

Steps for Starting a Successful Beverage Brand

Creating your own energy drink, or producing your own vodka, or some type of “fountain of youth” elixir has, for the past decade or so, been all the rage. Indeed, consumers who walk into any convenience store are inundated with countless brands, types, flavors, sizes and shapes of various beverage products vying for their dollar. Given that these consumers will not spend much time deciding what grabs their fancy, from the producer’s standpoint, grabbing their attention—and keeping it—is essential. The following is a primer aimed at those who seek part of the beverage action.

Product (Quality)

This seems obvious, but whether you introduce a completely unique product, or a product such as “vodka,” if you intend to generate repeat purchases, then you must provide a quality product relative to the price you seek. Hence, the greatest design on the shelf will lure first time buyers, but if you do not give them quality commensurate with price, they will quickly become last time buyers. There are many high-quality flavor houses and distillers that work with start-up brands that can offer a variety of blends that can be tested with potential consumers prior to production.

Brand Name (Meaningful and Easy to Read)

A product’s name is very important in the development of a brand. Indeed, a name should be established prior to the package and brand development stage. That said, it can be one of the most challenging aspects of brand development. Not only does a brand name generate ideas for product positioning, package design and advertising, it conjures up emotion and becomes memorable for consumers. It should be easy to read and not confuse the consumer for the category it is in.



When brainstorming for ideas, you should be cognizant that common dictionary words or famous names are difficult to trademark. Most are already taken. One thing that can be done is merge words to form new words. Common words such as “ice” can be combined with another common word to form new “words” that can be trademarked. For example, Starbucks “Frappuccino” is a combination of *frappe* and *cappuccino*. Flowdesign created “Blue Ice” Vodka by combining the two common words, thereby creating a trademarked name unique in the spirits category.

Packaging (Differentiate, Differentiate, Differentiate!)

Packaging is the most effective way to get a consumer’s attention through the glut of competing products. Unfortunately, packaging is often an afterthought for a lot of start up brands. While product, materials, shipping, and other costs can quickly add up, it would be a mistake to skimp on design. The design of a brand is your cheapest form of advertising and your best chance to connect with the consumer. Most consumers like to try new things and the only way to entice their interest is through clever, interesting, and/or provocative packaging. In other words, the image created by the package must be notable and memorable. Creative packaging is crucial in attracting first time buyers to an unknown brand.

To ensure your brand imaging and packaging is done right, you should consider the following steps:

1. *Work with a reputable design firm with experience in your product field.*
A reputable design firm will guide you through the design development process from start to finish. Find a design firm that knows branding with both graphics and structural design. Many designs created by graphic professionals who possess little or no manufacturing acumen may create a design you like, but the design

cannot be translated to the manufacturing process or is simply too expensive to make.

2. *Describe your design goals and describe other brands that you admire.*

A design brief describing target market, price point, competition and personal preference for style will help guide the design firm to create designs that fit your design goals.

3. *Allow the designers freedom to create.*

Having a preconceived idea for what your design should look like may be a good starting point, but have an open mind to new ideas and allow your design firm the freedom to go in other directions. The "I know what my product design should look like" mentality, can greatly limit a designers options to create something truly unique.

4. *Stock versus Custom Bottles*

At flowdesign we always try to encourage our clients to opt for a custom shaped container for their product. A custom shape blended with brand graphics can only increase the uniqueness and brand identity of your product. Some brands rely greatly on structure for brand identity. For example, products like Coca Cola, Absolut Vodka, and most recently Crystal Head Vodka are all structurally unique. In recent years the price for a custom mold has dropped dramatically due to the improved quality from Asia and other developing countries.

There are many high-quality stock containers available that can be ordered in lower quantities that do not require mold costs and minimum quantity production runs. The drawback to stock containers is that you may find the same bottle being used by a competitor. Thus it becomes more challenging for a consumer to differentiate your product from the others. Design techniques like spray coatings, acid etching, color and font usage, label materials, custom capsules, or cartouches can be useful helping your product stand out.



5. *Get feedback from your first round of creative.*

Your design firm can perform informal focus groups, or focus groups facilitated per your target market if your budget allows. Informal feedback is inexpensive and can be helpful if done correctly, but more accurate feedback can be achieved with the use of a targeted focus group or an online feedback forum. Feedback from focus groups can be helpful in guiding direction but should not be used as the ultimate determining factor in design direction. For example, General Motors relied greatly on the views of focus groups in its design of the Pontiac Aztek. Unfortunately for General Motors, the Pontiac Aztek was a sales flop for GM and rated among the top 50 worst automotive designs by Time Magazine.

Seeing your energy shot prominently displayed near the cash register, or your premium vodka standing out against other top-shelf brands can be a thrilling experience. Particularly if the consumer likes it as much as you do. The correct branding of your product is crucial to its success.

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