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Massachusetts Beverage Business



KAPPY'S TONY ANTHONY

Knappogue Castle is essentially all upsell; their standard expression is a 12-year-old single malt (although they do have their Clontarf blend, which will be getting a re-package this year). "Knappogue has always been a very small single malt Irish whiskey with vintage dating," laughs Juliet Balian when asked how her brand differentiates itself, "all of that was different. We've changed the vintage to a 12-year-old. We're offering a product with more age without having the consumer do the math: when was it distilled, when was it bottled. Now we are giving them a 12-year-old on a consistent basis. And it is small: we sell 3000 nine-bottle cases, it's very small.

Knappogue has begun doing annual special releases to replace the excitement generated by the new vintages. This year it's the 16 Year Old Twin Wood, an older expression of the malt that's been finished in sherry wood. It comes with a distinctive red label.

Balian is bullish on new labels. "More products provide more differentiation," she says. "That's how retailers should look at it as well. Put out more products; that's how you get people to look at the category. More brands allows more people to participate. They want to try new things, they want to experience different tastes now."



THE CREAM ALWAYS RISES

You wouldn't think there's much point in writing about Irish cream, would you? After all, here's the story on Irish cream: Baileys.

Right? Well . . . kind of. "Baileys is huge," says Gary Park. "Baileys is still a big item," agrees Tony Anthony, manager at Kappy's in Peabody. And Joe Howell wraps it up by noting that with Baileys, "the bottle's never big enough for people."

But there are other products in the category. Coole Swan usually comes up when you ask the question; a high-end product that goes for the luxe part of the market. Howell is enthusiastic about it. "Phenomenal product," he says. "It's not known, and that's the problem. But you put it in people's hands and they don't forget it. I'd love to see more bars and restaurants putting it out so people would get to know it."

Some brands look to get under the Baileys pricepoint. "The category can handle that, it's very strong," Anthony says. "Carolans is big, St. Brendan's is big. The Irishman is fantastic."

Gary Park sees that more as a 'sale of the week' phenomenon. "Whoever's the cheapest will sell," he muses. "The bottom end sells, but it doesn't matter what's on the label: it's just a price."

And then, of course, there's Molly's Irish Cream. What? Never heard of it? You will. The brand was introduced in Massachusetts on February 1. "We waited a long time to find the right partner in Massachusetts," says brand ambassador Carol Murphy, who represents Molly's through Bord Bia, the Irish Food Board. "We are very excited about placing the brand with Burke, a family-owned company with strong roots in the Irish community."

Molly's is a product of Terra Ltd., which was formed to buy the original "Emmet's" Irish cream plant in Baillieboro, Ireland – which has been producing Irish cream since 1978 – from Diageo/Baileys; the management team are all ex-Baileys employees. They are uniquely experienced in this business.

To quote Murphy, "Molly's is a natural fusion of fresh Irish dairy cream, aged Irish whiskey, smooth Irish spirits, and the finest natural chocolate. One third of a bottle of Molly's is pure fresh Irish cream, which is a comparable amount to that used in the higher priced cream liqueurs on the market."

That's right; Molly's is banking on value. They're positioning themselves as a top quality Irish cream, approximately 40% under the shelf price of Baileys. "Molly's puts its marketing spend in the quality of the liquid and supporting its price," says Murphy, "as opposed to expensive advertising."

Trial is what they're hoping for, and with 50ml minis at 99¢ each – "Fish bowls to hold the minis are a great impulse prompt at the register!" Murphy adds – they're getting a great conversion rate. "Tastings in NYC have achieved up to 70% conversion rates," she notes. "Out of every ten people trialed, seven bought a bottle."

So if you're looking for a sure thing: keep stocking Baileys (as if you wouldn't). If you're looking for a deluxe thing, try some Coole Swan. If you're looking for a price thing, try Brady's, or Carolans, or O'Mara's. And if you're looking for a new thing . . . try Molly's.

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