Beverage Alcohol Outlook for 2026

What's Actually Moving the Market

Volume isn't collapsing — but it is concentrating.

Across beverage alcohol, overall consumption continues to soften, particularly in traditional core segments. At the same time, buyers are still actively sourcing new products — just more selectively, with tighter sets, fewer risks, and a sharper focus on velocity.

Growth isn't disappearing — it's moving.

Volume Is Flat. Opportunity Is Targeted.

TARGETED GROWTH & VELOCITY

Broad-based growth is gone. What remains are specific pockets of demand driven by format, occasion, and consumer intent.

- Buyers are prioritizing incremental, differentiated SKUs, not broad portfolio expansion
- Distributors are narrowing focus toward proven volume and margin drivers
- Brands are increasingly forced to earn their shelf space market by market

The winners will be brands that stay flexible, protect their placements, and expand deliberately — not indiscriminately.

Premium Still Matters — But It Must Be Defensible

PREMIUM PERFORMANCE & PROOF

Premiumization hasn't vanished. It has become conditional.

- A clear reason to exist on shelf
- Consistent execution and supply reliability
- Proof of performance through reorders, not storytelling alone

Buyers are still supporting premium — but only when it's backed by data, velocity, and operational discipline.

RTDs and Alternative Formats Continue to Do the Heavy Lifting

RTDs & FORMAT INNOVATION

Ready-to-drink cocktails and hybrid formats remain among the most resilient growth engines in beverage alcohol.

• RTDs continue to benefit from convenience, format familiarity, and operational ease

• Hybrid products that blur category lines are expanding the buying occasion

• Buyers favor formats that turn quickly and simplify inventory decisions

Innovation is encouraged, especially when it drives sustainable economics across retail and on-premise

Moderation Is Structural, Not Cyclical

LOW & NO-ALCOHOL OCCASIONS

Low-ABV, no-alcohol, and mindful drinking options are now embedded in assortments, not seasonal experiments.

• Buyers are expanding choice rather than replacing traditional alcohol

• Moderation-driven SKUs create new occasions and incremental baskets

• Education, clarity, and pricing discipline matter more than ever

Non-alcoholic spirits, beer, and wine are no longer fringe — they are part of the core set strategy for many retailers.

Wine Is Rebalancing — Not Recovering

WINE: CORE VS ADJACENT

Wine continues to face pressure, particularly in table wine and domestic core varietals, which account for the majority of volume declines.

Where growth is showing up:

• Wine-based cocktails

• Non-alcoholic wine

Consumers are shifting toward flavor-forward, convenient, and lower- or no-alcohol options.

Flexibility Is the Competitive Advantage

ADAPTABILITY & EXECUTION

The brands that will win in 2026 will not necessarily be the biggest — they will be the most adaptable.

• Ability to scale up or pull back market by market

• Multiple paths to market without operational disruption

• Direct ownership of buyer relationships

Execution, not exposure, will define success.

Bottom Line

2026 will reward discipline over noise. Brands that focus on where demand is actually moving, protect hard-earned placements, and stay operationally nimble will continue to grow — even in a contracting volume environment.

This isn't a year for chasing every trend. It's a year for making smart, intentional decisions.

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Data & references compiled by Premium Beverage Group®

Market References & Data Sources

Insights in this outlook are informed by a combination of national and regional data sources, including NABCA Control State results; Circana (formerly IRI & NPD) retail scan data; NIQ and CGA on- and off-premise measurement; WineBusiness Analytics and Sovos ShipCompliant direct-to-consumer reporting; and industry coverage from Bloomberg, Financial Times, MarketWatch, Brewbound, Just Drinks, and World Health Organization alcohol consumption reporting.

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