



Harry Kohlmann

PREDICTS A LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

By Christina Staalstrom

Dr. Harry Kohlmann, CEO of Park Street Imports, can be found on stage at most wine and spirits conventions sharing exciting stories filled with the entrepreneurial prowess of brands barreling onto the market in unconventional ways. Over the years, Kohlmann, a quick-witted, German-born, former McKinsey & Company strategy consultant, has become the unofficial crusader for wine and spirits entrepreneurs.

Seasoned brand owners and yet-to-be-launched beverage innovators listen intently before lining up post-seminar for their moment in the sun with Kohlmann and his phone, where his coveted list of contacts rests securely in the palm of his hand. Arguably Kohlmann's phone is worth its weight in gold, and with an adept dial of the right digits, he can open doors to make things happen for even the smallest of brands.

Kohlmann started Park Street Imports with co-founder and company president Chris Mehringer back in 2003 when the two saw an opportunity. They wanted to provide technology-focused, back-office services for wine and spirits entrepreneurs looking to launch their products on the United States market.

Fast forward to today, and Park Street has grown to become the leading provider of not only back-office and compliance management but also working capital and management solutions to more than 13,500 alcoholic beverage brands from the United States and around the world. Their service-focused model helps manage functions critical to launching and maintaining successful beverage alcohol brands, and their clients range from entrepreneurs to multi-brand global suppliers. They include craft distillers, centuries-old family businesses, award-winning wineries, and innovation brands.

Like many industry leaders, Kohlmann's sites are set on the future, trying to determine where the dust from Covid-19's rocky ride will settle. Almost a year into the pandemic, we've seen our industry upended with closures of bars and restaurants nationwide. Fortunately, the rise in e-commerce solutions assures us that consumers are just as thirsty as ever.

As we enter yet another unfamiliar phase of the pandemic, Kohlmann expects to see a huge entrepreneurial wave of innovative products enter the market fueled by pent-up consumer demand for something "new and exciting." Development cycles are shorter, and the ramp-up is faster as brands turn to digital and social media for direct consumer engagement right out of the gate.

Luxury brands and perceived better-for-you products lead the way in terms of new entrants and line extensions from big players with a focus on positioning and packaging for today's social media-driven sales platform.

Expect also to see products that blend categories and are perceived to be healthier than their traditional counterparts. Liqueurs, long seen only as an added ingredient to craft cocktails, have come a long way from the Kir Royale. Today's offerings range from fruit to herb and everything in between. For instance, gin liqueur that can be enjoyed on the rocks or in a low abv G&T.

Innovation has always been the driving force of our industry, and with 2020 behind us, 2021 is looking to be a banner year for redefining innovation and creating new traditions around the "what, where, why, and how" of enjoying a cocktail or two.