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Remy Cointreau deploys AI hosts to sell cognac to late-night shoppers in China

The spirits maker says virtual presenters fill off-hours gaps as banquet drinking gives way to more personal occasions

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Remy Cointreau is using artificial intelligence, direct online sales and a push toward younger consumers to expand in China as drinking habits move away from business banquets and toward smaller, more personal occasions.

The French spirits group said its AI-powered virtual sales presenter, known as Eve, can introduce cognac and whisky to Chinese shoppers at any hour, answer questions and recommend products when live human hosts are offline. The company introduced the virtual host about 18 months ago as part of a broader digital strategy in China.

Sophie Phe, chief executive of Remy Cointreau China, said in an interview during the ninth China International Import Expo in Shanghai that the audiences reached by AI presenters and human livestreaming hosts overlap very little. Human presenters still account for about 80% of the company's livestreaming activity, while AI sessions make up about 20%, she said. Human hosts continue to produce stronger sales results, but the AI system allows the company to reach late-night and early-morning shoppers.

The effort comes as imported spirits makers face uneven demand in China and a broader change in consumption patterns. Remy Cointreau, whose brands include Remy Martin, Louis XIII, Cointreau and several Scotch whiskies, has long benefited from premium cognac sales tied to business entertaining and formal dining. Phe said those occasions are becoming less central as consumers shift toward personal use and small-group drinking.

She said Chinese consumers are focusing more on quality than quantity and are exploring a wider range of spirits categories and drinking occasions. Younger drinkers, in particular, are showing less attachment to older consumption habits and more interest in products that match individual tastes.

That change is shaping how drinks companies approach China. For spirits producers, and potentially for other beverage groups that depend on premium positioning or traditional consumption occasions, the shift could mean greater focus on direct consumer data, digital channels and new marketing tied to informal social settings rather than banquet-driven sales.

The company's latest results suggest that strategy is gaining ground. Remy Cointreau reported first-half fiscal 2026-27 sales of 510.9 million euros, or about $566.7 million, up 2.9% on an organic basis, according to results released on Oct. 28. Sales in Asia-Pacific rose 14.3%, helped by stronger shipments to China before the Mid-Autumn Festival and continued growth in other Asian markets.

Chief Financial Officer Luca Marotta said during the company’s earnings presentation that cognac sales in China rose at a high-single-digit rate in the first half, including mid-teens growth in the second quarter. He said the recovery varied by channel, with direct sales channels leading the improvement.

E-commerce was a major part of that growth. Marotta said online sales in China rose by more than 30% in the second quarter and represented about 30% of the company’s China business.

Phe said Remy Cointreau has spent more than a decade building e-commerce operations in China. That work has included dedicated teams, customer relationship management systems and directly operated flagship stores on platforms such as Tmall and JD. Running its own online stores requires more investment, she said, but it gives the company direct access to consumer data and tighter control over pricing and promotional campaigns.

The company’s approach reflects a broader reassessment of how premium imported spirits are sold in China. As banquet demand weakens and consumption becomes more individualized, producers are trying to broaden their customer base beyond traditional cognac buyers. Remy Cointreau is using AI and direct online operations not only to improve availability but also to better understand who is buying, when they shop and what kinds of products they want.

Phe said the company’s established customer base in China remains relatively mature and loyal, but younger consumers are increasingly open to experimenting across categories, flavors and drinking occasions. She said the company is responding with a value-focused strategy rather than relying on volume growth.