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Prepared cocktail sales rose 1.8% over four weeks on strength in spirits-based drinks

NielsenIQ found category volume fell 2.2%, with flavored malt beverages and seltzers continuing to drag on growth

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Prepared cocktail sales showed modest improvement over the four weeks ending October 17, even as the most recent weekly reading moved lower, according to a NielsenIQ report on the category.

NielsenIQ said dollar sales for prepared cocktails rose 1.8% during the four-week period, while case volume fell 2.2%. In the latest week measured, dollar sales totaled $268 million, down 1.6% from the previous week. The report said the category was still being supported by spirits-based and wine-based products, but that the gains have not yet produced steady overall volume growth.

The data covered prepared cocktails sold in the beer, wine and spirits channel and included spirit-based ready-to-drink and ready-to-serve products, wine-based cocktails, flavored malt beverages and seltzers.

Performance varied sharply by product base. Spirits-based ready-to-drink cocktails posted the strongest growth, with dollar sales up 18.4% and volume up 20.6% in the four-week period. Wine-based cocktails also grew, though at a slower pace, with dollar sales rising 6.0% and volume increasing 4.1%. Flavored malt beverages and seltzers remained the weakest part of the category, with dollar sales down 5.3% and volume down 7.6%.

That mix left the category in an uneven position. Faster growth in spirits-based drinks and continued gains in wine-based cocktails helped offset part of the decline in flavored malt beverages and seltzers, but not enough to fully restore volume growth for the segment as a whole.

Among manufacturers, Mark Anthony Brands remained the largest by dollar sales, even though its sales slipped 0.3% and its case volume fell by 152,500 cases. Boston Beer ranked second by dollars, with sales down 4.2% and volume down 360,100 cases. Anheuser-Busch Inc. held the third spot, with dollar sales up 6.3% and volume up 30,700 cases. Sazerac ranked fourth, with sales up 5.7% and volume up 35,600 cases. Gallo rounded out the top five, with dollar sales down 3.7% and volume down 59,800 cases.

On the manufacturer growth list, Stateside Brands posted the strongest dollar growth. Its sales rose 100.6% and its case volume increased by 390,500 cases. Anheuser-Busch Inc. ranked second on that list, followed by Sazerac. NielsenIQ placed Moët Hennessy USA fourth by dollar growth, though the report did not provide a comparable dollar-change figure and only reported a volume gain of 5,900 cases. Constellation ranked fifth, with dollar sales up 63.9% and volume up 26,200 cases.

At the brand level, White Claw remained the largest prepared cocktail brand by dollar sales. Its dollar sales increased 1.3%, even as case volume declined by 26,700 cases. Twisted Tea ranked second by dollars, but its sales fell 9.0% and its volume dropped by 284,600 cases. BuzzBallz was third, with dollar sales up 7.4% and volume up 36,200

cases. Cutwater Cocktail ranked fourth, with sales rising 15.7% and volume increasing 83,700 cases. Smirnoff held the fifth position, with dollar sales up 3.0% and volume up 16,200 cases.

The fastest-growing brands looked different from the biggest brands by sales. Surfside Cocktail led the dollar-growth ranking, with sales up 53.8% and volume up 207,700 cases. Super Lyte Cocktail ranked second, though NielsenIQ did not publish a comparable dollar-growth figure and reported only that volume rose by 183,200 cases. Cutwater Cocktail placed third on the growth list, followed by Sun Cruiser Cocktail, which posted a 56.2% increase in dollar sales and a volume gain of 134,600 cases. BuzzBallz ranked fifth by dollar growth.

The report pointed to a category still being reshaped by consumer movement toward spirits-based ready-to-drink products. Large established brands continued to hold the biggest share of dollar sales, but some of the strongest gains came from newer or faster-expanding cocktail brands. NielsenIQ’s figures showed that the category’s near-term direction still depends heavily on whether declines in flavored malt beverages and seltzers continue to ease while spirits-based products maintain double-digit growth.