.

No label appears to be able to catch Mark Anthony Brands' White Claw, the first hard seltzer to rise to popularity last year. Its dominance hasn't slipped, even amid a monthslong internal restructuring in the marketing department. (Due to that restructuring, White Claw declined to comment for this story.) But the race for second place is on.

As new seltzer brands arrive on the scene, they have to go beyond pitching the foundational appeal of the drink (refreshing, low calorie) and push compelling points of difference to win over consumers for the long haul.

"[The] opportunity is going to be looking at demographics and figuring out lifestyle overlaps and opportunities to appeal to certain demographics—and subdemographics—that are buying this," said alcohol branding expert and owner of CF Napa Brand Design David Schuemann. He added that brands that lean in to the key benefits of hard seltzers, like perceived healthiness when compared with beer or sugary cocktails, are also likely to win out as the category continues to expand.

Anheuser-Busch bet big on hard seltzer with five brands to date: Bon Viv (originally SpikedSeltzer, the first hard seltzer), Bud Light Seltzer, Natural Light Seltzer, Social Club Seltzer and, most recently, Michelob Ultra Seltzer.

Each of its brands targets a subdemographic—a strategy that Anheuser-Busch hopes will allow it to continue to expand its reach within the category. Lana Buchanan, the company's vp of beyond beer, said most seltzer consumers fall into one of two main groups: drinkers who are trying seltzers for the first time and drinkers who have already fallen in love with the product and are looking for a more interesting flavor or occasion-specific beverage.

For example, Bud Light Seltzer serves as a "point of entry" for a set of consumers that's already familiar with the Bud Light brand and is interested in seltzers, said Buchanan. For Natural Light Seltzer and Michelob Ultra Seltzer, a similar logic holds.

But a dedicated seltzer drinker who's looking for something new might be more interested in branching out toward the botanical flavors of Bon Viv or the cocktail-style offerings of Social Club. Social Club recently hosted tastings in barber shops and co-working spaces in Phoenix, gearing its marketing toward a masculine audience.

Through Bon Viv and Social Club, Anheuser-Busch is focusing on older millennials—Bon Viv is targeting women in their 30s, and Social Club is aiming for men in the same age group. Meanwhile, White Claw has successfully catered to younger consumers of all genders.

Overall, Nielsen reports that hard seltzers have broad appeal across genders and age groups—consumers tend to be more affluent drinkers between 21 and 44. A summer survey from Drizly indicated that Gen Z continued drinking it at the highest rate this year.

For Bud Light Seltzer (and its new higher alcohol content Platinum version), Anheuser-Busch tapped into social media, piggybacking off Bud Light’s more than 50 partnerships with sports teams and leagues. Bud Light Seltzer is the only brand in the category that has had an increase in mentions since summer wound down. From mid-August to Oct. 5 the brand saw a 13% jump in mentions, according to social media analysis firm Talkwalker.

Continue Reading

Pages: 1 2

The fans. The brands. Social justice. The future of sports. Don’t miss the upcoming **Brandweek Sports Marketing Summit and Upfronts, a live virtual experience on Nov. 16-19**. Early-bird passes available until Oct. 26. Register now.

Recommended articles
https://www.adweek.com/brand-marketing/hard-seltzer-brands-emphasize-what-makes-them-unique-to-stand-out/