

WHISKEY'S MOMENT IN THE SUN

LIFESTYLE BRAND BEACH WHISKEY GOES NATIONAL

BY KRISTEN BIELER

Whiskey has been on fire for well over a decade. Recruiting from new demographics—women and Millennials—the category has also made inroads in less traditional whiskey-drinking American markets. But there was one opportunity whiskey couldn't crack: daytime consumption.

Last year, Beach Whiskey set out to change that. Co-founder Smoke Wallin bet that by "reimagining" whiskey—creating a clear (non-barrel-aged) version, with a lighter-body, flavor-packed taste profile and packaged in bright sea glass-inspired bottle—he could tap into the beach- and pool-side drinking occasion, long considered the domain of vodka, rum and tequila.

"Because Beach Whiskey is a smooth, clear whiskey, it's day-drinkable, and even appealing to people who don't drink, or are intimidated by, traditional dark whiskey," says Wallin. "It's a unique proposal."

The brand launched last summer in two flavors, Island Coconut and Bonfire Cinnamon, both designed to be sipped solo on the rocks, as a shot or mixed in a range of cocktails. Both expres-

Beach Whiskey has 75,000 Facebook fans—79% of whom are 34 and under.

ANCHORED ON-PREMISE

In over 1,200 accounts today, Beach Whiskey cocktails can be found at Outback Steakhouse, Hooters and Applebee's (where Beach Whiskey sold 12,000 drinks in four weeks in an initial test of 72 stores) as well as fine-dining spots like Nobu in Malibu and Aureole in NYC.

sions' relatively low sugar content (over one-third less sugar than the leading coconut- and cinnamon-flavored brands on the market) is a significant point of difference, particularly for bartenders, who, Wallin admits, were dubious at first: "Once mixologists try Beach Whiskey they realize how flexible both flavors are for creating drinks that aren't too sweet. Which is why the brand is growing so fast on-premise."

Hitting the Bars Before the Beach

The company's on-premise and national account focus so early in the brand's life cycle was a very deliberate strategy, says Wallin, and has enabled Beach Whiskey to roll out nationwide in less than a year. "Getting featured on drink menus at national accounts has made Beach Whiskey relevant to today's mega-distributors who have many other priorities," says Wallin. A recent distribution deal with Southern Glazer's means the brand is now available in all 50 states.

Interestingly, many of its most successful markets—including its initial and number one market, Nashville—are nowhere near the beach. "It is a lifestyle brand," explains Bill Henderson, Chief



Marketing Officer. "Drinking Beach Whiskey makes you feel like you are on vacation no matter where you are. That is why it resonates and why it's working."

Having celebrity investors and business partners—Billy Bush and country singer Jake Owen—has provided some big promotional boosts for Beach Whiskey. "Our live activations of Beach Whiskey partner Jake Owen's shows are really starting to be effective and we have a big 2017 ahead of us for these and other tactical events," Henderson explains.

The brand's programming is rather un-whiskey-like as well, ranging from being named the official whiskey of the NASCAR's Phoenix International Raceway, to sponsoring Nashville's "Bach Weekends," where the trademarked "Beach Bride" cocktail—pineapple juice and Beach Whiskey Island Coconut—was born.

More recently, the Beach Whiskey Company acquired American Harvest Organic Vodka. Created by Sidney Frank in 2011, the craft spirit was "a bit ahead of its time," says Wallin. Returning to market with new packaging, it's a good fit, he adds: "As you can imagine, there are accounts where Beach Whiskey is a harder sell but American Harvest is the perfect fit; fine-dining, craft mixology bars. American Harvest can lead the discussion and bring Beach Whiskey along for the ride, and vice versa. It gives our team a much more versatile sales pitch." ■

