

Winning combinations

GROWTH IN MIXERS IN BARS IS BRINGING NEW PRODUCTS AND FLAVOURS INTO PLAY, REPORTS MARK LUDMON

Mixed drinks with Frobishers Juices

With all its bars in central London and other city centres, Novus Leisure finds that most of its soft drinks are mixed with hard liquor. "For our customers, it's more about having a premium mixer as part of a cocktail or mixed drink rather than a quality soft drink option," explains head of marketing Sorrel Ward. "The majority of people visiting our sites come to enjoy an alcoholic beverage;

very few of our customers are driving home. They want a drink they can savour, with a flavour and taste that is of a high standard and tastes different from the norm, and this is where a more exclusive mixer can play a role."

For soft drinks and mixers, Novus favours the likes of Fentimans and Fever-Tree, with tonic water being by far its most popular mixer thanks to the popularity of G&Ts. "We like to offer customers a premium mixer option," Sorrel says. "This isn't to say that something more mainstream like

Schweppes won't work. We just think it creates a better experience for the customer and fits in better with the feel we want for our sites. We don't see the rise of premium mixers as a result of increased customer demand, but more as a trend that is being driven by the industry. These don't tend to help profit margin, as we can't always pass on the increased cost of a premium product to a customer, but they can drive cash margin."

On the back of growth in premium spirits, sales of mixers are increasing, according to



the latest Soft Drinks Report from leading supplier Britvic. Overall, sales by value were up 12.6% last year, with Schweppes maintaining its top position. The largest growth for mixers was seen in restaurants, where the market grew by 23%, but it was also up 11% in pubs, bars and clubs. With cola remaining the number-one soft drink in the UK, Britvic has been looking to boost sales of Pepsi by promoting its sugar-free Pepsi Max as a mixer. Alongside the launch of a new 330ml bottle in May, it developed simple serves over ice such as tequila with lime wedges and vermouth with orange peel.

With the market dominated by a handful of brands, newcomers are seeking to capitalise on the demand for premium products such as 1724 Tonic Water from Spain, Walter Gregor's from Scotland, Peter Spanton and Bermondsey Tonic Water from London. UK wine and spirits distributor Cellar Trends has brought in Thomas Henry Mixers which are named after an 18th-century Welsh pharmacist who made soda water for bars in Manchester. Despite their namesake, they were developed in Berlin in 2010 by a group of bartenders who were struggling to source great-tasting, good-quality mixers to match the premium spirits they were using. Still made in Berlin, the range comprises tonic water, elderflower tonic, ginger beer, ginger ale, bitter lemon, soda water and a limited-edition grapefruit lemonade. "Thomas Henry has seen huge success in its domestic market, gaining presence in the very coolest, edgiest 'go to' bars of Berlin, and we look forward to achieving the same level of presence here in the UK," says Cellar Trends' sales and

marketing director, Terry Barker.

A new premium still and sparkling range has been launched by Devon-based Spring Rocks Drinks, emphasising its use of only fruit, sugar and water and their sophisticated blends of flavours. Available in 250ml bottles, they include sparkling drinks Organic Ginger & Wasabi, Organic Strawberry & Blackcurrant, Pink Lemonade, and Organic Raspberry and Lime, and still drinks Organic Blackcurrant & Elderflower and Organic Mango & Orange. They are promoted for mixed drinks and cocktails with recipes developed by leading bartender Joe Wadsack. Examples include mixing the Pink Lemonade with gin and a few raspberries over ice or combining the Ginger & Wasabi with vanilla vodka and the juice of half a lime over ice plus a few drops



of Angostura Bitters.

Interesting flavours are bringing innovation to the category such as Gloworm energy mixers, ranging from Cucumber & Apple – a good match with gin – to Ginger & Lemongrass which complements bourbon. Bottlegreen Drinks, a leading supplier of premium soft drinks, has seen considerable interest in its pomegranate-flavoured Pink Tonic Water and Elderflower Tonic Water as well as its Indian tonic water.

Cucumber-flavoured soft drink

TIME FOR TEA

Luxury tea brand Jadu, created by expert blenders in the UK, is being promoted as an ingredient for alcoholic drinks. Bartender Michael Stringer of consultancy BlackLeaf Events has developed serves using syrups made from the teas, which include Rooibos Crème Brûlée, a twist on the classic tea with caramel and vanilla, and Mademoiselle Grey – a take on Earl Grey using Sri Lankan Uva black tea as a base plus citrus notes and aromatic bergamot. A Single Shade of Grey is made by combining 50ml of No 3 Gin with 20ml of syrup made from honey and Mademoiselle Grey plus 15ml of freshly squeezed lemon juice and two lavender sprigs, shaken and fine-strained over cubed ice. For his Truffle Brûlée Martini, Michael uses 40ml of Black Moth truffle vodka with 20ml of Rooibos Crème Brûlée syrup and 30ml of cream, shaken hard and strained into a coupe with brown sugar sprinkled on top.

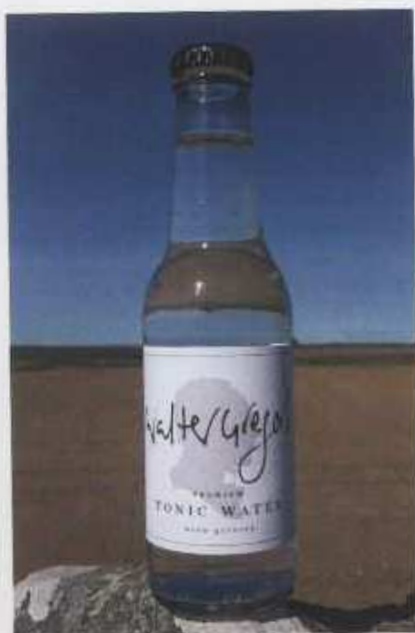


Qcumber can provide a twist on classic serves: founder Graham Carr-Smith champions the G&Q as an alternative to a G&T. "Encapsulating the idyll of the quintessential English summer, Qcumber is unique, and its light, crisp, refreshing flavour is just the thing to mix with a premium spirit," he says. "The brand has great potential to help licensees offer something a bit special and, as a premium product, help them increase margins along the way."

Qcumber is made from 100% natural ingredients and is free from artificial sweeteners, colours, preservatives and flavourings and, since its launch in 2012, has been joined by Qcumber with Mint, using garden mint. "With consumer demand for premium spirits increasing, it's more important than ever for bars to match these high-quality products with mixers and juices which adequately complement them, or even enhance them," Graham adds.

Among the Funkin range of cocktail mixes, syrups and purees, strawberry remains a popular flavour, especially as sourcing consistently good fresh strawberries can be a challenge when demand is high. "Funkin Strawberry Purée can be used in so many different drinks that are ideal for summer, this is an obvious top seller," says managing director Andrew King. "Funkin Passion Fruit Purée is a leading seller in our portfolio and this is partly a result of the popularity of the Porn Star Martini."

Demand for good-quality products means that Funkin is picky when it comes to sourcing fruits, Andrew adds. "Our fruit is always grown in the sun, never in poly-tunnels, so we are able to capture the fruit's



flavour at its best and deliver a premium product to our customers allowing them to create great-tasting cocktails. In the same way consumers are looking for premium spirits with strong heritage and provenance, they are also interested in the other ingredients that are going into their cocktail. It makes sense to use a premium mixer when you are using a top-notch gin or whisky, and consumers can taste the difference."

Bartenders should show as much care in their choice of syrups as other ingredients, points out Cleo Rocos, who supplies an agave syrup as part of her AquaRiva range of tequilas through distributor Catalyst Brands. "Just as bartenders want high-quality tequila or rum, they need to be using a high-quality syrup," she says. "There are a lot of agave syrups out there now but some are cut with corn syrup in the same way that mixto tequila is not 100% agave. Our syrup is made only from Blue Weber agave that has been organically farmed in rich volcanic soil in Mexico to guarantee it's the highest quality."

The top-selling flavours in the Frobishers Juices range, for both mixing and stand-alone soft drinks, are Apple, Orange, and Bumbleberry – a blend of strawberries, raspberry, blackberries and blackcurrants. "We see the demand for premium 100% natural, no-nonsense fruit juices and juice drinks continuing to grow," says sales and marketing director Steve Carter. "Operators are realising the benefits of a switch to premium through increased sales and increased profit margins. Stocking a strong repertoire of premium soft drinks and mixers can help raise a bar's profile and differentiate it from its competitors."

When selecting soft drinks generally, consumers should not still be stuck with an

uninspiring range, adds Andrew Quinlan, founder of Orchard Pig which produces not just ciders but soft drink blends such as ginger and chilli with a touch of fennel and strawberry and blackberry with a hint of poppy. "There's a much greater selection of quality soft drinks available so there really is no excuse for a venue to offer a boring, staid selection that would be more at home at a child's birthday party."

