

Sayso: flexible tea bag cocktails for the sober-curious

CASE STUDY | Oct 26, 2022

Catering to the growing popularity of spirit-free drinks, Sayso's tea bag cocktails enable the sober-curious to engage in drinking rituals without compromising on taste. As more people cut back their alcohol consumption, how can brands appeal to both casual drinkers and at-home, sober mixologists?

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LOCATIONS:
UNITED STATES

SECTORS:
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EXPERTS

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HIGHLIGHTS

- 01** Sayso produces cocktail tea bags that enable people to conveniently steep their own at-home concoctions, catering to a rise in amateur mixology and a trend toward drinking less
- 02** Indulgent drinking behaviors peaked during the pandemic, leading to the rise in at-home bars and DIY mentalities
- 03** Sober-curious people still want great taste and convenience, as well as the ability to engage in drinking rituals without facing stigma

DATA

- In 2021, 64% of people globally said they wanted to explore low or no-alcohol drink options
- 94% of ready-to-drink cocktail consumers choose them because of taste, while 92% say it's for convenience
- 38% of Gen Zers and 25% of Yers are replacing traditional drinks with non-alcoholic versions

SCOPE

The low- and no-alcohol drinks market is diversifying, with exciting and trend-setting new beverages catering to people's shifting attitudes toward alcohol consumption. As the first brand of cocktail tea bags, [Sayso](#) is steeping a new kind of mixed drink – one that is conveniently instant, made with premium ingredients for easy at-home and on-the-go use, and customizable with alcoholic or spirit-free options. Its creative concoctions are well-aligned with two core drinking behaviors that emerged from the pandemic: a rise in amateur mixology and a trend toward drinking less. “Happy hour turned from 5pm to 12pm for a lot of people,” says Fiona Hepher, CEO of online marketplace for alcohol-free beverages, [Sansorium](#). “Lockdowns were the real drivers to people going, ‘okay, I think I might be drinking more than I thought’.” Coupled with the hyper-focus on wellbeing, people started placing a greater emphasis on sobriety to stay healthier.” [1]

“We were frustrated when we couldn't recreate the delicious drinks we were having out at cocktail bars at home,” [say founders](#) Alison Nathanson and Chloe Bergson. “We started experimenting with all-natural ingredients in a tea bag and thought we could be on to something. And we were right! Now we can have delicious cocktails or mocktails at home in minutes.” The flexibility of Sayso's products has enabled the brand to bridge drinking and alcohol-free crowds – a tea bag creates a shared social experience with everyone able to enjoy the same drink, whether it is zero-proof or not. It's a development that could help ease stigma and sober-curious social exclusion, particularly at a time when 38% of Gen Zers and 25% of Yers are replacing traditional drinks with non-alcoholic versions. [2] Tea bags also create the same on-the-go

flexibility that younger people already love in canned cocktails – bring booze (alcoholic or not) and a tea bag, and people can have a premium drinking experience whenever and wherever they want.

With 67% of Americans worried about rising food and energy prices, Sayso's mission to 'democratize cocktails' by making them affordable and easy to prepare works well for drinkers who want a premium product that doesn't break the bank. [3] The brand's blends of mixers are steeped in three minutes and ready to serve, meaning there's also no need for consumers to turn towards other costly, niche liqueurs they may never drink again to make a cocktail at home. Following Sayso's lead, how can brands appeal to epicurean drinkers looking for high-quality convenience who want more flavourful, spirit-free, and ready-made options at their fingertips?



Sayso's tea bag cocktails provide a hyper-convenient alternative to traditional concoctions

Sayso | Facebook (2022)

CONTEXT

THE RISE OF AMATEUR MIXOLOGISTS

Excessive drinking increased by 21% during US lockdowns, particularly at the pandemic's peak – in May 2021, 29% of Americans said they had been drinking more in the previous six months, yet by March 2022, only 9% of people said the same, according to Canvas8 research. [4][5] At the same time, [at-home cocktail-making boomed](#), which will likely be a lasting post-pandemic legacy even as people drink less. Those who got into amateur mixology have higher standards for homemade highballs, especially as they start to entertain guests again post-lockdown, which 46% of Americans said they were very excited to do as pandemic restrictions eased. [6] But with the cost of living crisis and the price of at-home spirits rising 5.5% in 2022, they may not want to invest in the types of mixers needed for hyper-specific cocktails, whether alcoholic or not. [7] That's where Sayso comes in, offering a cheaper cocktail mix alternative to buying a premium bottle of alcohol that may sit in consumers' cabinets for months. Large and well-established brands are doing the same, like [Bacardi's cocktail pods](#).

SOCIAL AND STIGMA-FREE SOBRIETY

In response to growing health concerns following the pandemic, many people are drinking less. Even those who haven't written off alcohol are engaging in sober-curious behavior – in 2021, 64% of people globally said they wanted to further explore low- or no-alcohol drinks, and 22% of Americans said they were cutting back on their alcohol consumption. [8][9] Beyond health concerns, drinking just doesn't have the same appeal that it used to, with over two-thirds of American Gen Yers and Zers finding heavy drinking culture to be 'boring'. [10] As a result, more people are looking for ways to reduce their alcohol intake without facing the stigma of drinking non-alcoholic drinks – often seen as a 'lesser than' option – or missing out on social rituals. With tea bags that can be added to water, booze, or spirit-free alternatives, Sayso makes it easy for the sober-curious to participate. Beer giants like [Heineken](#) are also taking a greater interest in non-alcoholic offerings, especially through its [Now You Can](#) campaign which celebrates the inclusion of alcohol-free alternatives.

EPICUREAN CONVENIENCE

The hard seltzer market has tanked in 2021, leaving a gap in the market for novel alternatives that are customizable and available on the go. [11] As the fastest-growing spirits category in 2021, ready-to-drink cocktails are filling the gap. [12] Demand has remained steady as Americans continue to seek big flavors and the convenience of a drink that can be consumed anywhere – 94% of drinkers choose canned cocktails because of taste, while 92% say it's for convenience. [13] [Tea-based cocktails](#) have also been experiencing a surge in popularity since early 2022 as part of a Cantonese-inspired trend in New York, elevating cocktail tea bags like Sayso's to the equivalent of premium mixers that don't compromise on convenience. With flavors like Skinny Spicy Margarita, Cardamom Paloma, and a Honey Moscow Mule – all of which come with spirit mixing suggestions printed on the package – they're catering to adventurous palettes in a way that hard seltzers haven't been able to.



The brand's products are facilitating social drinking behaviors that don't rely on alcohol

Sayso | Facebook (2022)

INSIGHTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

CREATE CURIOUS ALTERNATIVES

Hard seltzers have reached a point of market saturation where they're no longer new and fun, which signals an opportunity for brands to create alternative cocktails to capture this market – alcoholic or not. Sayso is smartly stepping into this space by infusing the essence of canned convenience with greater creativity and high-quality taste, appealing to the more than one-third of Americans who are making fewer cocktails from scratch since they started consuming ready-to-drink beverages. [2] Alongside Sayso, brands like [Loverboy](#) or [Boochcraft](#) are bringing hard teas and kombucha cocktail alternatives to market, while high-quality dealcoholized drinks like the [St. Agrestis](#) Negroni or [Five Drinks Co.'s craft cocktails](#) are appealing to even part-time sober-curious drinkers. The taste will drive popularity, especially for the alcohol-free category. "It's like re-palletizing people, getting people to step outside what they're used to," says Hepher. "All of that is based on quality. If it tastes like crap, they're not going to go for it." [1]

INVEST IN SOBER SOCIALIZING

Brands have a growing opportunity to offer spirit-free selections while creating ways to engage in social drinking behaviors that don't rely on alcohol, bringing people together and offering a new sense of community post-pandemic. Whether people go full-on sober, are sober for a moment, or are part-time sober, new attitudes towards alcohol consumption are allowing people to engage in alcohol-free socializing on their terms. At-home options like Sayso or those available on [Sansorium's](#) well-curated zero-proof market are being met with new solutions to sober bar culture. [Binge](#) – a completely alcohol-free bar – is set to open in Washington DC in Q4 2022, while [Lyre's Impossible Bar](#), which features non-alcoholic spirits with custom recipes available, is helping sober selectors continue cocktail rituals. "I'm seeing this movement as a trend now for two, three years running," says Hepher. [1]

PRIORITIZE AFFORDABILITY AND ACCESS

Alcohol spending has been dropping most prominently among Gen Yers and high-income earners, partially due to the inflation crisis and increasing cost of living, and partially because they're not going out as much. [14] Yet, people are still looking to entertain without shelling out for expensive liquor, meaning brands can bring alternative mixers and liqueurs into drinkers' home bars in an affordable and accessible way, allowing people to have fun on a budget. More importantly, conscious consumers want fun-filled drinking experiences that are purse friendly without compromising on taste. Most alternative mixers tend to come in liquid forms, like [Cheeky Cocktails](#) and [Cocktail Crate](#), but Sayso's tea bags prove that they don't have to. Creative offerings may also have greater viral appeal, akin to the [Cocktail Bomb Shop's](#) TikTok-popular fizzing cocktail mixes – like a bath bomb for your drink.

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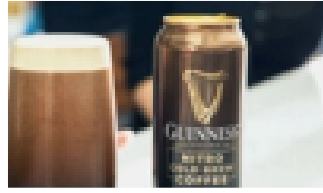
JuneShine is set to open New York's first hard kombucha taproom in the winter of 2022, offering



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SOURCES

1. Interview with Fiona Hepher conducted by the author
2. Bar and Restaurant (June 2022)
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4. Massachusetts General Hospital (December 2021)
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6. PR Newswire (May 2021)
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14. Morning Consult (May 2022)

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