

MAKING A SPLASH AT

TALES OF THE COCKTAIL

How to ensure that your brand's presence at the country's longest-running bartending festival will resonate throughout the industry • **BY AMBER DREA**

Mixologist Dave Arnold administers shots of Absolut vodka during the brand's 2013 Tales of the Cocktail welcome reception at Arnaud's Restaurant in New Orleans.



Bartenders and mixologists are the primary link between brands and consumers, as they often decide which bottles to feature on the back bar and which spirits to use in their cocktails. For brand owners, getting a product into the hands and mouths of bartenders has become a top priority. That's why Tales of the Cocktail, which has taken over New Orleans every July since 2002, is such a major event. With an estimated 20,000 attendees and more than 200 events, the six-day celebration and educational experience is the most renowned cocktail-focused industry gathering in the United States.

"We curate and program the event for the professional bartender," explains founder Ann Tuennenman. "Consumer cocktail enthusiasts account for less than 20 percent. The rest

is working bartenders, brand ambassadors and industry folks." MARKET WATCH offers 10 tips on reaching that highly coveted demographic—and making sure what happens in New Orleans doesn't stay there.

1. Create A Spectacle

One party that this year's attendees couldn't stop talking about was Absolut vodka's Welcome Reception at Arnaud's Restaurant. Each of the venue's 16 rooms had a different theme, such as Monkey Tales & Dreamz, featuring slushy machines and magicians; My Blue Heaven, a morgue-like space in which Dave Arnold of New York City's Booker and Dax squirted liquid nitrogen-cooled vodka shots into

PHOTO BY AMBER DREA



TOP LEFT: The "Lucrative Libations" seminar examined strategies for running a profitable craft cocktail program. TOP RIGHT: The Irish Whiskey House highlighted brands from the Midleton Distillery. BOTTOM LEFT AND RIGHT: The Jägermeister Spirited Dinner paired the cuisine of chef Chris Santos (fourth from left) with drinks from renowned mixologists, including the Grand Fashioned (pictured) by Willy Shine (far left).

the mouths of his victims; and Masque, where celebrity mixologists Dale DeGroff, Audrey Saunders and Gary Regan served cocktails to guests who donned masks of the threesome's own faces. (A room full of Dale DeGroffs leaves a lasting impression.) On a smaller scale, Breckenridge Distillery from Breckenridge, Colorado, set up a trailer outside the Hotel Monteleone—ground zero for Tales festivities—that spewed snow all over the sidewalk to call attention to the distillery's 9,600-foot-high Rocky Mountain location. In the New Orleans heat, those icy flakes were a welcome treat.

2. Sponsor A Seminar

From technical demonstrations like "Fun with Hydrocolloids" and historical surveys like "Paleococktails" to meditations on "The Art and Philosophy of Hospitality" and intense examinations of specific spirits, such as Tequila or Scotch, Tales of

the Cocktail's seminars are full of bartenders eager to learn. And most of these 90-minute discussions are sponsored by one or more brand owners who gain exposure to a targeted audience. During "Advanced Sherry: Secrets, Lies & Solera," roughly 100 attendees tasted fortified wines from Sandeman and Williams & Humbert, as well as Botran rum, while learning the difference between Amontillado and Manzanilla. And at "Lucrative Libations," Cameron Bogue of Earls Restaurants Ltd. in Canada and Ryan Magarian of Oven and Shaker in Portland, Oregon, shared their strategies for running a profitable craft cocktail-focused bar program as another 100 attendees sipped drinks made with Diageo products.

3. Partner With A Venue From Another City

For this year's Tales of the Cocktail, Ireland's Midleton Distillery teamed up with Manhattan's The Dead Rabbit Grocery and Grog, which earned the honor for "World's Best New Cocktail

PHOTOS BY (TOP LEFT AND RIGHT) AMBER DREA; (BOTTOM LEFT AND RIGHT) BRANDON CUMMINS



D'Ussé Cognac hosted a dinner at Degas House (top right), a historical property on Esplanade Avenue in New Orleans. The three-course meal comprised Cognac-infused dishes, such as shrimp and grits over cochon de lait (bottom right), and finished with neat pours (left) on the patio.

Bar” at the 2013 Spirited Awards. Founder Sean Muldoon and head bartender Jack McGarry, who also won the award for “International Bartender of the Year,” transplanted their concept to the French Quarter and dubbed it The Irish Whiskey House. The venue featured drinks mixed with Jameson Original, Jameson Black Barrel and Redbreast 12-year-old Irish whiskeys, as well as samples of Powers, Green Spot and Yellow Spot Irish whiskeys. Middleton’s fifth-generation master cooper, Ger Buckley, also provided barrel-building demonstrations throughout the day.

4. Do Something Unexpected

Jägermeister herbal liqueur, known primarily as a shot consumed by the 21-plus college crowd, attempted to reinvent its image with a fun yet sophisticated Spirited Dinner as part of this year’s Tales. Featuring a six-course meal of shared plates from celebrity chef Chris Santos of The Stanton Social and Food Network’s “Chopped,” the event took place in an elegant room above the Martine Chaisson Gallery in New Orleans’ arts district. Accompanying each dish was a cocktail crafted by renowned mixologists including Willy Shine, Sean Kenyon, Ivy Mix, Sean Hoard and Sidney Frank Importing Co.’s corporate mixologist, Todd Richman. Creamy oven-braised chicken meatballs were paired with the Square Root, a stirred concoction of Jägermeister, Michael Collins Irish whiskey and St. Vivant Armagnac, while the savory-sweet chipotle-caramel-glazed pork tenderloin

was complemented by the Grand Fashioned, made with Jägermeister, Appleton Estate Reserve rum, Tequila Ocho Reposado and burnt sugar syrup, topped with toasted marshmallows. Many of the roughly 40 guests, which comprised trade, media and consumers, were pleasantly surprised by Jägermeister’s mixability.

5. Venture Outside The French Quarter

D’Ussé Cognac took advantage of New Orleans history by hosting a dinner at Degas House, located on tree-lined Esplanade Avenue between the Seventh Ward and Tremé neighborhoods. Built in 1852, the property belonged to the maternal relatives of Parisian painter Edgar Degas, who lived there from 1872 to 1873. Scot Craig, chef and owner of Katie’s Restaurant in Mid-City, created a three-course D’Ussé Cognac-infused meal, comprising lump crabmeat served on endive, maplewood bacon-wrapped Gulf shrimp over Brie grits with smoked cochon de lait and Creole white chocolate bread pudding. Each dish was paired with a cocktail: the Gold Lorraine, made with D’Ussé VSOP, Bénédictine liqueur, honey, lemon juice and Fee Brothers Old Fashioned bitters, garnished with a golden apple slice; La Nouvelle Place, blending D’Ussé VSOP, Martini Rosato, Bénédictine liqueur and The Bitter Truth Creole bitters; and a neat pour of D’Ussé VSOP. Guests were then invited to the patio for a Torpedo Maduro cigar that had been dipped and cured in D’Ussé VSOP.

PHOTOS BY (LEFT) KENT MILLER; (TOP AND BOTTOM RIGHT) AMBER DREA

6. Host Breakfast Events

Since there are only so many hours in the day, it only makes sense to provide opportunities for Tales attendees to connect with brands before their first seminar starts. The Perfect Purée of Napa Valley offered smoothies and massages from 8:30 A.M. to 10:30 A.M. on July 18th and July 19th, and Mandarin Napoléon orange liqueur served coffee cocktails created by Elad Zvi of the Broken Shaker in Miami at the Imperial Breakfast event from 8 A.M. to 11 A.M. on July 20th. For later risers, Café Adelaide & the Swizzle Stick Bar hosted its “Hangover Hospital Cocktail Brunch,” featuring modern twists on Creole cuisine like a chicken-fried soft shell crab biscuit and blackberry-chèvre beignets. These items were paired with such signature drinks as The Russian Standard, made with Russian Standard vodka, Lillet and lemon, and the Sambuca Soda, comprising Sambuca anise liqueur, The Bitter Truth Xocolatl Mole bitters, vanilla syrup and soda.



7. Set Up A Tasting Room

Tales of the Cocktail allows brands to submit applications for 90-minute tasting rooms at the Hotel Monteleone and the Royal Sonesta, and occasionally events can be held at off-site venues. All ticket holders may attend the tasting rooms, and marketers have free rein to set up the space, so these opportunities allow bartenders to become acquainted with brands during their downtime between seminars and other events. “We’re really focused on having brands of all sizes,” Tuennerman says. “We easily had more than 200 brands this year. You can participate for as little as \$750, which allows a brand to be featured in the Lagniappe Lounge gifting suite.”



8. Serve Drinks In Branded To-Go Cups

Like Las Vegas, New Orleans allows consumption of beverage alcohol in open containers on the street. This type of visibility is free advertising for any marketer that hosts a tasting room or event at Tales of the Cocktail. Just make sure the branded cup is plastic, as glass containers are prohibited.

9. Always Offer Food And Water

Nearly all events provided some type of buffet or passed hors d'oeuvres, as well as bottles of water. Between the New Orleans humidity and the nonstop availability of alcohol, Tales of the Cocktail attendees need help staying nourished and hydrated.

TOP: Café Adelaide and the Swizzle Stick Bar offered a Saturday morning “Hangover Hospital Cocktail Brunch,” prepared by chef Carl Schaubhut (left) and mixologist Lu Brow (right). BOTTOM: This year’s Tales of the Cocktail featured 59 seminars, including the well-attended “Advanced Sherry: Secrets, Lies & Solera.”

10. Keep It Simple

When it comes to planning events for Tales of the Cocktail, more isn’t necessarily better. One afternoon cocktail competition turned into a bit of a train wreck due to technical difficulties, a lack of organization and an overabundance of drinks to evaluate. “After four hours and 18 cocktails, my palate was shot,” said one judge. “I had to leave before I found out who won.”

As Tuennerman says, “Events don’t have to be expensive—just interesting.”