

# NATURAL SELECTION

Soft drinks offer out of home operators plenty of profit potential, so ensuring drinks menus have all bases covered is the key to securing soft sales



BIDFOOD

**Soft drinks have always been an integral part of the out of home foodservice offering, but a shift in consumer tastes towards non-alcoholic options has seen a surge in demand. "With total soft drinks worth over £7.1bn [+2.9%] in the out of home channel, the category offers operators an important profit opportunity," says John Rumble, channel director, OOH for Lucozade Ribena Suntory.**

With BMC Public Health finding that 25% of young people class themselves as teetotal, and Alcohol Research UK stating that 4.5m people took part in dry January last year, it's clear the popularity of soft drinks shows no sign of abating any time soon.

Given these statistics, it is little wonder that Technavio has predicted that the soft drinks market is set to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 5.7% by 2023. "Consumers want soft drinks that taste and look just as appealing as an alcoholic beverage," says Chris Sanders, sales director for Radnor Hills.

#### WATER WORKS

In the not so distant past soft drink options were fairly limited to water and something fizzy. However, today there are infinite possibilities available, so just what should you be serving? "One of the most important trends is the growing demand for healthy options," says Paul Proctor, managing director of EcoPure Waters. "What could be better than freshly filtered and chilled water to encourage customers to maintain sensible hydration and provide a tasty, healthy non-alcoholic option?"

With bottled water sales volumes increasing by 9.6% in 2016, bringing its share of total soft drinks to 19.5% (British Soft Drinks Association Annual Report 2017, based on data supplied by Canadean), water is clearly a popular choice for many consumers. However, with an increased focus on the negative impact of plastic bottles

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WILD FIZZ

on the environment, it's important that operators choose a sustainable alternative.

"Many organisations are turning to mains water filtration systems that create an endless supply of chilled still and sparkling drinking water for serving in reusable, own-brand glass bottles," explains Adam Lenton, marketing manager for EauVation. "This is an ideal alternative to expensive, environmentally damaging bought-in bottled water, which also saves the organisation money and improves sustainability."

Although tea and coffee remain in high demand in the UK, iced versions of consumers' favourite caffeine fix are becoming increasingly sought after. In fact, in 2017 iced beverage sales within the specialised coffee shop sector reached £370m. "Some 46% of consumers purchased an iced beverage in the last 12 months, according to an Allegra consumer survey from 2018," says Gary McGarr, head of sales and marketing for Beyond the Bean. "The amount of sales generated from this category should not be underestimated. It is an easy way to keep sales peaking in hot weather when tea and coffee sales can tail off."

Cold brew tea is the ideal fix for customers who would normally order tea but are looking for a long cold drink. Naturally sugar- and calorie-free, cold brew tea is perceived as an ideal soft drink for adults. "As the name suggests, 'cold brew tea' uses cold, rather than hot, water for the infusion of the tea," explains Allan Pirret, sales director for Novus Tea. "Any type of tea can be used with the cold brew method, including black, green and white teas, as well as herbal and fruit infusions."

Cold brew tea is not the same as chilled or iced tea which has been brewed using hot water and then chilled before serving. The fact that cold brew tea is made using cold water means the tea infuses more slowly. This results in a milder, richer and smoother taste with none of the bitterness that can sometimes be evident in over-brewed hot infusions.

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SUPERMALT



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### DOUBLE BUBBLE

Since the introduction of the sugar tax, the out-of-home foodservice industry has seen more demand for low-sugar carbonates. According to Bidfood, "water plus" products are growing in popularity. "Offering customers lower-calorie fizzy drink alternatives, such as naturally flavoured sparkling water and grouping healthier alternatives with more familiar counterparts, will help to encourage sales," says Isabelle Haynes, category manager for Bidfood. "Where and how ingredients are sourced also plays a big role."

Health is a key driver for many customers, highlighted by packaged low-calorie soft drinks growing in value at 8.7% (CGA Food Service Measurement). This means there is great scope for operators to capitalise on this trend. "Consumers are becoming increasingly conscious of consuming foods and drinks that contribute positively to their wellbeing," explains Gina Geoghegan, founder of Wild Fizz. "Kombucha is widely acknowledged to aid relief in medical conditions such as IBS, and is quickly becoming a popular alternative to carbonated and sugary fruit-based options."

Kombucha is a natural sparkling soft drink made by adding bacteria and yeast to sweet black or green tea and allowing it to ferment. Packed with friendly live cultures, high in antioxidants, hydrating and low in sugar, it's full of huge health benefits. "Customers expect to pay more for higher quality products, so it's important to stock soft drinks that are an added treat as well as a range of 'better for you' options to satisfy the more health-conscious consumer," advises Pev Manners, MD of Belvoir Fruit Farms.

Many customers are on the lookout for something new when drinking out of home and are willing to trade up to what they see as more premium products for the privilege. "Malt drinks are relatively untouched in foodservice, despite seeing strong growth in other channels, including retail," points out Neil Lunn, UK trade marketing manager for Supermalt. "This presents another opportunity for caterers looking to complement their existing soft drink range."

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## FUNNYBONES



## THE PERFECT BLEND

Juices, smoothies and shakes are always popular with customers looking for an indulgent alternative, so it's vital that operators offer a range of drinks that will appeal to this demographic. "With an increasing amount of consumers deciding to choose soft drinks when they drink or dine out of home, especially as we move into the warmer months, caterers should look to fulfill demand by offering a varied and exciting range of soft drinks within their menus," says Karen Green, marketing manager for Aimia Foods. "Providing caterers with an alternative to the standard juice or carbonated option, delicious ice-cream textured milkshakes that both look and taste divine allow customers to enjoy a unique soft drink experience."

Freshly made juices and smoothies will appeal to a wide audience of adults and children who are looking for a healthy and tasty option. Not only do juices and smoothies offer customers a great nutrition hit, but they also create theatre, which is always popular. "Individually-portioned, frozen fruit or vegetable sachets make it easy to produce healthy smoothies and they can command a premium price point too," points out Tom Workman, commercial trader - drinks for Creed Foodservice.

The beauty of blended smoothies and juices is that they offer operators a much higher profit margin than bottled variants. They also allow creativity as operators can make their own signature drinks with seasonal produce. "Look for beverage equipment that's simple," advises Mark Hogan, commercial director for Foodservice Equipment Marketing. "Pre-programmable blenders will reduce the requirements for staff training and ensure consistency. This is particularly important when there may be additional casual staff on shift."

With increasing numbers of consumers looking for soft options when out of home, it's essential that operators offer a good range of drinks that appeal to every demographic. From health and nutrition to sustainability and ethical trading, successful outlets will have it all.



## TOP TIPS

## KEEP IT FRESH

"Focus on the ingredients and flavours to tempt consumers into a new drink each time," says Jessica Walter, head of brand for Frobishers. "Whether it's an interesting ingredient, tasting note or a health benefit."

## FOLLOW THE SEASONS

"To get the most from a soft drink offering, the key is in the freshness and seasonality of a range," points out Michael Eyre, culinary director for Jestic Foodservice Equipment.

## TREND SETTERS

"A successful offering will combine conventional soft drinks with more contemporary offerings, such as coconut water," says Marja Lawrence, operations manager for Funnybones Foodservice.