

The Hottest, Fast-Tracking Vodkas



Vodka is America's spirit of choice. Its impressive 30-year march up the charts shows no signs of abating as sales grew a healthy 6.7% last year. Not surprisingly, the category dominates consumption figures. Vodka now accounts for 27.5% of all spirits sold in the country.

One driving force behind the market dominance is its mixability. Vodka is featured in more recipes than any other type of spirit, largely because of its unsurpassed ability to bolster nearly any combination of disparate ingredients. Another ace in the hole is its perceived value. From top to bottom, the vodka category offers consumers a lot of bang for their buck.

In terms of growth, the category is expanding upwards. Last year, sales of ultra and super-premium brands together increased 22.9%, nearly eclipsing the gains posted by the category as a whole. In contrast, premium vodkas rose 12% while economy-priced brands rose a modest 2.4%.

Steadily growing sales of top-shelf vodkas is further evidence that Americans are growing savvier and more discerning. Especially in this hotly contested segment, keeping an eye on the brands with the fastest growth rates can be more insightful than watching those on the leader board.

In the upper echelons of the category, the ***Grey Goose*** franchise (*Bacardi*) grew at 25% making it again the fast-track leader. The 3rd bestselling vodka in the U.S. with a 6.3% share of the category, the French import is distilled in copper alembic stills from a blend of grains and spring water. The range also includes ***L'Orange***, ***La Vanille***, ***Le Citron*** and newcomer ***La Poire***.

The next fastest growing brand is ***Svedka Vodka*** (*Constellation Brands*). Sales of the Swedish premium vodka consistently rank it high among the top performers. Case depletions increased 47.6% lifting Svedka to just under a 3% share of the market. The line currently features six flavor extensions.

Imported by *Proximo Spirits*, ***Three Olives Vodka*** from England registered the third highest sales gains last year at 34.9%. Part of the premium brand's success can be attributed to its portfolio of 16 flavored vodkas, which now include recently released ***Tomato***, ***Root Beer*** and ***Triple Shot Espresso***. Three Olives commands a 1.6% share.

The 4th fastest growing brand is perennial all-star ***Belvedere*** (*Moët Hennessy USA*), a quadruple-distilled vodka made from rye and spring water. Sales of the Polish super premium rose 13.4%. The Belvedere range also features ***Pomaranicza*** (mandarins and oranges) and ***Cytrus*** (lemons and limes). Rounding out the top fast-tracking brands is super-premium ***Van Gogh Vodka*** (*Luctor*) from Holland. Sales of the small batch spirit and its popular range of 17 flavors—the latest additions being ***Açai-Blueberry***, ***Double Espresso*** and ***Mojito Mint***—grew 14.3% last year. Three other super-premium brands posted significant sales gains last year. Canadians ***Pearl Vodka*** and coconut flavored ***Pearl Lo Coco*** (*Luxco*) grew 12.5% and broke into the category's top 10 bestsellers. French ***Cîroc Snap Frost Vodka*** (*Diageo*) saw sales rise 12.3%. It's distilled in copper pot stills from Mauzac Blanc and Ugni Blanc grapes. The third brand is ***Imperia Vodka*** (*Remy Cointreau USA*), a small batch wheat vodka from St. Petersburg, Russia whose sales increased 4.1%. As long as demand continues unabated, distillers will debut new vodkas to tempt aficionados and novices alike. Steadily rising sales suggest that these new arrivals are finding a warm reception here in the States.