



# QUICK ON THE UPTAKE

New offers and variations are a vital part of the whisky segment, so what can suppliers and retailers do to encourage the creation of more ‘early adopters’? *David Davies* reports

**A**s even the most casual, infrequent traveller will tell you, the number of whisky products on offer to consumers has increased significantly during the last five years. In conjunction with this apparent abundance of creativity on the part of suppliers, retailers have also become more savvy about explaining the sub-category to browsers and illustrating its tremendous variety.

New products – often in the form of travel-retail exclusives or special limited editions – have been an integral part of strengthening the whisky segment. *Frontier*

has asked before whether there might now be a danger of too many products, too many variations. But irrespective of these wider

concerns, how can travellers – many of whom will only buy one or two bottles per year, and these often old favourites to the cheaper end of the scale – be encouraged to actually make the jump and purchase one of the latest additions to whisky’s (very) well-stocked shelves?

The answer – as tends to be the case in any specialist area of the travel-retail offer – lies in a judicious blend of retail layout, careful marketing and, perhaps most importantly, expert guidance. Striking the right balance can demand many hours of brainstorming and analysis before implementation, and even then there may have to be substantial fine-tuning. But when persistence pays off, it pays off handsomely: not only is brand loyalty strengthened, it is also broadened as perceptions of identity and reach expand to encompass exciting new variations.

## World of Whiskies

The redevelopment of the World of Whiskies store at Heathrow T4 is a perfect case study when it comes to showing what can be done to encourage interest in whisky products – both new and existing. Undertaken by World Duty Free in conjunction with retail design specialist Sheridan&Co, the project aimed to “update the look and feel of our successful World of Whiskies concept, and ultimately drive increased footfall and penetration into the store by demystifying the malt whisky category, along with the introduction of new segments.

(Above) World of Whiskies at Heathrow T4; (below left) Johnnie Walker - The John Walker Edition from Diageo



This redesign has not only encouraged new consumers to visit the store, we have also at the same time increased ATV with existing customers,” says WDF’s head of category for liquor, Nigel Sandals.

With a brief to make World of Whiskies “the airside destination for whisky buyers”, Sheridan & Co set to work on a format with the overall theme of ‘discovering whisky’ – a concept with obvious relevance to new whisky consumers, long-standing purchasers and early adopters. A ‘Discover Your Taste’ bar enables travellers to sit down and sample whiskies at their leisure, while the new product segmentations – eg. ‘Fireside Indulgence’ and ‘Not the Usual’- reach for emotional resonance and a more straightforward connection between product and drinking opportunity.

“By redefining the occasions for consumption we aimed to create more reasons for a person shopping for either a gift or for themselves,” says Sheridan&Co’s Matt Millington, who served as the strategist on the World of Whiskies project. “For example, one section of the merchandising is called ‘Not the Usual’ – this displays whiskies aimed at the initiated whisky consumer, but is designed to get them to move away from the usual choices.”

Elsewhere in the store, Sandals notes, “another helpful feature to assist with purchases of newly-launched whiskies is that of ‘Malt of the Month’. Each month World of Whiskies showcases a different malt to introduce new products and whisky tastes to customers. The Malt of the Month is chosen by whisky expert and [www.worldofwhiskies.com](http://www.worldofwhiskies.com) contributor Charles Maclean.”

Seasoned connoisseurs (40+, often male), initiated consumers (late ‘20s-mid ‘30s, again often male) and gift-shoppers (frequently female) are among those who can show a keen interest in newly-launched whisky products. However, Millington sounds a note of caution: “Of course new products are important to drive the market, but I would say in the whisky category it is more important that brands think about how they present their brands. Brand owners need to look at smart marketing and presenting a more engaging brand story for consumers.”

### The experimenters

Inevitably, there is also much talk of understanding the consumer’s motivations amongst suppliers, and for Diageo those shoppers “who lead the purchase of our new innovations are known as the ‘experimenters,’” reveals Kenton Elliot, marketing manager Scotch, reserve brands

& single malts at Diageo GTME. “This shopper is the less frequent traveller and really enjoys knowing about and trying new products. The key motivations for purchase are for prestige, novelty and as a treat.”

Experimenters, continues Elliot, “know and expect Diageo to continue providing new and exciting innovations within the whisky category”, pointing to offers including Johnnie Walker Blue Label – King George V and Johnnie Walker Double Black Blended Scotch whiskies. “The success of these products has principally been driven by our ability to work with our retail partners to create engaging sampling experiences and communications platforms that cut through the ‘noise’ in the airport to reach these ‘experimenters.’”

Meanwhile, Ian Taylor from William Grant & Sons emphasises the opportunities provided by travel and the desire to create “passionate and engaging experiences” for customers. He also acknowledges that “most of our new product launches (Glenfiddich Rich Oak, Grant’s 25 Year Old, Monkey Shoulder and Balvenie 40 Year Old, to name four new whisky products brought to market this year by William Grant & Sons) will not be purchased by early adopters, but rather by our loyal current drinkers and people interested in purchasing a discerning gift – in the case of Grant’s 25 Year Old and Balvenie 40 Year Old, this will also include professional whisky collectors as well.”

Tim Young, director of global travel retail trade marketing at Brown-Forman, says that the company’s experience “shows that a high proportion of consumers in travel-retail are looking for their favourite brands or brands they are aware of. They will then start to experiment within the brand and look for expressions they can only find in travel-retail or limited editions. They are also prepared to trade up in value to more expensive expressions.”

Whatever importance early adopters might hold for individual suppliers, there is no doubt that they are integral to the continued revitalisation of the segment. New offers mean fresh blood for the channel, and so the onus is necessarily on both suppliers and retailers to support them as effectively as possible. ■



(Above) Johnnie Walker Double Black; (below) Nigel Sandals, World Duty Free



## Future plans

Diageo, says Kenton Elliot, “has a strong calendar of activities in place for 2010 to continue to drive our growth in whisky. We will continue to leverage our partnership with the Vodafone McLaren Mercedes F1 team to create amazing retail activations around premium whisky (notably Johnnie Walker Black Label, Johnnie Walker Blue Label, the John Walker Edition, Johnnie Walker Blue Label King George V Blended Scotch Whisky and Johnnie Walker Blue Label Blended Scotch Whiskies), and to train and educate our Brand Ambassadors to help consumers at the point of purchase.”

William Grant, says Ian Taylor, is focusing on TR exclusives,

premiumisation and sampling. “Our core priority is the revitalisation of Glenfiddich,” he adds. “We have launched a new explorer malt in Rich Oak, and over the last year have brought out outstanding new packaging for 30 and 40 Year Old as well as releasing the exquisite Glenfiddich 50 Year Old, which made its global premiere in Paris CDG airport in September last year. To continue this premiumisation and focus on Glenfiddich we will be unveiling a new look and feel to our fixtures (wall units and gondolas) in travel-retail over the next few months and will also preview a travel-retail exclusive bottling at Cannes that will be available across the channel in 2011.”