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Britain’s ready-to-drink cocktails neared £200 million in bar sales despite shrinking distribution

Younger adults are driving growth in a category that still makes up just 0.9% of long alcoholic drinks and spirits spending

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Sales of ready-to-drink cocktails and mixed drinks in Britain’s bars, pubs and restaurants rose 2.6% in value in the 12 months to late 2025, reaching nearly £200 million, according to new data from NIQ.

The market research group said the category outperformed the broader beverage alcohol market in the on-trade even as distribution fell 4.5%. Average rate of sale increased 7.4% over the same period, suggesting stronger turnover in the venues that do stock the products.

NIQ said RTDs still account for only 0.9% of spending on long alcoholic drinks and spirits in British hospitality venues, a sign that the category remains small in pubs, bars and restaurants despite recent growth. The company described Britain as an underdeveloped RTD market compared with Australia, where more than half of consumers buy RTDs and the category represents 14% of long alcoholic drinks and spirits sales.

That gap matters for drinks suppliers because it points to room for expansion in a segment that is already gaining traction with younger consumers but remains lightly distributed in many venues. NIQ estimated that if RTDs lifted their share of long alcoholic drinks and spirits spending in Britain's on-trade to 3.5%, still only a quarter of Australia's level, it would generate an additional £645 million in sales.

The strongest demand is coming from younger adults. NIQ's BrandTrack data showed that 69% of adults ages 18 to 34 consume RTDs. Its On-Premise User Survey also found that 32% of premium brand consumers are drinking RTDs more often than they were a year earlier.

By venue type, high-street pubs and large-format sites were among the best performers for RTDs in 2025, which NIQ linked mainly to affordable pricing. The share of people drinking RTDs at lunchtime and in mid-afternoon also rose by two percentage points over the past year, adding to signs that consumption occasions are widening beyond late-night drinking.

Seasonality remains important, with sales tending to rise in summer. Glass bottles continue to dominate the category by format. Draught RTDs remain a small part of the market, with distribution falling to about 4,300 outlets in 2025, but NIQ said draught now delivers stronger spend per outlet than the RTD category overall and posted rate-of-sale growth of 48.5%.

Rachel Weller, commercial lead for the U.K. and Ireland at NIQ, said the category has room to grow further in on-premise venues if suppliers can make a stronger case for listings and target the outlets and occasions where demand is highest.