

NextLevelMarketing

BEVERAGE AUTHORITY

February 2006 ~ Volume 5, Issue 2

manage. serve. profit.

©Next Level Marketing 2006

THE BIG PICTURE



Universal Formula For Success

I had the good fortune to spend my first week in the spirits industry touring the country with a senior sales executive. After a full week of teaching me the basics about the business, he dropped me off at the airport and told me something that has helped me more in my career than anything I learned in graduate school. He said that if I forgot everything else that he'd taught me, I'd succeed in the industry if I always remembered, "This industry is about people helping people."

Success in this, or almost any other business, is not about getting what you want; rather it's about building a reputation for helping others get what they want. I've met a lot of great professionals in this industry over the years. I've learned a lot from so many of them and done all that I could to help those same people as well.

continued on page 4

SPOTLIGHT ON COCKTAILS

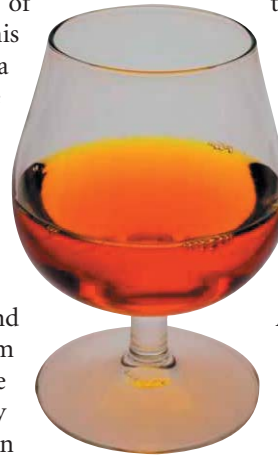
Profiting From the Ten Greatest Brandy Cocktails

The big news of this century is that brandy is back and more popular than ever. From Main Street to Wall Street, people are rediscovering the unsurpassed character and delectable taste of brandy. Not surprisingly, this renaissance was not born with a snifter in its hand. Instead, the birth of this mega-trend came about from people exploring brandy's creative range and limitless mixability.

Brandy is unique within the spirit world. While most types of liquor—vodka, gin and whiskies—are distilled from cereal grains, brandy is made from grapes. It is essentially wine that is distilled rather than going through the winemaking process. In fact, brandy is a derivative of the German word meaning "burnt wine."

As a result, brandy has an incomparably fresh and vibrant flavor. Its personality and

character is so universally appealing that it has the rare ability to complement a huge range of other flavors. Brandy works with everything from coffee and chocolate to mint and champagne. When it comes to mixability, it is undoubtedly a top performer behind the bar.



Brandy provides a base of flavor upon which to build something great. It provides a foundation with an alluring bouquet and exuberant, fruit-induced flavor. Add a modifier or two and you've got the making of something truly spectacular.

One last consideration, brandies come in a wide variety of styles. They are made in every wine-producing nation and have as many different looks and personalities as the United Nations. One thing is certain, the better the brandy, the better

continued on page 5

Spotlight on a Professional ... 2

Bar Guru Keeps Cranking Out the Hits

Beverage Management ... 3

Pizzazz Injections for Your Bar

Improving Your Business ... 4

Top Ten Things to Do on a Slow Bar Shift



PRODUCT PROFILE by Robert Plotkin

Xellent Swiss Vodka

Isn't it ironic that the first superpremium vodka from Switzerland isn't neutral? In fact, it's far from it. World-class *Xellent Swiss Vodka* takes a definite stand — it's imbued with mouth-filling flavors and has a discernable and engaging character. Leave the neutrality to the diplomats, this Swiss representative is decidedly top-shelf and proconsumer.

Xellent Vodka is handcrafted at the family owned DIWISA Distillery, a nearly hundred-year-old entity located near the Swiss Alps and Lake Lucerne. The vodka is distilled entirely from high-grade rye that grows in the thin air of the alpine foothills. The first distillation takes place in a traditional, copper pot still. This small batch method yields a spirit rich in taste, body and personality. The second and third distillations occur in a 45-plate column still, which renders the vodka weightless and pure.

continued on page 3

The Man Behind the Drinks You Drink

It's highly likely that you've had occasion to sample the artistic handiwork of David Commer. His specialty cocktails can be found on the bar menus of the most notable national eateries, as well as regional chains and even **AMF bowling centers**. Commer is affectionately known



within industry circles as the "Drink Doctor," the man the big boys call when they need beverage consulting.

"Someone once introduced me to an audience by saying that he hoped to one day be reincarnated as my liver," laughs Commer. "It was extremely funny, but it also underscores how much fun people think this job is. Drink development is not an occupation for the timid or thin skinned. Creating drinks and cocktails that will appeal to a huge segment of the population and every region of the country is a daunting task."

Before a drink makes it to a national operator's bar menu, it must survive a rigorous screening process. After innumerable executives sign-off on the drink, it must go before a battery of focus groups, which are comprised of employees and lay people within a particular demographics, who then test the drink along with food items being considered for rollout.

Few people have been so thoroughly trained for the rigors of the job as Commer. He started at 15 as a cook at a Dairy Queen in Pasadena, Texas. A year later he was working for a small, fast food

franchisee called **Restaurant Developers**. At the age of 18 Commer had risen up the ranks to regional manager, and by 20 he bought one of the company's restaurants.

Commer first started bartending several years later at a fine dining restaurant in Houston. Over the next few years he became the general manager of an upscale steakhouse and a casual dining franchise before following a friend to **TGI Fridays**. Over the course of thirteen years he was a general manager and regional manager for Fridays. His career took a decided step upwards when he accepted the position of Director of Beverage Marketing, Research and Development for Carlson Restaurants Worldwide.

It was here that Commer began garnering national recognition. Under his leadership, TGI Friday's reversed a protracted trend of declining beverage sales and increasing bar costs. A few dozen engaging specialty drinks, improved operational procedures and training, and enhanced marketing at the point of sale eventually turned things around.

"I was fortunate to have a lot of genuinely talented people to help me. I mean it's not something one individual can do alone," states Commer. "I also relied heavily on our suppliers, who provided me with relevant trend information and fresh drink ideas. I learned a great deal in my six years as Friday's beverage dude."

Since 2001, he has operated as Commer Beverage Consulting Liquid Assets. As a beverage consultant, he works with many of the most prominent and successful restaurant chains, assisting them with a variety of operational areas. Upwards of 100,000 people per week may possibly savor one of his many liquid creations. While much of his reputation is based on his success in drink development, few people better understand what it takes to profitably oversee a huge corporation's many beverage operations.

"I've had occasion to sit through presentations by suppliers or other consultants and listen to their ideas about drinks or beverage programs. Sometimes they really make me shake my head and wonder. Ideation is all well and good, but you need

continued on page 5



Velvet Falernum Back in the States

by Robert Plotkin

For those who may be unfamiliar with Taylor's **Velvet Falernum**, the classic Barbadian elixir is a refined infusion

of lime, cane sugar, cloves and almonds. With rum rocketing up the charts like a bullet, the 22-proof liqueur is a phenomenon waiting to happen behind American bars.

Made in Bridgetown, Barbados, Taylor's Velvet Falernum has crystalline clarity and a gloriously perfumed bouquet of cloves, citrus and spice. The array of aromas alone is worth the price of admission and contributes greatly to the allure of any rum-based libation. The liqueur has a soft, round body and a semisweet palate that quickly fills the mouth with tempered lime and spicy flavors.

Originally devised in 1890, Velvet Falernum is indispensable behind the bar and a must for creating classic rum drinks. After experiencing it firsthand, it is little wonder that famed mixologists Trader Vic and Don the Beachcomber relied heavily on Velvet Falernum in the majority of their recipes. For example, the recipe for the perennial favorite **Mai Tai** as originated by Don the Beachcomber calls for Myers's Plantation Rum, Cuban rum, Cointreau, fresh lime and grapefruit juice, Angostura bitters and a dose of Velvet Falernum. His famous recipes for the **Zombie** and **Vicious Virgin** call for Falernum as well.

Here's a golden opportunity to be the first one on your block to recreate classic rum drinks. Velvet Falernum is imported exclusively by The Spirit of Hartford in Hartford, CT (spiritofhartford@msn.com). —RP ♦

Pizzazz Injections for Your Bar

Some restaurants, bars and nightclubs avoid the stupefying effects of time, managing over the years to keep their competitive edge and the same creative spark they possessed at their inception. While some do, most don't.

Time affects beverage operations as it does us all. It has a way of diminishing the shine, dulling the glamour and dampening the sizzle of even the glitziest of clubs. Bars, like anything else, can lose their appeal, grow slack around the middle and slip into a predictable routine.

In the same way that a high-performance engine needs constant tuning, so does your beverage operation. No major over haul—just a few minor adjustments. Here are some suggestions to fuel the process.

⇒**Drink Flourishes** — According to Bon Appétit, swizzle sticks have become “one of the coolest collectibles around” and are currently enjoying a renaissance in bars and nightclubs across the country. Swizzles are more than mere implements for stirring, they're contemporary memorabilia, mementoes for the taking embossed with your logo and graphics. Swizzles have function and provide a lot of impact for the buck.

“Hang-ons” are also in vogue. They're descendants of the paper umbrellas of old; blue plastic whales to hook on the rim of a glass, pink flamingo fruit spears, lounging

mermaids, or dangling chimpanzees. They appeal to the kid in us, (“You mean I get the drink and get to keep this neat plastic orangutan”). You'll never spend less raising a smile out of your clientele.

Drink garnishing is an opportunity, not an obligation. The smallest nuances can make a big difference. Give your *Martini* drinkers something to talk about by garnishing their drink with vodka-steeped, anchovy-wrapped green olives, or pepper-infused, almond-stuffed black olives. Put some pizzazz in your *Bloody Mary* with a shrimp and scallion garnish. You can prepare strawberry fans, lime camellias and papaya moons. Flourishing a drink is like adding sizzle to a steak.

⇒**Staff Gone Flaccid?** — If bartenders could be replaced by tuxedoed robots or drink-making holograms, someone would have done it by now. Fact is, no machine, gadget or computer can provide the dynamics necessary to transform a body-filled room into party central the way a great bartender can.

Flipping bottles, tossing glasses and flinging mixing sets is definitely hot. For others, it's singing opera or dirty dancing on the bar. Others prefer “magic-tending,” performing feats of prestidigitation behind the bar with ordinary, everyday objects.

Hot is competency with panache and flair. A bartender with a genuine smile, quick wit and winning personality is a

hotter commodity than a drink-dispensing knife juggler who makes patrons feel as welcome as a boot camp drill instructor.

Want some heat? Light a fire under your bartenders and turn them loose.

⇒**Passé Product?** — No one said you have to offer the same bill of fare at your bar as the competition.

If it's true that the better the spirit, the better the cocktail, why not prepare all of your signature drinks with super-premium spirits. Upselling is an excellent means of stirring up excitement and increasing sales without promoting inebriation.

Also consider the merits of preparing highballs with bottled mixers; they make crisper, cleaner tasting drinks. The same is true if you use mineral water in drinks calling for plain soda and spring water in those finished with water. For some added pizzazz, how about adding Kahlúa to your *Irish Coffee*, or splashing Baileys into a *White Russian*. Do you offer your guests a Kahlua/chocolate/peanut butter/banana milk shake? If not, somebody should.

Anyone can make drinks, few make drinks special. Pizzazz behind the bar entails doing something unexpected, something out of the ordinary. The sales axiom “Don't sell the steak, sell the sizzle!” is equally true here. If it doesn't sizzle, who wants it? ♦

PRODUCT PROFILE *continued from page 1*

The spirit is then rested for several months before being reduced to proof with water originating from the Titlis glacier high in the Alps. The melting ice percolates through permeable strata of soil and rock leaching minerals in the process, a slow, methodical journey that takes many decades. The pristine spring water is eventually drawn from a deep underground aquifer in the upper Engelberg Valley. Prior to bottling the vodka is repeatedly filtered to ensure essential purity and clarity.

The skill and precision used to create this vodka is immediately evident. It is brilliantly clear and graced with a lush bouquet of ripe cherries and cocoa. Its silky, featherweight body lilts over the palate without the slightest trace

of heat delivering a semisweet payload of spices and dried fruit. The vodka finishes long and flavorful.

If you're wondering why Xellent is the first Swiss vodka, the reason is that until 1999 the government prohibited the distillation of grains and potatoes grown in Switzerland. Those of us fortunate to have a bottle of this exquisitely elegant spirit are eternally grateful that the embargo was lifted.

Your first sip of Xellent Vodka will confirm why the Swiss import has earned just about every major award

and accolade a spirit can earn. But wait a moment before you grab your cocktail shaker and begin concocting drinks. With its voluptuous body and delectable array of aromas and flavors, this masterpiece deserves to be sampled neat to be fully appreciated. More importantly, you deserve to sample this vodka neat.

After that, get to work. There isn't a vodka-based cocktail alive that won't be dramatically enhanced when made with Xellent. Here's a product that's appropriately named. —RP ♦



Top Ten Things to Do on a Slow Bar Shift

If you're really busy every shift behind the bar, stay where you are and don't change jobs. For most of us who bartend though, there are going to be shifts when you can feel yourself aging. Sometimes things just start slow and taper off from there. Whatever the reason, you can still contribute to the general welfare of the business on slow nights.

Here's our top ten list of things to do behind the bar when you just can't lean for one more minute.

- 1. Check Out the Pour Spouts** — Inspect the pour spouts on all of the liquor bottles in the speed racks and on the back bar. Retire the spouts that are worn and leak, and clean the rest. When in doubt, change the spout. Make sure that when finished all of the spouts face in the same direction relative to their label.
- 2. Clean the Beverage Gun** — The post-mix dispenser is the first thing the health inspector checks because it's typically the dirtiest square inch behind the bar. Disinfect the nozzle and holster and wipe clean the rest of the gun. The beverage guns should be cleaned a minimum of once a day.
- 3. Wipe Down Back Bar Bottles** — Dusty bottles on the back bar send your guests the wrong message about the worthiness of what's inside the bottle. And while you're cleaning, read the labels. Often there's a wealth of information about the brand and it's a good way to bone up on your product knowledge.
- 4. Take an Audit of the Bar Drawer** — Almost every bar has at least one drawer that's become the repository for extraneous stuff. Take a few minutes and discard what is obviously clutter or junk, and check if the drawer is stocked with such essentials as bandages, aspirin, antibiotic and hand lotion.
- 5. Wash an Extra Rack of Glasses** — Take stock of the cleanliness of those glasses that are used less frequently. They often wind up sitting on the shelves or hanging in glassware racks collecting a filmy layer of grime, smoke and dust. Invest in the bar's future and wash them.
- 6. Clean the Register or POS** — Sitting on the back bar, the register or POS is put through its paces every night and usually looks like it. Take a few moments and give it a detailing.
- 7. Attend to the Blender and Up-Mixer** — These machines are valuable tools of the trade. A thorough cleaning boosts their performance and longevity.
- 8. Clean Vertical Surfaces** — The mark of a true professional is a clean bar. Cabinets, drawers, display cases and cooler doors are rarely cleaned, a fact not lost on your customers.
- 9. Learn a New Drink** — Expand your professional expertise, pick up your favorite recipe guide and learn a new specialty.
- 10. Prep and Stock for the Next Shift** — elevate yourself to hero status by lending co-workers assistance and a

THE BIG PICTURE *continued from page 1*

“You'll go far in this industry if you remember that it's all about people helping people...”

Undoubtedly you'll have the opportunity of working with a countless number of people during your career, but greatness is only achieved when you consistently work with people who genuinely want to work with you. It's human nature, isn't it? If afforded an opportunity, wouldn't you choose to work with people you like and on whom you can count on in the clutch?

Since starting Next Level earlier this year, I've been amazed at the number of people that I have met from early in my career. It seems like I now know someone working in just about every company in the industry. I've run into people that used to work for me that

are now looking to hire me to work for them. I don't think any of this would be possible today if I didn't hear the adage about the industry being all about people helping people 15 years ago.

This brings me to a saying that I never like to hear...“It's not personal, it's just business.” When someone says this to you, it's likely someone you'll never want to work with again. I think everything we do in business is personal. For several years I worked with a large New York promotion agency teaching them about the spirits industry. When they felt that I could no longer help them, they started working around me, rather than with me. They said it wasn't personal and that

it was just business. That's when I knew that they probably wouldn't make it far in our industry.

That brings me to a story from annual. I was out at the Cheers Beverage Conference last week and saw this in action. I was with a new client who recently entered the spirits industry and was attending the conference for the first time. I decided to take her around and introduce her to some of the leaders in the industry. She later said to me that she was amazed at how everyone seemed to know each other and how nice people were to each other, even if they worked at competitive companies. She said the conference reminded her more of a family reunion than an industry function. That's when I said; “You'll go far in this industry if you remember that it's all about people helping people...”

Mike Ginley
Next Level Marketing

the resulting cocktail. So don't let anyone suggest that committing a stellar cognac or a prized Spanish brandy in a cocktail is sacrilege. On the contrary, it's creative genius.

To that end, we present the ten greatest brandy-based cocktails of all time. Give them a try and see if you don't agree.

⇒ **Brandy Alexander** — There may not be a more satisfying cocktail than a Brandy Alexander made with ice cream. This timeless classic features the uncomplicated marriage of brandy, crème de cacao and ice cream with a dash of nutmeg.

⇒ **Brandy Manhattan** — Sweet vermouth is a fortified wine that was seemingly created for the express purpose of being cast in a supporting role for brandy. We suggest a dash of bitters to fully round out the cocktail.

⇒ **Brandy Old Fashion** — What could be better than some muddled fruit, a little simple syrup, a splash of club soda and a healthy measure of brandy? The combination is lively and supremely flavorful.

⇒ **Café Royale** — Under the heading of "less is more," this classic drink is little more than brandy, simple syrup

and coffee. The espresso version is called a Café Correcto. Both are simply sensational.



⇒ **Dirty Mother** — Odd name for such a fabulous taste combination. It's made with brandy, Kahlúa and a dash of cream. For a savory variation, consider substituting an Irish cream liqueur for the half & half.

⇒ **French Connection** — Served neat in a snifter, the French Connection features equal parts of cognac and Grand Marnier. It's an elegant cocktail with which to finish off a great meal.

⇒ **French 125** — If you're looking to wow a guest, here's your chance. The French 125 is concocted with cognac, sweetened lemon juice and a fill of champagne. It's the unbeatable combination of effervescent and delicious.

⇒ **Keoki Coffee** — A popular favorite for the past 50 years, the Keoki Coffee is made with brandy, Kahlúa, crème de cacao and coffee. Top with whipped cream and wait for the kudos to roll in.

⇒ **Side Car** — Originated during World War I in France, the Side Car is traditionally made with cognac, Cointreau and sweetened lemon juice. The cocktail is exceptionally delicious. Don't forget to finish it off with a rim of sugar.

⇒ **Stinger Cocktail** — Popularized during the Roaring '20s, the Stinger Cocktail is made with brandy and white crème de menthe. Now often requested over ice, the original version remains unsurpassed. ♦

SPOTLIGHT ON A PROFESSIONAL *continued from page 2*

to be able to execute that idea on a large-scale basis. There are plenty of cool drink ideas that would be perfect for a dinner party, but disastrous for a national account. A great drink that you can't execute is a waste of time and energy."

One problem Commer sees many beverage operators make is assuming that they know best what their clientele is looking for. "An operator who believes that 'I am the consumer' is perched on a slippery slope. The riddle of what consumers really want is easily cracked once you ask them. They need to approach guests, buy people a round or two and find out what their preferences are. It's a great way to build repeat business and fine tune your beverage operation at the same time."

As you can imagine, Commer always has one eye on the horizon looking at

burgeoning beverage trends. "I think the concept of making drinks with fresh ingredients is here to stay. I'm not necessarily suggesting that operators need to incorporate freshly squeezed blood orange juice, pomegranates or prickly pears into their beverage line-up. What I am suggesting is that those three flavors are going to be particularly popular for the foreseeable future. Fortunately, there are many different ways to incorporate those flavors in drink making that don't necessarily entail an inordinate amount of advance preparation.

So the next time that you find yourself in the lounge of your favorite national restaurant, and you see someone in a lab coat taking the temperature of a cocktail, go over and say hello. It's the Drink Doctor and it's lonely at the top. -RP ♦

Next Level Marketing Beverage Authority

February 2006 ~ Volume 5, Issue 2

©Next Level Marketing 2006

Publisher: BarMedia

Editor: Robert Plotkin

Contributing Editor: Mike Ginley

Design: Katie Alter

Next Level Marketing

www.nextlevel-co.com ~ Tel.203.292.6295

1330 Post Road East, Westport, CT 06880

BarMedia

www.barmedia.com ~ authority@barmedia.com

Tel.520.747.8131 ~ Fax.520.903.0540

P.O. Box 14486, Tucson, AZ 85732

BarMedia and/or Next Level will not be responsible for the misuse of information obtained from this newsletter that results in harm in any form to the person/persons or to others while using this newsletter.

Brandy Drinks Are a Marketing Bonanza

If poker were a cocktail it would have brandy as the base. There's simply nothing blasé about the spirit. Brandy plays well with others, or it can quite effectively be billed as a solo act.

You could devise a successful beverage program using the list of the 10 greatest cocktails as the creative blueprint. One of the featured cocktails is guaranteed to please virtually anyone's palate. —RP♦

Brandy Alexander

House specialty glass, chilled
Pour ingredients into blender canister
 1 oz. Brandy
 1 oz. Dark Crème de Cacao
 Splash half & half cream optional
 2-3 heaping scoops vanilla ice cream
Blend ingredients
 Sprinkle nutmeg

Brandy Manhattan

aka Delmonico
 Cocktail glass, chilled
Pour ingredients into iced mixing glass
 3/4 oz. Sweet Vermouth
 2-3 dashes Angostura Bitters
 2 1/2 oz. Brandy
Stir and strain
 Cherry garnish

Brandy Old Fashion

Rocks or old fashion glass
Build in glass
 3 dashes Angostura Bitters
 1/2 oz. simple syrup
 1 orange slice and cherry
Muddle contents
 1 3/4 oz. Brandy
 Splash club soda
 Orange slice and cherry garnish

French Connection

Brandy snifter, heated
Build in glass
 1 1/2 oz. V.S. Cognac
 1 1/2 oz. Grand Marnier

French 125

Champagne glass, chilled
Pour ingredients into iced mixing glass
 1 1/2 oz. V.S. Cognac
 2 oz. sweet 'n' sour
Shake and strain
 Fill with Champagne
 Lemon twist garnish

Dirty Mother

aka Dirty White Mother
 Rocks glass, ice
Build in glass
 1 3/4 oz. Brandy
 3/4 oz. Kahlúa Coffee Liqueur
 3/4 oz. half & half cream

Café Correcto

Coffee mug, heated
Build in glass
 1 1/4 oz. Brandy
 Near fill with hot espresso coffee
 Whipped cream garnish
 Dust powdered cocoa

Café Royale

Coffee mug, heated
Build in glass
 1/2 oz. simple syrup (optional)
 1 1/2 oz. V.S. Cognac
 Fill with hot coffee

Keoki Coffee

Coffee mug, heated
Build in glass
 3/4 oz. Brandy
 3/4 oz. Kahlúa Coffee Liqueur
 3/4 oz. Dark Crème de Cacao
 Near fill with hot coffee
 Whipped cream garnish
 Dust powdered cocoa

Sidecar (1)

Cocktail glass, chilled
 Rim glass with sugar (optional)
Pour ingredients into iced mixing glass
 1 oz. V.S. Cognac
 1/2 oz. Cointreau Liqueur
 1 1/2 oz. sweet 'n' sour
Shake and strain

Great Bartenders Do It On The Rocks

The popularity of rock drinks has endured primarily because of their inherent simplicity. Long a mainstay of American mixology, they are able to deliver the goods unfettered by extraneous ingredients. Rock drinks feature a base liquor and are modified by a liqueur or two.

The key to their longevity is that the classic recipes feature a liqueur that complements the flavor and character of the drink's base spirit. Case in point is the timeless *Black Russian*, the iced combination of vodka and Kahlúa. The combined flavor of coffee and vodka is superb.

Being well-versed in the world of rock drinks is essential for any aspiring bartender. Here then is a little harmless quiz to check out your familiarity with this noble drink category. Identify the ingredients in the following drinks. ♦

Questions

1. Brave Bull
2. Dirty Mother
3. French Connection
4. Godfather
5. Godmother
6. Kamikaze
7. Mudslide
8. Russian Quaalude
9. Rusty Nail
10. Smith & Wesson
11. Sombrero
12. Vodka Gimlet

1. Tequila + Kahlúa
2. Brandy + Kahlúa + cream
3. VS Cognac + Grand Marnier
4. Scotch + Disaronno Amaretto
5. Vodka + Disaronno Amaretto
6. Vodka + Triple Sec + Lime Juice
7. Vodka + Kahlúa + Irish Cream
8. Stolichnaya Vodka + Kahlúa + Irish Cream
9. Scotch + Drambuie
10. Kahlúa + Cream + Cola
11. Kahlúa + Cream
12. Vodka + Lime Juice