

Confessions of a drinks salesman



By [Rowan Leibbrandt](#)

15 Jan 2021

It is written in the annals of marketing 101 (I didn't actually attend any of these lectures, but I do recall reading this in the study notes I stole) that every year needs to begin with a trends email. "Behold" some marketeer needs to proclaim, "this is how you will all be drinking in the months to come."



Rowan Leibbrandt, founding partner of Truman & Orange

This year, that bold trend-spotter is I. Before I hear any of you ask "Can you remind us what you said last year so we can check how clever you are?" or "Did you predict Covid, you idiot?" I'd like to point out that this exercise is totally devoid of any science, or anything remotely similar to research.

And with that bold disclaimer your humble correspondent proclaims – with totally unjustified confidence – that when it comes to what we drink, the year ahead of us is going to be driven by the following mega-trends:

Trend 1: The demise of the ice cube

2021 is almost certainly going to see us saying goodbye to the ice cube. Also known as the 'arse-coob' in Durban, this drink addition has surprisingly become quite popular for those enjoying a cold one. However, recent years have seen some push-back driven by the tragic loss of building material it has translated into for the Northern Canadian Inuit community, with the desecration of their homes as their igloo walls are demolished and shipped in small pieces to popular cocktail bars around the world by ruthless ice foragers.

2021 is the year the ice cube – this cruel, yet long-time friend of every barman – will have reached the end of its useful life. In response, 2021 will be the year when we finally see the long-awaited rise of those mouth-watering, room temperature cocktails: the lukewarm-long-island-ice-tea, the tepid-tequila-daiquiri, and the increasingly popular icky-sticky-martini.

La Med in Cape Town is widely renowned to have helped kick-start this sophisticated style of drinking, with the pioneering work they did selling sweaty little drinks to sun-burnt tourists standing in 40-degree sun, for fifty bucks.



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Trend 2: Gin might make a comeback

Yes, you heard it here first, 2021 will see a boatload of new gins launched in SA. A recent poll of two barmen, a car guard, my tipsy wife and the Uber driver taking us home, led me to draw the inescapable conclusion that 2021 will see gin becoming quite popular. “Gosh, hold the front page,” I hear you say. As unlikely as this seems, we are entering into a year which will increasingly see grown men quit corporate jobs they actually have degrees for, and launch craft distilling businesses they are totally unqualified to run.

Undeterred by the generation of bankrupt craft brewers that came before them, these enthusiastic distillers (insert small, polite cough) will open garage distilleries and launch craft gin brands with names like Octonaut’s Rectum. The world will rediscover rare ingredients like fungus and elephant dung, and once again come to the conclusion that they don’t have any place in a gin.

This same poll predicted the long-awaited Vermouth trend’s arrival will consequently be pushed back to 2042 as a result of quite a lot of people not liking Vermouth, and the people expected to start liking it not having arrived yet.

Trend 3: Guys will start buying girls drinks in bars

Probably the most surprising prediction we’re making this year is that we anticipate the rise of guys smelling of Tommy Hilfiger wearing golf shirts with the collars stuck up, buying pretty girls in bars drinks, as part of a complicated mating ritual we are only beginning to understand. Early signs suggest that these unsolicited bottles of champagne might be a form of subtle, non-verbal signal sending, whereby the middle-aged male is actually saying “please shag me”.

This never-before-seen bar ritual will surprise some (the girls) for its audaciousness and surprise others (the golf shirt wearers mostly) for its extremely low return on investment. 2022 is likely to see a return to the more successful tactic where the male of the species slides his Golf GTI keys across the bar in front of his victim, and nods silently at them, while she does her best not to be overwhelmed by the suddenly handsome stranger.



Excuse me Mr President, could we have a drink, please?

Rowan Leibbrandt 3 Aug 2020



Trend 4: Quite a few drinks categories will change size

Finally, we felt the need to include some predictions for our business readers. Our extensive research in the South African drinks industry, enables us to somewhat confidently predict that the size of the South Africa spirits segment will change by

either plus or minus 11.1%. Unfortunately, our research isn't granular enough to predict which way, but we are able to say is that the change will almost certainly see some categories getting bigger, while others might get smaller.

We surmise that this might be as a result of certain drinks choices going up in popularity while others get less so. And while our research wasn't able to establish which categories would gain and which would lose in 2021, we expect that by November we will be able to let you know.

Please note that no industry professionals, commentators, or authoritative figures were bothered in the writing of this report. Opinions are entirely your correspondent's own and he has been wrong quite frequently in the past, but thought that South Africa might need a little more fun given the year we've just had. So voetsek 2020, hello 2021 you gorgeous thing.

ABOUT ROWAN LEIBBRANDT

Rowan Leibbrandt is a founding partner of Truman & Orange, a premium drinks company. Returning to South Africa to apply 20 years' experience in various management positions at blue chip liquor companies, Rowan has lived in Swaziland (where he was born), the UK, Russia, Germany and worked extensively in France, Germany, Portugal and Greece. He is passionate about Africa, and the opportunity to introduce African drinkers to the premium discovery brands Truman & Orange curates.

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