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Britain's managed venues entered the holiday season after drinks sales fell in five of six weeks

NIQ cited weak Saturdays, soft spirits demand and consumer caution, leaving operators reliant on Christmas gatherings

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Britain’s hospitality sector is heading into the holiday trading period under pressure after a fresh run of declines in drinks sales at managed venues, according to new data reported on November 23 by The Brewers Journal from NIQ’s Daily Drinks Tracker, powered by CGA.

The tracker showed that average sales in managed venues in the week to Saturday, November 7 were 6.4% below the level recorded in the same period of 2025. Trading improved somewhat in the following week, but sales in the week to Saturday, November 14 were still down 3.1% from a year earlier.

The figures mean on-premise drinks sales have posted negative year-over-year growth in five of the past six weeks since the start of October. NIQ’s data also showed revenue fell from the prior year on each of the first 10 days of November.

The latest numbers point to a weak start to a period that is usually critical for pubs, bars and other hospitality operators. Businesses across the sector are now looking to a late-November and December lift from Christmas and New Year gatherings to improve results.

Rachel Weller, commercial lead for NIQ in the U.K. and Ireland, said the data gave the on-trade little reason for confidence before the festive season. She said weak Saturday trading and soft spirits sales were particular concerns and added that many consumers appeared to be cutting back on spending, alcohol consumption or both.

NIQ said consumer caution before Christmas was a key theme in the recent performance. The tracker also pointed to cold weather in some parts of the country and an international break in England’s Premier League as factors that weighed on sales.

That combination matters beyond pubs and bars. A weaker run-up to Christmas can affect forecasts for beer, wine and spirits producers, distributors and venue operators, and it may lead companies to take a more careful approach to holiday purchasing and inventory decisions if demand remains uneven.

The pressure appears to be especially clear in spirits, which Weller identified as one of the softest categories in the recent data. A sustained slowdown in that segment would be a concern for suppliers because the holiday season is often a period of stronger premium and celebratory spending.

At the same time, NIQ said consumer interest in social occasions still offers some support for the sector. Weller said the company’s research continues to show that consumers value pubs and bars during communal celebrations such as Christmas and New Year. That leaves open the possibility that spending could recover as the season advances, even if the latest data suggest any rebound is far from certain.

For now, the message from the tracker is that operators may need to work harder to win discretionary spending from households that remain price-sensitive. Weller said venues and suppliers would need to offer clear value, quality and a strong overall experience if they want consumers to choose drinking out instead of staying at home.

That challenge comes at a sensitive point in the calendar. November and December often help determine how hospitality groups finish the year, and disappointing drinks sales can quickly affect staffing plans, promotional activity and category mix. If weak demand extends further into the season, suppliers could also face a tougher environment for placements, volumes and reorder patterns across the on-trade.

The NIQ results do not yet rule out a stronger finish to the year, but they suggest that the sector is entering the holiday period without much momentum. After five negative weeks out of six since early October, pubs, bars and drinks suppliers are relying on festive demand to reverse the recent slide.