

Future Soft Drinks: Innovations to Watch



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Key suppliers offer their thoughts on trends to watch in soft drinks. Which trends are driving development in the soft drinks space and what can we expect to see this year?

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On beverage trends to watch and functional beverages...

“Today, we already see several facets in the market like clean label, light/zero or functional, premium/craft products and fusion. We can widely cluster those facets into four major trends on a global scale. They definitely influence future product development. The trends are: Naturalness & Provenance, Health & Functionality, Premium & Craft and Fusion & Emotions.

Naturalness is the topic that Symrise considers to be the biggest driver in the market. In many countries “cleaner” label is already a given for new product development and it influences the other trends as well. Especially fruit, spice and herbal



extracts play a major role, when it comes to authentic and natural taste. Even fruit tonalities such as Alphonso Mango or Totapuri mango fuel this trend. Symrise can support this natural trend with its “Code of Nature” portfolio, as well as with its widespread range of apple and mango tonalities.

Almost everything has been tried already and it gets hard to reinvent new fruits or ingredients, which have the potential to drive a trend. But there are opportunities: Vegetables such as beet, cucumber or carrots have not yet found a sustainable place in the beverages segment so far, as really tasty solutions are missing.

Also berries, which have been neglected for the past years, are back in focus and the whole area of herbs and spices (where mint and ginger have been promoted already in many beverage concepts) are now seen in a new light, as they can give complexity as well as adult taste to mainstream beverages.

Fueling the trend of a healthy lifestyle, the product category of functional beverages is constantly developing. One area of opportunity is liquid instead of solid nutrition to suit a mobile and flexible way of life.

Breakfast on the go is the buzzword here, as consumers often rarely have time during the week for a “real” breakfast. Some of the needs are: fresh, rich in taste and filling for the next couple of hours. But energy drinks are also under scrutiny. The effect is often seen as not natural and the added caffeine as well as taurine are seen in a negative light and therefore consumers and the industry look for alternatives - such as mate, green coffee beans, guarana or the new “it” ingredient guayusa in the US.” ■

On personalized beverages and trending ingredients...

“With the ongoing fragmentation of soft drinks, we see a clear trend towards a more personalized positioning. It is not enough to simply offer great taste, but instead a holistic, multisensory experience that also covers the right color, mouthfeel, odor and even sound. These have become a must-have for long-lasting success. In addition to the sensory attributes, increased nutritional value that stems from natural ingredients is now essential, as is the perfect fit for the brand, its positioning and sales channels, which is where consumers can come into contact with these new products. Also, traceability and sustainability play an increasingly important role.

Based on the trends of health and naturalness, ingredients such as botanical extracts and proteins - especially green proteins - are becoming increasingly important. Botanical extracts support the “better-for-you” trend as well as the clean label trend, as they provide a diverse range of ingredients that come directly from nature. Green proteins are also becoming increasingly important, as consumers become familiar with their health-promoting effects.

Now with the trend towards vegan products, consumers are looking for alternatives to animal proteins. Peas or rice can also be valuable sources of proteins, to name a few. Green proteins fit perfectly into the “better-for-you” concept and fulfil the demand for healthy, natural and vegan products.” ■



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On craft soft drinks and premium beverages...

“Smaller soft drink manufacturers have the ability to come to the market in a shorter amount of time. They are able to take risks and do not necessarily need to appeal to a large mass of people; they can focus on niche markets. These markets lead to innovative flavor profiles. Soft drinks are being produced with profiles of herbs and spices like juniper berry. An Indian influenced curry soda is in the market. Peppers like chipotle are hot and mix well with fruits in soft drinks. Pie type flavors like rhubarb and key lime are being used in soft drinks. Expect to see more soft drinks with fermented and infusion notes, along with premium ingredients such as cane sugar, organics, probiotics, and novel ingredients like chia seeds.

Premium beverages create the need for premium packaging which may include glass, distinct caps, and up-scale graphics/labeling. There is a trend towards smaller packaging at higher prices. Smaller bottles, mini cans, and single serve beverage packaging are popular because they allow consumers to budget their intake. Variety packs provide people with the opportunity to increase their beverage experience, by allowing them to experiment with more flavor profiles. Environmentally conscious consumers prefer eco-friendly packaging. Manufacturers are focusing on sourcing from recyclable or renewable material and increasing the recovery rate of discarded packaging” ■

On artisanal beverages and the role of technology...

“Although still niche, the recent boom in artisanal beverage product launches show there is room to explore and capture value by positioning quality, texture, mouthfeel and “natural” claims and move beyond traditional fruit flavored soft drinks.

The synergy of juices, pulps, tea and fortification agents presents an opportunity to add value by changing consumers’ current perception of soft drinks - from a “not necessarily healthy, high-sugar and flavored” beverage to a more appealing solution that fits their lifestyle and diet expectations.

From a technology standpoint, the use of nature-based origin rheology modifiers, known as hydrocolloids, is essential to the successful innovation in soft drinks.

For example, by exploring KELCOGEL gellan gum, you can create gel-structured drinks with high clarity and excellent suspension power, even allowing for the addition of delicious gellan-based microcapsules that contain fibers or fruit pieces. You can also innovate by giving the consumer the choice of how to consume their soft drink: eat a gel, with different texture experience options, or shake the beverage and drink it. Hydrocolloids can help manufacturers choose more sustainable or appealing beverage packaging formats, including transparent systems and convenient on-the-go pouches, influencing texture and drinkability.” ■

On the rise of clear labels and sustainable progress...

“The market request for natural and clean label products keeps growing. In the soft drinks sector in particular we register globally an increasing demand for products with a low sugar content. The goal is to slow down or fight the increasing prevalence of obesity.

For flavor houses, the challenge is help finding solutions which allow to obtain drinks with a reduced calorie content but that, at the same time, can keep the “taste” and round texture of the missing sugar. As far as we are concerned in particular, brewed teas, which have been a reality for some years in Italy, are gaining increased attention also abroad. Brewed drinks have a more authentic taste, if compared with other similar drinks and are also perceived as more natural and clean label products.

There is always a strong demand for new taste combinations and for natural flavors. In line with this, superfruits, such as pomegranate, blueberries, blackberries, blackcurrants or the exotic acai and acerola, which are rich in antioxidants and protective compounds, have strong demand. These fruits are source of vitamins, polyphenols and anti-aging substances, so the corresponding flavors are much liked by consumers. Citrus flavors are always among the most requested because they taste refreshing and are known, liked and available all over the world. Flavors for flavored beers have also seen increasing demand.” ■