



Saké Thriving On Growth In Asian Accounts, Influx Of New Consumers

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As U.S. consumers broaden their drinking repertoires and explore more sophisticated taste profiles, saké producers have seen their opportunities multiply. Marketers of top saké brands say the category is now making inroads into the mainstream, while also benefiting from marked expansion in its core Asian restaurant account base.

Shipments of imported saké to the U.S. rose 13% in 2013 to 516,000 cases, while domestically produced sakés advanced by 1% to 1.7 million cases, according to the Beverage Industry Analytics. Takara Saké USA and commanding a 27% share of the category with 587,000 cases last year, according to Impact Databank. Number One Importing Co. (SFIC), grew by 3.2% to 450,000 cases. SFIC tells analysts it expects 2014 cases in 2014, with further growth projected for 2015 as saké gains

Oregon-based brewer and importer SakéOne is also bullish on the category. The company grew its volume 8.4% to 89,000 cases in 2013, and has bolstered its range with several new brands over the past year. In May, SakéOne was named the exclusive U.S. importer for Hakutsuru Saké Brewery Co., Ltd. which significantly upped its share of the premium saké market in the grocery channel.

This month, Japan's Kibo Saké linked with SakéOne to begin importing its line of premium canned Junmai saké (15.5% abv) to key coastal markets at about \$6 a 180-ml. can. "Forty years ago, the number of saké breweries in Japan peaked at about 10,000. Now there are about 1,200," explains SakéOne president and CEO Steve Vuylsteke. "With the decline in the Japanese market and breweries going out of business, the idea of exporting is becoming very important."

New York's Joto Saké also expanding from its 720-ml. to crest 20,000 cases in 2014. In Tennessee, Oklahoma and Texas, on-premise and Asian fusion restaurants are becoming very important. Another rising star, Hiogo, and \$39.99, respectively, and plans to expand in California. Carlos Arana, formerly of the San Francisco-based brand, and he envisions more sophisticated profiles. "Today, other than the traditional, there," he says. "There is ample room for category expansion."

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Guillaume Cuvelier, vice president of the category, says, "People are starting to include saké in their wine repertoire. It's another option in the 12%- to 15%-abv segment."



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