

NIQ Perspective



New Pours, New Possibilities: Why Innovation Still Matters

Why innovation matters

BevAI companies growing innovation sales are

2.0x

as likely to grow their overall business⁴

In a challenged Beverage Alcohol industry, success depends on capturing a fair share of a shrinking market. Innovation is essential to building loyalty, recruiting new consumers, sustaining engagement, and ultimately driving growth.

Here’s what you should do if you are brand

Brands should treat innovation as a growth strategy, not just a launch calendar. The biggest opportunities will come from understanding which consumer occasions are underserved, which claims are gaining momentum, and which formats or flavors are creating measurable demand. Winning brands will connect the dots between occasions strategy product development, retail execution, and on premise discovery, ensuring that every innovation has a clear role, a compelling benefit, and strong visibility at the point of choice.

Your next move

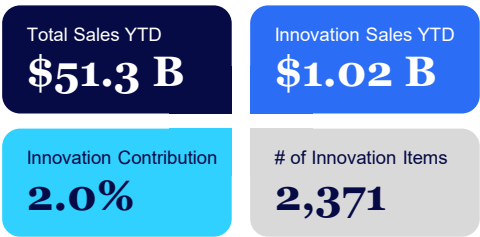
Start with the consumer moment. Identify where consumers are most open to exploration: trying a new drink at the bar, browsing the aisle, responding to a display, or being drawn in by packaging. Then work to understand what consumers are buying, and why they are willing to try something new. The next move is to build innovations that are easy to discover, easy to understand, and clearly connected to the occasions consumers care about most.

Implications for Beverage Alcohol Manufacturers

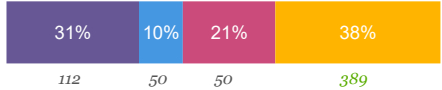
Ready to Drinks are Powering BevAI Innovation

Innovation continues to shape BevAI performance, driving incremental dollars and keeping brands relevant across beer, wine, spirits, and RTDs. RTDs are doing a disproportionate amount of the work, delivering 38% of innovation dollars from just 22% of innovation items. This outsized contribution reinforces RTDs as the industry’s strongest innovation engine and a clear signal of where consumer demand is. The strongest opportunities will be those that bring new flavor, occasion, format, and convenience to market.

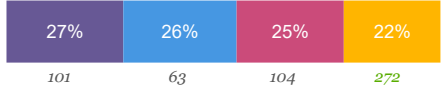
Innovation Performance Year to Date 2026¹



Category share of innovation dollars & index to total



Category share of innovation items & index to total



■ Spirits ■ Wine ■ Beer/Cider ■ RTDs

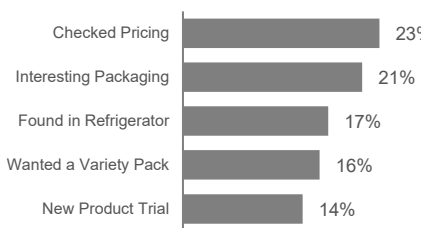
The RTD Playbook: Make It Convenient, Visible, and Trial-Worthy

RTD innovation is winning when it is easy to recognize, accessible, and inviting to try. Cans, non-carbonated options, and vodka-based offerings are leading innovation characteristics, while pricing, interesting packaging, refrigerator placement, variety packs, and new product trial are influencing purchase at shelf. The strongest RTD innovations do more than introduce something new—they remove friction from discovery and make the trial decision feel simple, appealing, and worthwhile.

Top Innovation Characteristics for RTDs YTD 2026¹



Point of Purchase Influencers: RTDs²



Discovery Happens Everywhere, But Younger Drinkers Lead On Premise

On-premise is where curiosity turns into trial. With 41% of consumers trying a new drink while out in the past month, led by Gen Z (21+) and Millennials, bars and restaurants continue to play an important role in shaping what consumers discover next. For BevAI brands, this creates a critical opportunity to use flavor, format, and experience to introduce innovation in the moments when consumers are most open to something new.



Did you know?

Test your next RTD idea in under 5 minutes

BASES AI Screener delivers fast, predictive feedback using synthetic respondents trained on real consumer behavior.



Find out more about BASES AI Screener here!

[1] NielsenIQ BASES Innovation Measurement: Profiler | US Alcoholic Beverages | Total US xAOC+Liquor Open State+Conv | 26 w/e 06/13/2026; [2] NielsenIQ Category Shopping Fundamentals BevAI 2025; [3] NIQ JUNE 2026 US On Premise Pulse Report Sample (178 – 1490) [4] NIQ Innovation Intelligence, 70,000 manufacturers, 130 categories, across 10 countries; ratio of Growth v Decliners = x2.03