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Ready-to-Drink Cocktails Drive Growth as U.S. Spirits Sales Shift Toward Convenience

Premixed spirits-based drinks surge 16.4% in 2025, offsetting declines in traditional categories and reshaping the alcohol market

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Spirits in the United States held their lead in the beverage alcohol market in 2025, even as overall revenues declined, according to the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States (Discus). The annual report from Discus shows that ready-to-drink (RTD) cocktails continued to grow rapidly, becoming the main driver of growth for the spirits

industry.

Total sales of spirits in the U.S. reached $36.4 billion in 2025, a decrease of 2.2% compared to the previous year. However, volumes increased by 1.9%, totaling 318.1 million nine-liter cases. This combination of higher volume but lower revenue suggests that consumers are buying more lower-priced spirits and reducing purchases of premium products.

For the fourth year in a row, spirits maintained their market share lead over beer and wine, reaching 42.4% in 2025. Since 2000, spirits have gained more than 13 points of market share against beer and wine. Discus estimates that each point of market share is worth $860 million in revenue.

Chris Swonger, President and CEO of Discus, said that despite a challenging economic environment and weakening consumer confidence, Americans continue to choose distilled spirits. He highlighted that innovative products are keeping consumer interest high, with RTD cocktails standing out as a favorite.

RTD spirit cocktails were a highlight for the industry in 2025, growing into a category worth nearly $4 billion. Sales of premixed cocktails, including spirits-based RTDs, reached $3.8 billion, an increase of 16.4% over the previous year. Spirits RTDs have more than doubled their market share since 2021 and gained 11 percentage points in market share during 2025 alone. In contrast, malt-based seltzers lost 14 points of market share.

Swonger noted that consumers are drawn to RTD cocktails because they are made with real spirits, offer convenience and flavor, and include lower-alcohol options.

Other major spirit categories did not fare as well. Vodka sales fell by 3% to $7 billion. Tequila and mezcal sales dropped by 4.1% to $6.4 billion. American whiskey sales were just under $5.1 billion, down nearly 1%.

The sector also faces challenges from global trade tensions. Discus reported ongoing issues such as unresolved retaliatory tariff threats and the removal of American spirits from most Canadian retail shelves. These factors create uncertainty for long-term

planning within the industry.

Swonger emphasized that unpredictability around global trade continues to affect the U.S. spirits sector. He pointed out that American spirits exports declined by 9% year-over-year in the second quarter of 2025. Swonger called for reinstating zero-for-zero tariffs on distilled spirits as a priority to help American distillers return to growth.

Despite these challenges, the U.S. spirits industry remains resilient due to consumer interest in new products and changing preferences toward convenient options like RTD cocktails. The data from Discus highlights both the opportunities and obstacles facing producers as they navigate shifting consumer habits and international trade pressures.