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DIVA being featured on Singapore newspapers, 'The Business Times' – 4 Aug 2006

DIVA 的产品介绍刊登在新加坡报纸'The Business Times'里. - 2006 年 8 月 4 日

executive lifestyle

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Battle of the spirits

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MELISSA LWEE reports



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MOST people in Chan Yik Ley's age group would never choose cognac as their choice of poison.

However, the 22-year-old student and his group of friends stand out because they only order Martell VSOP when they go out partying, and nothing else.

"People always say that cognac is an old man's drink, but it doesn't bother me at all. It's just an assumption that they make, a stereotype," he said.

Chan, belongs to the growing group of young drinkers who prefer brown spirits like cognac and whisky to the conventionally more "hip" choice, vodka, even though the former is generally perceived as dowdy and boring. "I don't think it's cooler to drink vodka," he said. "In fact, I'm quite proud to be seen drinking what is considered to be an adult's drink."

He revealed that he even brought his drinking habits over to America where he is currently studying. "I usually buy a bottle and put it in my room. All my American friends who have tried it think it's awesome and that it's so much better than cheap beer and wine. We even set up an online group on Facebook.com called 'Friends of Martell'."

This trend has spurred local alcohol companies that bring cognac to shift some focus onto this emerging market.

In June 2006, Pernod Ricard, the alcohol company that brings Martell into Singapore also started the "Rise Above" campaign, an initiative involving Martell parties and new cocktail launches. Said Raymond Koh, marketing director for Pernod Ricard:

"As we discovered that the brand was becoming more relevant to the young adults, we decided to launch Rise Above in celebration of the fact that more people are willing to see the brand as contemporary."

And just last month, Hennessy VSOP recently launched Discover Music with Hennessy VSOP, a nationwide directive to reach the younger crowd through music, in support of innovation and creativity in new and emerging music genres.

This massive onslaught of marketing aggression from the cognac companies does not come unwarranted.

With more than 200 alcohol brands in Singapore jostling for a pie of the market, it is unsurprising that alcohol companies are fighting tooth and nail to go one up on their competitors.

More interestingly, according to industry experts, cognac consumption in Singapore today is about half what it was 10 years ago. This is in contrast to still wine consumption which has nearly tripled and sparkling wine consumption (including champagne) which has nearly doubled.

Explaining the numbers, industry experts suggest that this was most probably due to the declining popularity of local KTVs that were big supporters of the cognac industry.

They also suggest that the growing number of Singaporeans who travel and study abroad have brought the wine drinking culture back home.

Giorgio Ferrari, whose company deals with wine and spirits, said: "This has triggered a lot of efforts by cognac companies to promote consumption in order to regain market share."

And one way to do that is to target a younger audience, especially with



For the trendy or discerning drinker: (clockwise, from main photo) The Diva Vodka; 'A Bottle Named Desire' by Dom Perignon; new brand on the block The Singleton; Hennessy with a twist

the rise of the clubbing culture in Singapore.

"The image that people have about cognac is that you sip it by the fireplace whilst you read a good book and enjoy a cigar. It's not what one would choose to drink at a club," said Dr Ferrari.

"Generations change. The young don't want to be seen drinking their father's drink so that is why the cognac companies are trying to create an image of it being more trendy."

Director of Blackwood Distillers Tom Porter cited an added advantage of alcohol companies targeting the youth market.

He said: "If you get someone in his early 20s to convert to a particular alcohol, it is likely that he'd spend the next 30 to 40 years of his life favouring that same alcohol!"

"By appealing to the youth, you could potentially gain an entire generation of loyal followers for a long time."

In contrast to cognac, its brown spirit brother whisky is doing quite well. Consumption of whisky in Singapore is about double what it was 10 years ago.

Mr Porter said that one reason could have been that flavouring innovations in the single malt whisky market has attracted a new generation of whisky enthusiasts. The other was the extremely popular campaign that whisky company Chivas Regal did a few years ago — The Chivas Life.

He said: "They had advertisements that made people think that hey, this is the kind of life that I would like to be leading, and if drinking whisky can accomplish that, I'll drink whisky."

The idea of association branding is not new and could likely explain the reason why many alcohol brands are trying to keep relevant by merging with fashion.

One such example is the launch of "A Bottle Named Desire", a limited Dom Perignon Vintage 1998 edition created by famous designer and photographer Karl Lagerfeld which made waves worldwide.

The edition features a stunning Vintage 1998 bottle of Dom Perignon dressed with gold studs encased in an elegant, semi-opaque jewel case, individually numbered and signed by Lagerfeld, essentially transforming an otherwise drab looking bottle into an object of desire.

Another example would be Diva Vodka. Each bottle is filled with a column of gems which can be customised to fit any individual's taste. The

gems can then be reused after the vodka is finished.

Said Mr Porter: "The industry has been acutely aware that when you reach saturation, desirability of the product is what makes you stand out."

It is thus unsurprising that alcohol companies are starting to merge with fashion. After all, what is fashionable sells. A classic case would be that of vodka.

Whilst part of vodka's popularity stems from the fact that its neutral flavour makes it easy to mix with other flavours, it has, over the years, cultivated an image that the masses seem to have taken to.

Here in Singapore, in stark comparison to cognac, vodka consumption today is about four times what it was 10 years ago.

It is thus easy to forget that historically, vodka used to be perceived as a lower-class alcohol that peasants drink, a far cry from the cool and trendy image that it has today.

And they have a certain suave spy to thank for the change. This is because a momentous scene from the 1962 James Bond movie *Dr. No* featured the villain handing Sean Connery a "Martini, shaken not stirred" made with Smirnoff Vodka.

This single-handedly revolutionised the alcohol drinking culture for not only did it popularise the vodka martini, but it also helped to change people's perception of vodka, making it a classic example of branding by association that did work.

In a recent *USA Today* article, Smirnoff vice-president Mark Breene was reported as saying that the Bond movies work well to help promote an upscale image for a vodka brand be-

cause "Bond is known for having discerning taste".

In the 1980s, Swedish Vodka brand Absolut took it one notch further by coming up with a very successful print ad campaign that reinforced that vodka is stylish.

That said, not every alcohol brand wants to be the drink of the masses. Some are content to just cater to the cream of the crop instead.

New brand on the block The Singleton of Glen Ord passed over fashionability, wanting instead to cater to a discerning audience.

The single malt whisky that was launched on Tuesday chooses whisky experts like Charlie Maclean, a leading whisky writer, as brand ambassadors instead of celebrities or fashion icons.

On their less than fashionable ambassadors, Harvey Ong, a regional brand director at Diageo, explained: "We don't intend to brand the product to the masses. We want to get it into the hands of the discerning consumers who would appreciate the product."

"For other types of spirits, it's driven purely by image. When it comes to malt whisky, our drinkers are more discerning, they need to better understand the qualification of the product and heritage. Our brand ambassadors are whisky experts who can guide them."

Yes, it's a tough world out there for the alcohol companies. If only all of them were like 24-year-old consultant Felicia Chia.

She said: "When I party I like vodka because it's easy to drink, but cognac is something that I like to sip when I'm having a chat with close friends."