

SGWS COMMERCIAL INTELLIGENCE | H2 2026 EDITION

RAISE THE BAR

5 Ways to Win in Beverage Alcohol

Across Beer, RTDs, Spirits and Wine

Distilled by SGWS Commercial Intelligence



AUGUST 2026

The State of Beverage Alcohol

The category is adjusting to consumers redefining how, when, where and what they drink, with shifts creating new pathways for growth

WHERE WE ARE TODAY

A Cyclical and Structural Reset

We've been here before – the industry is going through a reset, not a collapse
Beverage alcohol is soft across the board, with declines stabilizing and expected to improve in H2 2026.

Consumers are Changing, not Walking Away

People are drinking more mindfully, value-seeking and a new generation is stepping in as boomers step back.
That mix is opening more options and ways to drink — not fewer

Bright Spots Exist

Consumers continue to drink and refine their choices—fueling growth in RTDs, Cocktails, Non-Alcoholic, Tequila, small formats, and premium picks

Placeholder for stats on the next page

WHAT COMES NEXT

Five Ways to Win in H2 & Beyond

- 01 Courting the Next Generation
- 02 Formats and Drink Types Fueling Growth
- 03 Own the Moments That Matter
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K-Shaped Economy + K-Shaped Consumer
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The path forward isn't defense — it's going on offense and knowing where the consumer is heading.

THE OPPORTUNITY IN NUMBERS

15 Distilled Stats to “Raise the Bar”

The numbers behind the five ways to win – where volume, innovation and recruitment are concentrating in H2 2026.

WHERE THE VOLUME GROWTH IS CONCENTRATED

94% of total Spirits volume growth is driven by RTDs, gaining ~3pts of category share⁽¹⁾	92% of total Wine \$ growth comes from Cocktails⁽¹⁾	98% of Tequila volume growth sits in the \$20–\$34.99 tier, with Reposado spearheading growth⁽¹⁾	\$100+ luxury American Whiskey delivers 94% of category volume growth⁽¹⁾	+1 pt of volume share for Sauvignon Blanc & Cocktails⁽²⁾; White Wine \$’s grow in \$15–19.99 and \$25+ tiers⁽³⁾
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FORMAT, FLAVOR AND INNOVATION ARE DRIVING THE GAIN

+28% Wine and Spirits portable formats >=500ml (can & box) \$ growth⁽¹⁾	66% of Beer volume growth comes from 16oz 12-packs, 32oz and 19.2oz singles⁽¹⁾	73% of Spirits innovation \$’s come from Cocktails and American Whiskey⁽⁴⁾	90% of Wine drinkers say flavor scales on labels would help them choose⁽⁵⁾	2X small sizes \$ share of core Spirits category (24%)⁽¹⁾ vs. share of shelf (12%)⁽⁶⁾
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WHO IS NEXT: RECRUITMENT, ON-PREMISE AND MODERATION

35.6% of households are Gen Z and Millennials, up from 29% in 2021⁽⁷⁾	+8% Gen Z Wine spend vs. 2020 – Winee’s clearest recruitment opening⁽⁸⁾	46% say bars and restaurants are the best place to try a new brand⁽⁹⁾, and 74% of younger drinkers rely on bartenders when choosing a drink⁽¹¹⁾	\$1B+ in Non-Alcoholic Beer, Wine and Spirits sales, nearing 1% of BevAlc \$ share⁽¹⁾	+105% Social Tonic \$ growth⁽¹⁰⁾ – moderation’s fastest riser
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Sources: (1) Nielsen Total US xAOC + Liquor Open State + Conv 52W w/e 07/11/26 (2) SGWS OneSource Organic Data (Adjusted for supplier gains/losses) R12 LME June 2026 (3) Nielsen Total US xAOC + Liquor Open State + Conv 52W w/e 06/13/26 (4) Nielsen Total US xAOC + Liquor Open State + Conv 52W w/e 06/27/26 (5) Wine Market Council + Quini May 2026 “Identifying & Solving Taste Barriers for Wine-Hesitant Consumers” | “Why Consumers Turn Away – and What the Industry Must do to Retain Them” (6) SGWS SET 2.0 Analytics Q2 2026 (7) Numerator L52W 7.05.26 (8) Numerator 52W 2025 (9) Nielsen On-Premise Powered by CGA Intelligence OPUS US Spring 2026 (10) Numerator Insights Existing Brand Source of Volume 12M 04/30/26 vs Year Ago (11) Technomic 2024

01

Courting the Next Generation



Younger generations are reshaping BevAlc growth, with Gen Z and Millennials now representing 35.6% of households (up from 29% in 2021) and projected to become the top two BevAlc spending generations by 2035.⁽¹³⁾ As Boomers embrace moderation and age out of the category, Gen Z households have grown from 4% in 2021 to 7%,⁽¹⁾ but spend is only about one-third of Boomer levels, highlighting the importance of balancing recruitment with retention. While the next generation represents meaningful long-term growth, today's category remains heavily dependent on older consumers, particularly in Wine where nearly two-thirds of drinkers are 45+⁽²⁾. SGWS is seeing younger consumers engage through flavor, convenience, Cocktails, and low-risk trial, with accounts over-indexing among 21-24-year-olds gaining traction in small-format core Spirits, and 50ml/375ml share increasing +1.2 points vs. last year.⁽³⁾

BEER & RTDs

Recruit with RTDs

Gen Z over-indexes with RTDs,⁽⁴⁾ making them a powerful entry point into BevAlc. Convenient and portable, RTDs align with how this generation explores the category. Expand assortment and visibility to drive recruitment, while closing the on-premise gap where many accounts still offer only one, or no, RTD options on the menu.

Win with Flavor and Discovery

Flavor is often the first step into the category for Gen Z, making exploration and low-risk trial critical to recruitment. Variety packs outperform single-flavor packs across RTD Cocktails and Hard seltzers⁽⁵⁾ supporting consumers' desire to discover before they commit. Gen Z's stronger preference for berry-flavored Beer on menus (37% vs. 19% of all drinkers)⁽⁶⁾ reinforces how flavor-led experiences can attract the next generation.

Own the Beer Cocktail

Beer Cocktails create a natural bridge between flavor exploration and Beer recruitment, with 31% of Gen Z preferring formats such as micheladas versus 9% of all drinkers⁽⁶⁾. Winning with flavor-led, approachable serves can drive trial and repeat, while imported Beer's growing appeal among Gen Z provides another pathway to engage emerging drinkers.⁽⁶⁾⁽⁷⁾

SPIRITS

Retain Gen Z's First Pour

For nearly half of Gen Z drinkers, the first alcoholic drink was Spirits-based. That early connection matters: 75% enjoyed their first drink and 85% continue to consume the same beverage or a similar one today.⁽⁸⁾ Target iHubs and college locations to recruit and engage early, which will create lasting loyalty

Lead with Tequila

Gen Z over-indexes with Tequila⁽⁹⁾, with 55%⁽⁸⁾ consuming the category in the past year, creating a natural pathway to high-velocity Cocktail occasions. Expand Tequila's role across social gatherings, celebrations and experiential moments to maintain engagement.

Build the Innovation Engine

Innovation is softening category declines. Spirits Cocktails and American Whiskey are the top 2 contributors to Spirits innovation, representing 43% of innovation brands and 73% of the dollars.⁽¹⁰⁾ Drive bigger bets with innovation, as it is proven to be an effective platform to offset category headwinds and scale where consumers continue to engage.

WINE

Capitalize on Gen Z Wine Growth

Wine stands out as a bright spot with Gen Z, growing spend by +8%⁽¹⁾ versus 2020, creating a meaningful opportunity to recruit new drinkers and capture share. Fruit Wine, Blush, and Bubbles are stand out over-indexing categories for Gen Z – tap into the recruitment opening to build lifetime loyalty.

Flavor Match

Wine flavor surprises are frequent, with 1 in 4 Wine drinkers experience a flavor mismatch. 90% surveyed say flavor scales on Wine labels would be helpful, with ~2 in 3 infrequent drinkers saying they would buy more often with clearer labels. Simplify Wine selection to reduce flavor mismatch and improve confidence.⁽¹¹⁾

Simplify Choice, Grow Trial

Wine is social and aspirational, but to compete today it must feel easier to understand, choose, and enjoy⁽¹²⁾. Simplify the path to purchase with easier shelf/menu navigation and occasion-led guidance.

Formats and Drink Types Fueling Growth



Growth is shifting toward smaller formats and drink types that provide convenience, affordability and low-risk trial in a cash constrained environment. Across all BevAlc categories, single-serve cans and Cocktails are becoming key growth engines, with portable (box + can) Wine and Spirits formats <=500ml growing rapidly at +28%.⁽⁴⁾ SGWS is seeing that behavior translate directly into performance. 50ml core Spirits account for 76% of SGWS core Spirits volume growth, while 200ml & 500ml core Wine drive 58% of core Wine volume growth.⁽¹⁾ Wine momentum is also building in Sauvignon Blanc and Wine Cocktails, gaining 1 point of volume share, reinforcing that growth is strongest where flavor, format, and occasion relevance intersect.⁽¹⁾

BEER & RTDs

Scale the RTD engine

RTDs are winning new consumers and now reaching similar household levels (63%) to total Spirits category (66%)⁽²⁾ — convert that reach into repeat growth by prioritizing the cold-box, cocktail led innovation and high-velocity packs that make trial easy and occasions immediate.

Win with Execution

Most RTD purchases are planned (61%), with 55% of shoppers deciding brand in-store. RTD trips tend to be quick in & out, making visibility and fast recognition key for winning the trip⁽³⁾. Cold-box visibility and retail displays are critical to capturing the decision at shelf.

Win Value Formats

Consumers are gravitating toward larger single-serve and immediate-consumption formats that deliver convenience, value and occasion fit, reflecting a preference for smaller cash outlays that provide the largest bang for their buck. With 32oz and 19.2oz singles helping drive Beer volume growth,⁽⁴⁾ there is a clear opportunity to win the quick-trip shopper by aligning pack architecture to high-velocity occasions and per-ounce value expectations.

SPIRITS

Scale Cocktail-Led Growth

Spirits RTDs drive 94% of total Spirits volume growth⁽⁴⁾ Turn Cocktail equity into a format strategy by expanding recognizable serves across more occasions and touchpoints.

Seed Trial with Small Formats

While small sizes account for 24% of the core Spirits category, SGWS SET (Sales Execution Tracking) data shows they only account for 12% of Spirit shelves,⁽⁵⁾ suggesting small sizes are under-indexed at retail. Optimize size assortment to capture consumers seeking affordable, convenient and low-risk ways to trial products.

Tiny Pours & Tasting Menus

In the on-premise, smaller pours and half-sized bottles at lower prices deliver value, variety, and moderation—plus tasting experiences that elevate the Cocktail and Wine by the glass game.⁽⁶⁾

WINE

Lead with Wine Cocktails

Wine-based Cocktail innovation generated \$107M, representing 66% of Wine innovation dollars⁽⁷⁾, with all Cocktails generating 92% of total Wine growth⁽⁴⁾ — prioritize Cocktail-led innovation and merchandising to recruit younger drinkers into Wine.

Grow Portable Wine Formats

200ml Wine drives 55% of Sparkling/Still Wine volume growth⁽⁴⁾ — use small formats to unlock trial, expand grab-and-go occasions and everyday pours.

Go Premium-Accessible

\$15-19.99 innovation generated \$83M, accounting for 37% of Wine innovation dollars. Sub-\$15 items drove the Wine-innovation decline⁽⁷⁾ — follow the innovation dollars and lean into premium-accessible tiers where growth, recruitment and trade-up opportunities converge.

Owning the Moments That Matter



Occasions aren't fading—they're evolving. Drinking is occurring more throughout activity-based-gatherings and around bigger cultural events. While on-premise visits are shifting into midday and mid-afternoon occasions, early evening remains the highest-volume drinking occasion, creating an opportunity to reimagine how brands engage consumers throughout the day. SGWS is seeing the dining channel regain momentum, with strong improvement in Fine Dining and Casual Dining continuing to play a critical role in driving consumer engagement. Together, these trends reinforce that growth comes from aligning the right brands, formats, and experiences to the occasions consumers value most.⁽¹⁾

BEER & RTDs

Maximize on-the-go Occasions

Portable, single-serve RTDs fit the outdoor, daytime, and on-the-go moments younger consumers increasingly favor - elevate the c-store trip. Convenience is about one-third of Beer volume ⁽¹⁾— value packs and single-serve win the trip-driven shopper.

Win the Big Event

Big events like the World Cup are growth engines, but the opportunity extends beyond a single moment. Plan early to recreate high-energy activations across the balance of the year and into next year, aligning programming to sports, cultural events, key holidays, and the categories that naturally over-index for each occasion.

Capture Earlier Dayparts

Early evening remains the core Beer consumption occasion, but declining participation, particularly among Craft and Import Beer drinkers, is reducing category demand. Protect 5–8pm as the velocity anchor, then use happy hour, after-work, and event-led moments to build incremental demand.⁽²⁾

SPIRITS

Maximize the Tequila Occasion

Tequila continues to win new consumers, growing household levels to 31.4% (+6 points vs 2019,⁽⁵⁾ and Reposado leading the momentum. As Reposado drives 43% of core Spirits (excluding Cocktails) volume growth,⁽³⁾ deepen frequency with occasion marketing around out-of-home, high-energy and social moments.

Win Out-of-Home

On-premise is where premium Spirits win occasions and build loyalty. Nearly half of consumers (46%) say bars and restaurants are the best place to try a new brand, and that trial creates lasting value, with 69% looking for the brand at retail afterward and 70% continue drinking it in future visits.⁽²⁾ Investing in high-visibility on-premise occasions creates a direct path from discovery to repeat consumption.

Drive High-Velocity Cocktails

The Cocktail list is the velocity lever: protect the classics that drive volume, and menu the momentum drinks — Espresso Martini, Spritz, etc— into the daytime and drink-led occasions that are growing.

WINE

Own where Wine Wins

Occasion (22%) matters to consumers just as much as Wine type and style (23%)⁽⁴⁾. Wine does not need to win every drinking occasion; it needs stronger ownership of the occasions where it delivers unique value: meals, hosting and celebration - merchandise by occasion expand relevance and convert hesitant shoppers.

Everyday Pour Occasions

Shoppers still associate Wine with special occasions, leaving weeknights and casual social hours as the biggest untapped whitespace — lean into approachable, joyful “Wine in the mix” merchandising to drive emotional connection and daily relevance with consumers.

Raise Wine's Visibility

Wine earns strong sentiment but captures only 23% of beverage conversation vs. 41% for Beer and 32% for Spirits — make it easier to see, shop, and choose through occasion-led merchandising, clearer shelf cues, and premium-accessible storytelling.⁽⁴⁾

04

The Barbell Advantage | K-Shaped Economy + K-Shaped Consumer



The K-shaped divide is about more than economics; it's about consumer choice. Drinkers are becoming more selective, seeking either affordable ways to trial and explore or premium experiences that feel worth the spend. From low ABV to high ABV and from sweet to dry flavor profiles, growth is concentrating at both ends of the spectrum. SGWS is seeing consumers gravitate toward tiers that deliver strong perceived value, with affordable quality and premium-accessible offerings emerging as sweet spots for engagement and growth.⁽¹⁾

BEER & RTDs

Win the Value-Seeker

High-ABV craft brands are winning by pairing premium taste with strong perceived value. Focus on the craft brands that resonate most with consumers, with a balanced assortment of differentiated offerings that drive engagement and velocity.

Court Premium with Imports

Imported Beers dominate by delivering a premium feel at an affordable price point — value with polish is the new premium.

Turning up the Proof

Consumers are increasingly choosing stronger options, pushing BevAlc high-ABV to \$10.4B in sales and 160M cases. Growth is fueled by RTDs (+22%), which now account for 36% of overall RTD category sales (+5.4 points vs last year), reflecting demand for convenient, high impact occasions.⁽²⁾

SPIRITS

Capture Small Size Momentum

Small formats are not just a value play — high-income households contributed 40.1% to the sales growth of total Spirits small sizes, and they represent 43.2% of small-size Spirits buyers⁽³⁾ — use small sizes to unlock trial convenience and premium discovery across income levels.

Defend Premium Tequila & Extend Luxury Whiskey

Protect the \$20–\$34.99 Tequila tier, which drives 98% of Tequila volume growth, while extending momentum in luxury American Whiskey, where \$100+ offerings contribute 94% of category volume growth.⁽⁴⁾

Make Value Accessible

As consumers become more selective, winning the value end means delivering flexibility. Offer approachable price points, easy-to-enjoy flavor profiles, and occasion-fit formats that lower barriers to entry without sacrificing experience.

WINE

Optimize Pack and Price

While most Wine price tier combinations remain challenged, White Wine sees sales growth in \$15-19.99 & \$25+.⁽⁶⁾ Build accessible entry points and premium options through the right mix of pack sizes, formats, and price tiers—keeping consumers in the category across occasions with a clear value proposition.

Premium Made Simple

Consumers still value quality, craftsmanship, and authenticity—but not complexity. Help shoppers buy with confidence by simplifying quality signals, using approachable language, and providing everyday premium recommendations that make trade-up decisions easy.

Invest in the Story

Consumers are willing to pay for products that feel worth it. Define what makes your brand distinctive—aging, ingredients, history, exclusivity, process, personality⁽⁵⁾—and bring that story to life to strengthen perceived value and support premiumization.



Winning the Moderation Consumer

Moderation isn't shrinking BevAlc— it's widening it. Wellness-minded consumers aren't skipping the occasion; they're building broader baskets that include alcohol-free, functional, THC and adaptogenic beverages alongside traditional BevAlc. 98% of BevAlc Non-Alc + Social Tonic (including THC/CBD) buyers also purchase BevAlc, and 73% of trips include both options, acting as basket extenders and increasing spend by \$13⁽¹⁾. SGWS is seeing this moderation shift translate into greater menu and shelf presence. Non-Alc now reaches 3% of menu share and is offered by 53% of national accounts (+20 points vs PY) ⁽²⁾. Retailers are also expanding assortment to meet demand, with SGWS Non-Alc Spirits now present in 15% of Spirit chain accounts and Non-Alc Wine in 31% of Wine chains⁽³⁾

BEER & RTDs

Court the Wellness Lifestyle

Consumers aren't stepping away from BevAlc, they're expanding their choices. Moderation continues to gain traction across generations, with younger drinkers leading adoption. Rather than leaving the category, drinkers are expanding how they engage with it, helping propel **Non-Alc Beer, Wine and Spirits** past \$1B in sales in 2025 and to nearly 1% of total BevAlc dollars.⁽⁴⁾

Scale Functional Beverages

Functional beverages are gaining momentum as consumers increasingly seek products with clear, credible benefits and transparent claims. That demand is translating into stronger engagement, outpacing total beverages on both trips and dollars, with dollars-per-buyer up +12.0% vs. +5.4% for total beverages.⁽⁵⁾

Set the Zero-Proof Pace

Non-Alc Beer is Beer/Malt's fastest-growing segment — dollar sales are up double-digits at +12%⁽⁴⁾
Lower-calorie and Non-Alc Beers are gaining momentum as consumers increasingly seek options that fit active, wellness-focused lifestyles and occasions.

SPIRITS

Own the Non-Alc White Space

Non-Alc Spirits are underdeveloped — representing 0.3% of total Spirits dollars but hold 8% of Non-Alc BevAlc and gaining the most share, up 2.6 points vs 2024.⁽⁴⁾ As trial continues to turn into habit, the category is scaling rapidly, delivering a 54% three-year CAGR,⁽⁴⁾ while innovation dollars have more than doubled from 2024.⁽⁶⁾

Lead the Low-Alc Shift

Low-Alc Spirits represent 60% of Low-Alc Beer, Wine and Spirits landscape and continue to gain — up 8.5 points vs 2024⁽⁷⁾ — expand assortment and merchandising now to establish leadership before category reaches scale.

Anchor the Mocktail Moment

SGWS SET (Sales Execution Tracking) menu data supports mocktails moving from novelty to a menu staple. 9% of accounts with Spirits Cocktail menus have a mocktail section.⁽³⁾

WINE

Extend the No & Low-Alc Occasion

Non-Alc Wine dollar sales are up +18%, with growth driven by Non-Alc Sparkling⁽⁴⁾ — signaling a growing opportunity to extend Wine occasions and capture incremental spend.

Expand the Non-Alc Footprint

Suppliers are adding No and Low-Alc Wine into their repertoire at a faster incubation level than ever before. Consumers will gravitate towards trusted brands that extend familiar flavors and quality cues into Non-Alc Wine.

Win Beyond Dry January

Moderation is now a year-round behavior, not the reset it once was. As consumers increasingly "zebra-strip" between BevAlc and Non-Alc, Dry January remains an important trade marketing opportunity to showcase trusted Non-Alc Wine brands. Drive recruitment and strengthen brand connection with consumers, re-engaging the 46% who expect to return to alcohol after January.⁽⁸⁾

Where to Play Offense in H2 2026

H2 2026 is our moment to lead the market forward — where moderation adds, Gen Z grows, small formats scale, occasions still sell and execution wins at the end. That's how we raise the bar.

Courting the Next Generation

Gen Z is emerging as a key growth cohort, over-indexing in Spirits and RTDs while uniquely increasing Wine spend—making early engagement critical to shaping future category growth.

Formats and Drink Types Fueling Growth

The products and formats winning today are the ones making BevAlc easier to discover, try, and enjoy—opening new occasions, recruiting new consumers, and fueling future growth.

Owning the Moments That Matter

Winning today means owning the occasions that drive demand—from everyday consumption to cultural moments, social gatherings, and on-premise discovery. Growth comes from servicing occasions that matter most—connecting brands, formats, and consumers across every drinking moment.

The Barbell Advantage K-Shaped Economy + K-Shaped Consumer

The strongest growth opportunities sit at the edges—low and high ABV, small and premium formats, everyday value and elevated experiences—while the middle continues to fragment.

Winning the Moderation Consumer

Moderation is expanding the BevAlc occasion—not replacing it—creating new pathways for growth through no-, low-, and functional offerings that complement and act as basket extenders to traditional BevAlc choices.

Execute Efficient Innovation

The most effective innovation doesn't add complexity—it creates meaningful reasons for consumers to engage, explore, and return. Prioritize innovation on fewer, differentiated bets that drive recruitment, retention or unlock incremental occasions.