

# BetterByDesign

## Designing with Desire for Spirits...

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Even if I feel certain a whiskey, tequila, beer, wine—or other product—is what I want, choosing from the myriad of options is still a daunting, experience. In the high-involvement alcohol category, the journey and the discovery is the reward.

Mark McCallum, Executive Vice President of Jack Daniel's, provided a summation of the whiskey category in Interbrand's 2017 Best Global Brands report. It struck me when he said, “I work in a slow-moving consumer goods business, not a fast-moving consumer goods business.” This is spot on, and it applies to all sub-sets of the alcohol category. When authenticity, craftsmanship, and attention to detail are paramount for your brand’s success, you must take the time to create and polish a beautiful brand story and experience that fosters emotional connections that people will cherish.

These elements are critical for consumers like me who crave more when selecting our preferred beverages. We are seeking meaningful relationships with brands, personal moments, and knowledge more than ever before. We want to know everything about the brands we are drinking: where they’re from, how they are made, who the people are who make them, and the history. We aren’t just buying the juice. We are buying a connection, an experience, with that brand. In fact, spending on experience is forecasted to outpace spending on things in the U.S. by 33% over the next five years.<sup>1</sup> The same behaviors and brand connections are paralleled in the design process. Central to the creative process is the desire to become not only brand enthusiasts, but brand stewards. We want to get to know every facet of the brand and its relationship with people. We seek a holistic understanding to inform the creative concepts. Having a diverse background of knowledge on the history, foundation, and external influences on the brand is a critical part of the creative process, and it is key to creating and delivering unique and authentic experiences people covet.

Trends in the alcohol category also reinforce that seeking genuine and new experiences has a real business impact. Volume sales are declining, but dollar sales are increasing in this category. While consumption is decreasing, people are paying more for higher quality beer, wine, and spirits. We have a growing interest in experimenting and learning, especially when purchasing alcohol. This is driving the growing number of new brands launching year after year. In 2016 alone, 83 whiskeys were introduced in the US market.<sup>2</sup> From 2007 to 2017, sales of value spirits dropped from 40% to 33% of the total spirits market share. In the same time period, sales of more expensive spirits (\$20+ per bottle) rose from 24.6% to 31.8%. This illustrates that consumer preferences are shifting from value to premium options. This change in buying behavior alone has accounted for an additional \$2.4 billion in revenue for US spirits since 2007.<sup>2</sup>

Experimentation isn’t just limited to specific categories like wine or whiskey. It is expanding across all categories of alcohol, and even including non-alcoholic drinks like mocktails and cannabis-infused beverages. People are also seeking out variety by consuming more than one type of beverage in any one setting. The recent surge in popularity of tasting flights and the explosion of tourism at breweries, wineries, and distilleries are by-products of our desire to experiment, experience, and build brand connections.

The parallel between this category and the design process continues. Experimentation is just as critical to both. In the creative process we are constantly prototyping, challenging, and reworking ideas and designs until they are polished and ready for the world, all while immersing ourselves in the craft of the brand and learning new things. Any good designer will tell you that we are never truly satisfied. Even after a design has made its way to the shelf, we still find ourselves challenging the decisions we made throughout the process. Perhaps this isn’t too dissimilar to a brewer or distiller creating a new flavor or style. It is a never-ending quest for something special, unique, and beautiful.

Throughout my career, I have been fortunate to have worked with some of the most iconic beer, wine, and spirits brands in the world. It is some of the most exciting, highly regarded, and pursued work in the consumer branding and packaging discipline. It requires a special level of attention to understand the nuances in delivering authenticity, craftsmanship, and detail for these brands. Brand teams can never settle. To achieve the same level of recognition and brand strength, all brands should seek a partner who is persistent and passionate in delivering that same bliss we experience in our own customer journeys as a shopper. That’s what I strive for.

1. “Stylus Report Alcohol’s New Retail Frontiers” Published: 12 July 2018 By: Estella Shardlow.  
2. “U.S. Spirits Had Banner Year in 2017 Behind Premiumization.” Distilled Spirits. 1 Feb. 2018. Beveragedynamics.com

