The Grocer

Focus On: spirits by Daniel Woolfson (daniel.woolfson@thegrocer.co.uk)

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The Story

We all know gin is in. It's delivered nearly half the spirits sector's £100m plus growth in the past year. But where else is the growth coming from? With sales up £20m, is rum set to be the new gin? How are the trends that have benefitted gin (demand for small batch products with heritage, provenance, new flavours, trendy branding, etc) playing out in the rest of the market? How can gin sustain its growth?

Key themes:

Retailers: This feature will pay close attention to how different retailers are approaching the category, in terms of their branded and own label ranges, merchandising, price, promotions and so on. All of the major retailers have made big changes to their ranges in the past year. How has this affected the brands and SKUs (i.e. 1,000ml, 700ml, 350ml bottles, RTDs) they stock?

Mainstream brands: How are the giants of the spirits world maintaining shelf space in this difficult environment? How are they using factors such as new product and format development, diversification into new areas (such as cider), marketing and advertising to convince retailers they're worth their share of shelf?

Premium spirits: Average prices are rising in most of the major spirits sub sectors. Is this because drinkers are trading up to posher spirits or are other issues such as new promotional strategies, format changes or macroeconomic factors at play too? If they are trading up, what are they trading up to?

Value brands: As the discounters continue to steal share of the spirits market, value brands still have a part to play in helping mainstream retailers compete. Some have even lowered abv and increased unit size to allow them to keep prices low and appeal to price conscious consumers. So which brands are performing most strongly at the value end of the market? Who's being priced out of the market?

Cocktail culture: To what extent is growing consumption of cocktails at home fuelling growth in spirits sales? How are brands and retailers cashing in on this trend? What else can be done to encourage drinkers to have a go at recreating the drinks they knock back on a night out at home?

Sub sectors: We will be analysing everything from blended whisky, vodka, gin and rum to liqueurs, pre-mixed cocktails, cognac and brandy in this feature, exploring which macro trends, brands and other factors have affected their fortunes over the past year. Gin has had the greatest gain of the past year. Why? How are players looking to sustain growth or turn things around?

Innovation: Key to this feature will be a discussion of the latest NPD from the category's brands and own label players, large and small. The feature will explore the market trends that have inspired these innovations and weigh up which new launches are most likely to encourage new trends in the market. We will profile eight of the most interesting new launches in a separate innovation panel.

Key questions the feature is likely to address:

- What consumer trends have impacted the category over the past year?
- How have promotional strategies (both in terms of price and marketing) evolved?
- How have individual retailers' strategies impacted the market?
- How has merchandising changed in the market?
- What impact has own-label had on branded players?
- What's next for the category?