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Southern Glazer’s cuts about 1% of its U.S. work force in sales overhaul

The distributor is shifting part of its independent retail business to inside sales and digital commerce as buying habits change

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Southern Glazer’s Wine & Spirits, the largest distributor of wine and spirits in the United States, said it is reshaping its commercial service model across its U.S. network, moving more business toward a hybrid system that combines field sales, inside sales and digital commerce as customer buying habits change.

The company said the shift takes effect immediately for part of its independent retail base and will also lead to a net reduction of about 1% of its U.S. work force. Southern Glazer’s operates in 47 states and Canada and employs more than 22,000 people, according to the figures cited in the announcement and in industry reporting. A 1% cut would affect roughly a few hundred jobs.

In a statement, the company said it had revised its sales approach to reflect changes in the independent customer landscape and in how clients prefer to interact with suppliers. Under the new structure, an additional 1% of its independent customer base will be served by a redesigned inside-sales unit called the Customer Solutions Team, along with the company’s Proof Commerce digital platform.

Southern Glazer’s said those channels are intended to work alongside its broader commercial and operating system to better match the needs of independent customers, a group that often includes smaller retailers and on-premise accounts that may not require the same level of in-person coverage as larger buyers.

Wayne E. Chaplin, the company’s president and chief executive, said in the statement that market conditions were making it necessary to rethink how the distributor serves part of its independent customer base. He said the company was redirecting resources toward areas where business is moving and where growth is expected, while also using artificial intelligence to adapt more quickly to a changing market.

The move comes at a time when the U.S. wine market is under pressure from slower consumption growth, shifting consumer preferences and tighter competition across distribution. In that environment, large wholesalers are testing different ways to protect margins while keeping service levels high for suppliers and retailers.

For beverage producers, especially wine and spirits brands that depend on broad national distribution, changes at Southern Glazer’s matter because the company sits at a critical point between suppliers and thousands of retail and restaurant accounts. A stronger push toward inside sales and digital ordering could change how smaller brands pitch products, secure placements and maintain relationships with independent buyers. It may also speed up the use of data tools and automated systems across beverage distribution more broadly.

Southern Glazer’s framed the change as part of an ongoing effort to refine its commercial model rather than as a retreat from field sales. The company said the hybrid approach would create a more responsive and effective customer support system while improving earning opportunities and retention within its sales organization.

The distributor also emphasized its scale, brand portfolio and proprietary data as advantages in the transition. Which reported on the announcement, Southern Glazer’s generated $25 billion in revenue in 2025, citing Forbes.

The decision reflects a wider shift in beverage alcohol distribution as wholesalers face pressure to become faster and lighter in their operations. Some companies have pursued mergers or new partnerships. Southern Glazer’s is instead leaning more heavily on internal restructuring, digital commerce and artificial intelligence to follow demand patterns and customer behavior in real time.

The company did not detail which markets or job categories would be most affected by the work force reduction. It also did not say whether more customers could eventually be moved into the hybrid model beyond the newly designated 1% of independent accounts.

Still, the announcement signals that even the biggest players in U.S. beverage distribution are adjusting long-established sales structures. For wineries, distillers and importers that rely on wholesalers to reach fragmented local markets, those adjustments could influence everything from order frequency to brand visibility at independent stores and restaurants.