

Survival of the Fittest in an Expanding Marketplace

I recently read a great article in the Wall Street Journal about flavored whiskies and the role they play in the spirit marketplace. Fred Minnick, the best-selling author behind the book Whiskey Women: The Untold Story of How Women Saved Bourbon, Scotch, and Irish Whiskey, explores the theories surrounding the failure and success of certain spirits and the potential risks posed to producers for 'crossing over' the lines drawn by tradition. So I asked myself, "Who's going to make a lasting impression on the collective palates of the drinking class and who will not?" I explored a few theories of my own.

First theory: It is not about the flavor. Stay with me here. It is not necessarily about a specific flavor, but about the so-called voids that exist in the spirits spectrum. The spectrum ranges from flavorless, high octane spirits such as vodka all of the way to the more esoteric spirits such as Fernet Herbal Liqueur. The in-between is, well, full. That is, almost full. The great thing about being a crafter is that there are no limits to your creativity. Have you seen Red Stag Hardcore Cider? How about Piehole's Pecan Pie Whisky? Eden Hill's hopped Gin? Producers are navigating uncharted territory and who's to blame them? The best case scenario is that they've created a new category out of an experiment. So the theory here is that if you do the research, find the void and fill it, you have a better chance of launching a successful product and brand.

Second Theory: We, the consumers, have the attention spans of goldfish. With so much to choose from these days and so much information being processed at any given time, why not as a producer take a risk and break the confines of tradition? If it's a total flop chances are the marketplace didn't bat an eye and you've learned a lesson. It's a win/win.

Last Theory: Money talks. This one is obvious. The more capital backing a product usually translates to more marketing and distribution. More marketing and distribution translates to more bottles in consumers' hands. The more hands, the more money back to the distillery and the cycle continues. Next thing you know you've created a phenomenon, i.e. Fireball. Fireball had the biggest marketing success story in decades and that doesn't come without a price.

So what we know is that the spirits landscape is shifting, for better or worse only time will tell. I, personally, love to explore what's out there and I will drink something because I genuinely enjoy it. I say keep the experiments coming and you'll know you're a success when not only have you bought my interest, but also my loyalty.

What are your thoughts on the flavor craze? Are you a purist or opportunist? Please leave your comments on our twitter and facebook page with the hashtag #flavorcraze.

Cheers,

Mel