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Drops of Opportunity: Marketing Strategy for JustMyx

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INTRODUCTION

It was an unusually warm day in April 2024 when Richard Wang sat back with a sense of accomplishment. Having recently celebrated one year of running JustMyx full time, he opened his computer to turn his attention to the future of the start-up company. With current operations in Ontario, Wang aimed to design an effective marketing strategy to drive JustMyx's next phase of growth. The question was: how?

JUSTMYX

JustMyx was a concentrated liquid juice mix available in three cocktail flavours: Sex on the Beach, Piña Colada, and Lime Mojito. Its simplicity was its key feature—just mix it, and you're done! Consumers would add a small amount of JustMyx cocktail drops to water and, if desired, add hard alcohol/spirits. The standard 48 ml bottle, which contained about 24 servings, was compact enough to fit in a pocket, making it perfect for on-the-go use. The JustMyx slogan, "Cocktail simplicity, JustMyx complexity," underscored the brand's unique position in the juice mix and water enhancement market, offering a distinctive blend of convenience, innovation, and fun.

To enhance the overall taste experience, JustMyx products were complemented by specialized recipes on their website. All cocktail drops were 100% vegan, gluten-free, sugar-free, and calorie-free, making it a healthier choice over a traditional cocktail.[1] JustMyx took pride in using high-quality ingredients to ensure a premium taste experience.

[1] Instead of sugar, JustMyx used sucralose: an FDA-approved synthetic artificial sweetener.

HISTORY

JustMyx was started in 2021 by three students at Western University in London, Ontario. The students initially pitched the idea at a school club contest, earning first place for their presentation. The positive feedback from the judges and their fellow competitors encouraged the trio to apply for Western's Propel Accelerator Program, which provided student entrepreneurs with seed funding and world-class mentorship. Propel accepted their application and granted the co-founders $12,000 to kickstart JustMyx. In the summer of 2022, Wang's two other co-founders graduated and decided to pursue full-time corporate work instead of continuing with JustMyx. Wang therefore opted to take sole proprietorship of the venture with plans to hard launch the brand in the spring of 2023, following graduation. He envisioned JustMyx achieving national recognition and becoming a household staple across Canada, and he was committed to making that vision a reality.

Wang was the only full-time employee of JustMyx, in addition to three rotating student interns. JustMyx accepted student interns for four months during the summer (May-August), and for eight months during the school year (September-April). Students worked in a part-time capacity, from one to five hours per week, occupying positions in either promotions, marketing, or operations.

JustMyx products were sold in approximately 170 stores across Canada, and online through the direct-to-consumer (DTC) business model via their website. Only 1-2% of overall sales was attributed to the DTC platform, with the majority of revenue generated through wholesale to brick-and-mortar stores (Exhibit 1). These brick-and-mortar stores included large grocers, such as Sobeys and Foodland, as well as smaller boutique liquor stores and convenience stores across Ontario.[2]

Richard Wang

As one of the original co-founders, Wang had been with JustMyx since its inception, pursuing this venture while completing his Bachelor of Business Management and Organization Studies (BMOS). By August 2023, Wang had positioned JustMyx on the shelves of 100 boutique liquor and convenience stores. With this rapid growth, the business was running out of money, putting the company at immediate risk of shutting down. To save time and money, Wang would sometimes sleep in his car during product delivery runs. One morning, he woke up early in a Sobeys parking lot and saw the store manager going into work. Wang spoke to the manager about the JustMyx brand and walked out of this impromptu meeting with both an investor, and shelf space in the store. After that, Wang worked with the Sobeys manager to secure shelf space in 10 Sobeys and 30 Foodland grocers.

[2] Sobeys and Foodland have over 255 and 210 stores, respectively, across Canada.

INDUSTRY

In 2024, the Canadian alcohol industry generated $28.3 billion in revenue, reflecting a steady growth rate of 0.6% from 2019 to 2024.[3] Revenue was expected to increase at a compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of 0.2% from 2024 to 2029.[4] The industry also maintained strong profit margins of 28.2% in 2024.[5] Product offerings were typically categorized into four main segments: beer, wine, spirits, as well as ciders and coolers.[6] Unfortunately, it was difficult to penetrate this lucrative market due to high barriers to entry. Strict provincial and federal regulations governed alcohol production and distribution to uphold health and safety standards, such as adherence to labelling requirements, floor prices, and legal drinking ages.[7] In September 2024, the Ontario provincial government made alcohol more accessible by permitting alcohol sales in gas stations, convenience stores, and grocery stores, rather than restricting them to the government-run store, the Liquor Control Board of Ontario (LCBO) and The Beer Store. This policy shift aimed to reduce barriers and foster a more competitive and efficient market, setting Ontario apart from other provinces which continued to use government-run liquor sales. Additionally, manufacturers and wholesalers were subject to both federal excise duties and provincial taxes, further squeezing margins.[8] Nevertheless, the industry remained highly competitive, requiring brands to establish strong brand recognition, innovate product portfolios, or develop robust supplier and distributor relationships to succeed.

Following the global COVID-19 pandemic, Canada was on route to recovery from high unemployment rates; however, inflation and unemployment remained high at 2.7% and 6.1%, respectively.[9] As a result, consumers had less disposable income to spend on discretionary items. Alcohol fulfilled a unique position as both a consumer staple and consumer discretionary good.[10] In other words, alcohol volume remained steady during economic downturns, however, consumers often opted for lower-cost options in such periods. In contrast to the alcohol industry, ready-to-drink (RTD) mixes and flavoured beverages were considered non-essential and fell into the consumer discretionary category. The pandemic also changed consumers' drinking habits, shifting consumption from bars and restaurants to homes.[11]

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[3] Lombardo, C. (2024), "44531CA Beer, Wine & Liquor Stores in Canada," *IBIS World*, https://my-ibisworld-com.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/ca/en/industry/44531ca/at-a-glance.
[4] ibid.
[5] ibid.
[6] Rose, A. (2024), "41322CA Beer, Wine & Spirits Wholesaling in Canada," *IBIS World*, https://my-ibisworld-com.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/ca/en/industry/41322CA/products-and-markets.
[7] (n.d.) "Policy and Regulations (Alcohol)," *Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction,* https://www.ccsa.ca/en/guidance-tools-resources/substance-use-and-addiction/alcohol/policy-and-regulations.
[8] (n.d.) "Alcohol Tax Rates," *Canadian Partnership Against Cancer*, https://www.partnershipagainstcancer.ca/topics/alcohol-policies/alcohol-tax-rates/.
[9] (n.d.) "Unemployment rate by province and territory, April 2024," *Statistics Canada*, https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/240510/mca001-eng.htm; and Lundy, M. (2024.) "Canada's inflation rate slowed to 2.7% in April, boosting bets for June rate cut," *The Globe and Mail*, https://www.theglobeandmail.com/business/article-canada-inflation-rate-april-live-updates/.
[10] Moskowitz, D. (2022), "How to invest in liquor," *Investopedia*. https://www.investopedia.com/articles/personal-finance/041315/how-invest-liquor-deo-stz.asp.
[11] (2024) "CA620 Per capita alcohol consumption," *IBIS World*, https://my-ibisworld-com.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/ca/en/business-environment-profiles/ca620/business-environment-profile.

Since 2022, alcohol consumption per capita had been decreasing and was expected to continue decreasing due to an aging population and growing health concerns in Canada.[12] According to a report by Mintel in 2022, when choosing non-alcoholic beverages and additives, Canadians cared most about reducing or limiting sugar.[13] This report supported the notion that almost 50% of consumers were more likely to purchase a product with low to no sugar, and 37% of consumers were more likely to purchase a product made with real ingredients. Sugar consumption was most concerning to those in the Boomer or Gen X demographic, with Millennials and Gen Z's more likely to consider other benefits, such as energy boosting.

Flavour and flavour variety were among the top reasons consumers chose RTD alcoholic beverages instead of beer, wine or spirits alone.[14] According to an RTD Alcoholic Beverages Report on the Canadian landscape, 30% of consumers preferred familiar flavours, while 26% preferred exotic flavours. 57% of RTD consumers opted for a cocktail or mixed drink made from scratch, versus a cider, spirit, wine, or beer.

COMPETITORS

iiCiNG

Based out of Milton, Ontario, iiCiNG Flavour Shot was a direct competitor to JustMyx. iiCiNG's product portfolio consisted of seven flavours, specializing in broad aromas versus specific cocktail types. Like JustMyx, iiCiNG was packaged in a 48 ml, 24-serving bottle, and it also had zero calories. iiCiNG was available at retailers across Canada, including Loblaws, Real Canadian Superstore, No Frills, Metro, Zehrs and Maxi, and it was also sold DTC via the company website and Amazon.[15] For delivery across Canada, iiCiNG was available on Amazon in variety packs of five, or in individual flavour packs of three, six, or 12. In the U.S., iiCiNG was available on Amazon in the variety five-pack only.[16] When ordering directly on the website, one bottle of iiCiNG Flavour Shot was priced at $8.00 before taxes, with free shipping within Canada.[17]

Brella

Brella Beverage Inc. was based in Chicago, Illinois, and marketed its product as a pocket mixologist. Brella sold their concentrated cocktail mixer in portable 60 ml bottles. The product contained zero sugar, zero calories, and was 100% vegan and gluten-free.[18] Brella's product portfolio consisted of two flavours: Margarita and Tiki. These offerings anchored their presence in the cocktail-specific market. Brella was expected to launch four new flavours within the next year: Mule, Mimosa, Bellini, and Mojito.[19] Brella was available in select liquor stores, convenience stores, and grocers across the United States, with DTC sales available through their website.[20] On the Brella website, flavours were sold in packs of two, either a two-pack of the same flavour, or a two-pack with one of each flavour. All combinations were priced at $20 USD before taxes, with shipping available across the USA and Australia.[21]

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[12] (2024) "CA620 Per capita alcohol consumption," *IBIS World*, https://my-ibisworld-com.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/ca/en/business-environment-profiles/ca620/business-environment-profile.
[13] Gregoire, J. (2022a) "Non-alcoholic Beverages – Canada," *Mintel Reports*.
[14] Gregoire, J. (2022b) "RTD Alcoholic Beverages – Canada," *Mintel Reports*.
[15] "iiCiNG Retail," *iiCiNG*, https://www.iicing.ca/retail.
[16] "Amazon," *iiCiNG*, https://www.iicing.ca/home/amazon.
[17] "iiCiNG Online," *iiCiNG*, https://www.iicing.ca/buy-iicing-online.
[18] *Brella*, https://www.brelladrops.com/
[19] "Brella Cocktail Drops," *Brella*, https://www.brelladrops.com/cocktail-drops.
[20] "Store Locator: Find us in stores," *Brella*, https://www.brelladrops.com/brella-store-locator-find-us-in-stores.
[21] "Checkout," *Brella*, https://brella-2.myshopify.com/checkouts/co/05bbb1f5686cbe49aa598f445cc01828.

Mio

Operated as a subsidiary under the Kraft Heinz banner, Mio was a zero calorie, flavoured liquid water enhancer. In addition to their original Mio water enhancement product line, Mio released two new product lines in an attempt to attract Gen Z consumers in late 2023: Mio Hydrate and Mio Energy.[22] All three lines were available in a variety of fruit flavours and sold in either 48 ml bottles, 100 ml bottles, or 4 g powder packets.[23] In line with other Kraft Heinz products, Mio was sold in large grocers and retailers internationally, and through their websites and Amazon storefronts.[24] Mio's competitive advantage was attributed to their economies of scale and ability to leverage social media platforms for extended coverage. Depending on the retailer, the standard Mio bottle, 48 ml in volume, was priced between $3.50 to $4.50.[25]

Alcoholic Cooler Brands

Indirect competitors included alcoholic cooler brands like Cottage Springs, Black Fly, Georgian Bay, Dillon's, and Sandbagger, to name a few. These companies sold pre-made cocktails, such as Aperol spritzes, vodka sodas, cosmopolitans, and margaritas that were available in six, nine, 12, 24, and 30-packs of 355 ml cans or individually in 355 ml, 473 ml, or 750 ml cans/bottles. Although these drinks physically took more space in consumers' homes, brands positioned them as convenient, ready-to-enjoy cocktails that removed the need for separate flavoured water enhancers, water, alcohol, and a recipe, as well as the effort needed to mix drinks. With a standardized, clean-ingredient formula and consistent alcohol content, these cocktails provided reliable quality and taste. A 355 ml can typically ranged from $2 to $4 CAD. While some brands offered non-alcoholic versions, these products were available exclusively in Canadian liquor stores due to alcohol-related regulations.

CUSTOMERS

JustMyx segmented its target market into two distinct groups: students and new graduates; and young, affluent mothers (YAMs).

The students and new graduate category represented individuals who were in university, college, or within five years of post-graduate work and were above the legal drinking age of 19. Although they were highly price sensitive, this consumer group had a strong potential to promote products through word of mouth, and on Instagram and TikTok, and they were typically open to trying new products in the alcoholic beverage and mixer market. As a part of this consumer group, and an extensive network of current students and new graduates, Wang made this demographic the focus of JustMyx's marketing tactics and its primary avenue for sales.

The young and affluent mothers (YAMs) category represented middle-aged women who frequently enjoyed a cocktail or two. Whether it was a charcuterie night with the neighbourhood moms or a relaxing evening after a long day, YAMs often chose a cocktail to compliment these moments. Based on JustMyx primary research, YAMs were predominantly active in small, developing townships that relied on a single grocer for all purchases, and that leveraged Facebook to contact their networks. JustMyx saw rising success in targeting these individuals; however, Wang remained skeptical and unsure about the best way to successfully position marketing tactics toward this group.

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[22] Adams, P. (2024, April 17), "Kraft Heinz rebrands Mio liquid concentrate to meet Gen Z wellness trends, Marketing Dive, https://www.marketingdive.com/news/kraft-heinz-rebrands-mio-gen-z-wellness-trends/713423/.
[23] "Products: MiO," Kraft Heinz, https://www.kraftheinz.com/en-CA/mio/products
[24] "MiO: Fruit Punch Flavoured Liquid Water Enhancer," Loblaws, https://www.loblaws.ca/fruit-punch-flavoured-liquid-water-enhancer/p/20565119001_EA.
[25] "+Vitamins Blackberry Raspberry Liquid Water Enhancer," Loblaws,https://www.zehrs.ca/vitamins-blackberry-raspberry-liquid-water-enhanc/p/21081063_EA?utm_source=swaven&utm_campaign=swaven_manufacturer&utm_medium=referral&utm_content=mio.

PRICE

In the first year of operations, Wang purchased products from a manufacturer at $3.25 per unit for all flavours. Given his strong professional relationship with this supplier, he successfully negotiated a 24.6% reduction in the per unit cost, effective November 2023.[26] If JustMyx chose to expand operations to British Columbia, Manitoba, and Alberta, the higher sales volume would decrease in the unit cost by $0.45.

Through the DTC channel, JustMyx was sold at a 65% gross margin. Amongst the small to medium-sized accounts, which included boutique liquor stores and convenience shops, JustMyx was sold to consumers at the premium price point of $6.99 and a margin of 25% for JustMyx. For the larger accounts, such as the grocers, the average retail price was a 53.5% markup. These prices would be equivalent in prospective provinces.

PLACEMENT

Wang was contemplating JustMyx's distribution strategy: he could focus on grocery stores, boutique liquor shops, and convenience stores; DTC sales in Ontario; or expand DTC across Canada. With large accounts, such as grocery stores, Wang had two possible trade routes for mass distribution. He could continue selling directly to individual grocers in Ontario, forcing him to hand-deliver products when needed and likely hire additional drivers. Alternatively, Wang could engage with a distributor to help deliver JustMyx products to grocers.[27] This extra step in the chain of distribution could save him the time and energy required to check inventory and deliver products where needed. If feasible, this option could also be optimal for expanding to grocers in other provinces. JustMyx could then distribute to boutique liquor stores and convenience stores across Canada, and DTC via their website. As Wang contemplated the distribution strategy, he wanted to ensure feasibility was at the forefront of decision-making to competitively position JustMyx within broader geographic markets (Exhibit 2).

PRODUCT

A certified food scientist was in charge of creating the formulas for each flavour, thereby ensuring compliance with regulations and packer requirements. Based on a survey measuring consumer perception of 30 cocktail flavours, JustMyx identified and created its three most popular flavours: Sex on the Beach, Pina Colada, and Lime Mojito. Since then, an additional four formulas have been identified and formulated for prospective launches: Strawberry Margarita, Moscow Mule, Guava Margarita, and Whisky Sour (Exhibit 3). Wang wondered if expanding JustMyx's product portfolio was worthwhile, and if so, when he should launch these new flavours.

PROMOTION

Historically, Wang struggled to develop effective promotional strategies. He mentioned to his mentor that, "spending money on marketing is throwing money away at this point." So far, Wang had used setting up a booth at in-person events and launch parties, as well as creating TikTok content, as primary promotional strategies. However, Wang had not yet tried Instagram and Facebook advertising to attract students and new graduates or YAMs. Although not formally enforced, it was a common industry practice to avoid showing individuals consuming alcohol in advertisements, and Wang was mindful to follow this unspoken rule. Cash was tight, and thus Wang needed to drive top-line growth with a limited annual advertising budget of $2,000 (Exhibit 4).

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[26] The manufacturer made a 50% margin on product sales, commencing November 2023 and onwards.
[27] JustMyx would sell products to distributors at a price of $2.75 per unit. Distributors would sell to grocers at a markup of 18.2%.

DECISION

Wang knew he had to make decisions quickly to capitalize on the summer season. As he stepped away from his computer and went inside to his kitchen, he continued to ponder the next steps for JustMyx. Should he expand operations to British Columbia, Manitoba and Alberta? If so, how would the product be distributed and promoted? If not, where should Wang focus his efforts in Ontario? Which target market was most aligned with JustMyx's value proposition? He knew that with a little effort, he could find just the right marketing mix before the summer patio season.

EXHIBIT #1

Sales Proportions & Product Costing Information

Sales Proportion	
Wholesale	98%
Direct to Consumer (DTC)	2%

Product Costing Information	
Current	
Manufacturing	$ 2.00
Packaging	$ 0.45
Total	**$ 2.45**
Expansion	
Manufacturing	$ 1.55
Packaging	$ 0.45
Total	**$ 2.00**

EXHIBIT #2

Geographic Placement Opportunities

British Columbia	
Supermarkets & Grocery Stores[28]	1,403
Convenience Stores[29]	744
Liquor Stores[30]	807

Alberta	
Supermarkets & Grocery Stores	1,142
Convenience Stores	978
Liquor Stores	1,644

Manitoba	
Supermarkets & Grocery Stores	470
Convenience Stores	276
Liquor Stores	93

Ontario	
Supermarkets & Grocery Stores	3,578
Convenience Stores	4,463
Liquor Stores	1,505

[28] (2024) "44511CA - Supermarkets & Grocery stores in Canada" IBIS World, https://my.ibisworld.com/ca/en/industry/44511ca/geographic-breakdown.
[29] (2024) "44521CA - Convenience stores in Canada," IBIS World, https://my.ibisworld.com/ca/en/industry/44512ca/geographic-breakdown.
[30] (2024) "44531CA - Beer, Wine and Liquor stores in Canada," IBIS World. https://my.ibisworld.com/ca/en/industry/44531ca/geographic-breakdown.

EXHIBIT #3

Sample Product Portfolio

EXHIBIT #4

Advertising Data

Platform	CPM	Conversion Rate
Instagram[31]	$3.00	0.24%
Facebook[32]	$2.28	2.74%

[31] DeFazio, A., and DeFazio, A. (2024, January 14), "How much do Instagram ads cost? (+How to make the most of your budget), WordStream, https://www.wordstream.com/blog/ws/2021/02/08/instagram-ads-cost.
[32] McCormick, K., and McCormick, K. (2023, November 21), "How much do Facebook ads cost? (+9 ways to stretch your budget)," WordStream. https://www.wordstream.com/blog/ws/2021/07/12/facebook-ads-cost.