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Halloween shopping lifted prepared cocktail sales 6.0% in the final week of October

NielsenIQ reported October dollar sales rose 3.7%, with spirit-based ready-to-drink products driving most category growth

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Prepared cocktails posted a stronger October in U.S. retail as Halloween shopping lifted weekly sales and helped bring volume close to flat, according to a NielsenIQ report covering the four weeks ended Oct. 31.

NielsenIQ said dollar sales for the prepared cocktails category rose 3.7% in the period, while case volume slipped 0.3%. In the week ended Oct. 31, dollar sales reached $301.2 million, up 6.0% from the previous week, a gain the report linked to seasonal demand ahead of Halloween.

The category tracked by NielsenIQ includes spirit-based ready-to-drink and ready-to-serve products, wine-based cocktails, flavored malt beverages and hard seltzers. The data showed that growth was still uneven across those segments, with spirit-based products carrying most of the category's momentum.

Spirit-based ready-to-drink products remained the strongest part of the market. NielsenIQ reported that dollar sales in that segment climbed 21.5% and volume rose 24.3% in the four-week period. Wine-based cocktails also expanded, with dollar sales up 6.5% and volume up 4.9%.

Flavored malt beverages and seltzers were still down, but the category's decline moderated. NielsenIQ said dollar sales for that group fell 3.7% and volume dropped 6.1%. The smaller declines in that business helped reduce the drag on overall prepared cocktails performance, even as the segment remained weaker than spirit-based and wine-based products.

The figures suggest that prepared cocktails are moving closer to a return to unit growth after a period in which sales dollars held up better than case volume. The report showed that price and mix still supported the category, but much of the expansion came from consumers buying more spirit-based ready-to-drink products rather than from broad-based gains across every part of the segment.

Among manufacturers, Mark Anthony Brands remained the largest company in prepared cocktails by dollar sales in the four weeks ended Oct. 31. NielsenIQ said Mark Anthony posted a 1.1% increase in dollars, though its case volume fell by 74,800 cases. Boston Beer ranked second by dollars, with sales down 2.4% and volume down by 291,100 cases.

Anheuser-Busch Inc. ranked third by dollar sales and posted one of the stronger performances among the largest suppliers. Its prepared cocktails sales rose 6.3%, and case volume increased by 48,200 cases. Sazerac followed with a 5.6% increase in dollar sales and a gain of 42,000 cases. Gallo ranked fifth by dollars, with sales down 1.3% and volume lower by 30,700 cases.

In the manufacturer growth ranking, Stateside Brands led on dollar growth, with sales up 110.1% and case volume up by 435,100 cases. Anheuser-Busch and Sazerac also placed near the top of that list, reflecting gains among larger established suppliers as well as newer or faster-growing brands.

At the brand level, White Claw held the top spot by dollar sales in prepared cocktails. NielsenIQ said White Claw’s sales rose 2.4%, with case volume up by 6,000 cases. Twisted Tea ranked second by dollars, though sales fell 7.7% and case volume dropped by 247,900 cases.

BuzzBallz ranked third by dollar sales and posted a 6.2% sales increase, along with a volume gain of 32,700 cases. Cutwater Cocktail ranked fourth and recorded one of the stronger performances among the leading brands, with dollar sales up 13.4% and case volume up by 80,500 cases. Smirnoff ranked fifth, with dollar sales up 5.8% and case volume up by 51,500 cases.

The growth ranking among brands showed continued traction for several names tied to the spirit-based ready-to-drink market. Surfside Cocktail led that list with dollar sales up 60.2% and case volume up by 235,900 cases. Sun Cruiser Cocktail’s dollar sales rose 64.3%, with volume up by 146,700 cases. Monaco posted a 30.0% gain in dollar sales and added 59,900 cases. Cutwater also appeared on the growth list, underscoring its gains among both top-selling and fast-growing brands.

The October report points to a prepared cocktails market that got a seasonal boost at the end of the month and is still being shaped by a sharp split between stronger spirit-based products and weaker flavored malt beverage and seltzer trends. NielsenIQ’s figures show that consumer demand around Halloween helped the category finish the period on firmer footing, even though overall case volume had not yet turned clearly positive by Oct. 31.