

Alcoholic Drinks - Overview Of November's New Product Launches

Contributed by Euromonitor International
Wednesday, 22 December 2010

This monthly summary highlights some of the most interesting product launches in November, with a focus on the direction the alcoholic drinks industry is taking in terms of innovative developments.

Seasonal offerings and a time for companies to be merry

Special discounts and promotions in alcoholic drinks have secured a level of ubiquitous presence over the Christmas period that makes stockings, carols and Rudolph the red-nosed reindeer pale into insignificance.

Gone are the days of critically assessing the potentially devaluing effect of severe price cuts – if austerity is now the name of the game, frugality is the title in the rulebook and value-for-money propositions the essential pawns for the cash-strapped middle-classes getting ready for the next round.

However, beyond such over-debated and largely mundane promotional strategies, the arrival of the Christmas season, as well as the beginning of winter, provide unique opportunities for product diversification and innovative launches.

Either going for a decidedly Christmassy twist or simply drawing inspiration from a tipples northern, icy heritage can hence prove to be an edgier, more relevant and more convincing approach to seasonality.

A small number of manufacturers are already testing the frosty waters, and the results will undoubtedly be closely scrutinised.

Tuborg Christmas Brew from Carlsberg

Exclusively available in JD Wetherspoon pubs across the UK for the next 10 weeks, this 5.6% ABV beer is brewed with lager, ¼inchener and caramel malt, plus English liquorice.

It has already performed well in Denmark and Carlsberg is attempting to replicate its success in the still struggling - but seasonally uplifted - UK market.

McNally's Winter Spice Strong Ale from Big Rock Brewery

Launched in Canada, the beer is available for a limited period in six-pack bottles and 30-litre kegs. With a 6% ABV and a cost of C\$11.99 (US\$11.96) per six-pack of bottles in the off-trade, the company is trying to replicate last year's sell out.

Blue Moon Winter Abbey Ale from Blue Moon Brewing Company

Part of the company's seasonal-inspired offerings, including Spring Blonde Wheat Ale, Summer Honey Wheat Ale and Harvest Pumpkin Ale, Winter Abbey Ale will be available in ½ barrel kegs, 1/6 barrel kegs and 12oz bottles in six- and 12-packs.

Launched in the US, this latest craft offering comes with an ABV of 5.7% and will cost US\$8.99 per 75cl bottle.

Organic spirits?

The organic trend, timidly starting as a brook to later become a torrent, radically reshaping the full FMCG spectrum, has been only hesitantly embraced by the alcoholic drinks industry.

Wine has historically been the category to most readily adopt the trend, although legislative barriers and definitional perplexity have largely put the segment into a state of limbo.

According to Euromonitor International's packaged food research, organic packaged food saw a marked deterioration from its previously skyrocketing sales in 2009 as the recession started to bite.

Nevertheless, 2010 has already seen a strong bounce back and consistent consumer interest in the category further highlights this mostly untapped and largely downturn-resilient opportunity.

Spirits - even more so inherently conservative spirit behemoths - are rarely at the forefront of radical innovation. This time round, the omens must be very positive indeed.

Moon Mountain Vodka from Diageo

Moon Mountain Vodka is produced in the US and is made using organic ingredients and is USDA-certified organic. The company claims to be attempting to ‘mimic’ the speciality winemaking process, while the product will cost US\$19.99 per bottle.

Lion's Pride Organic Whiskey from Koval Distillery

A single grain, unfiltered whiskey named after the distiller's son, Lion is available in four varietals: Lion's Pride Rye, Lion's Pride Oat, Dark Rye and Dark Oat. Costing US\$48 per 75cl bottle, Lion's Pride Organic Whiskey is the first (legal) whiskey distilled in Chicago since Prohibition, according to Koval.

Lager galore

It is now as commonplace to reiterate the fact that lager dominates and controls overall beer fortunes in the UK as it is to scathingly underline the category's maturity and lack of radical innovation.

Interestingly, manufacturers and distributors seem to eventually be coming to terms with the fact that revamping and discounting will not be enough to stem the tide of steadily declining penetration rates.

Character and a convincing narrative have always been essential brand attributes but as the lager category continues to haemorrhage sales – even more so in the on-trade - provenance and unique brewing methods will replace the mainstream lager variants in the desperate quest for growth.

Rare Budvar from Budweiser Budvar

Launched in the UK, it is the first time that the golden unpasteurised lager has been distributed outside the Czech Republic. Because of the short shelf life (akin to that of real ale) and delicate draught condition, Budvar UK is only releasing it four times a year, while it will initially only be available in select on-trade outlets.

Suffolk Blonde from Chevallier Beer Company (CBC)

Suffolk Blonde, at 5.2% ABV, is the first beer brewed by the Chevallier Beer Company (CBC), a new firm set up by the people behind Aspull cider and aimed at riding the wave of the booming craft beer segment.

The new single hop varietal lager, launched in the UK, will be initially distributed via Mitchells & Butlers pubs and will be priced alongside the likes of Peroni and other premium lagers.

Novelty appeal: From Hello Kitty to Motörhead

Never underestimate pop culture's halo effect. Esoteric character, sustainability credentials and vintage years are all well and good but sometimes nothing can match targeting an already established and loyal fan base.

From Hello Kitty-themed bottles to the latest Motörhead metal-oriented offering, the key selling point is simply an image on the bottle. And it works.

Motörhead Shiraz from Grape Swedish Ltd

Launched in limited numbers in Swedish Systembolaget specialists, the wine successfully sold out all 1,000 available cases within only a week as the cult metal band's iconic logo on a fittingly black bottle proved to be more than enough to convince fans - a case of wine varietals, country of origin and tasting notes becoming utterly irrelevant.

As the winter sets in and 2011 is now just around the corner, Euromonitor International will continue to follow the latest new product developments from around the world.

Analyst Insight by Spiros Malandrakis.

Please visit Euromonitor International for more information

10 December 2010