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## Big Geyser Rolls



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# DISTRIBUTION

## BIG GEYSER INCUBATES NEW CROP OF ASPIRING STARS, ACQUISITION TARGETS TRADE SHOW HIGHLIGHTS POPPI, SPARKLING ICE, LEMON PERFECT, AND MORE

New York direct store distributor Big Geyser is known for helping turn aspiring non-alcoholic brands into stars by incubating them up and down the street in one of the most competitive beverage markets in the world. Brands handled by Big Geyser often graduate to the national distribution systems of Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, or Keurig Dr Pepper. Notable examples include Vitaminwater and Smartwater, BodyArmor, and Monster Energy. Even more impressive recently is Big Geyser's ability to hold onto hot brands even after they sign national distribution deals. Recent examples are Celsius, which partnered with PepsiCo; and C4 and Electrolit, which both partnered with Keurig Dr Pepper. In addition, Big Geyser held onto Super Coffee distribution after it signed on with DSD partner Anheuser-Busch InBev. In other words, Big Geyser tends to pick winners. One might even say they make winners because of the company's aggressive DSD execution in its home market. "We are demanding of our supplier partners," Big Geyser President and COO Jerry Reda told BD. "However, we want them to be even more demanding of us, like winning team members pushing each other." The distributor's stable of brands includes Nestle-owned Essentia and Talking Rain-owned Sparkling Ice, both of which have been with Big Geyser for years. These days, the distributor is working on a newer crop of aspiring stars such as Poppi, Lemon Perfect, Spindrift, Swoon, Recess, and Culture Pop. Big Geyser also has taken on Seth Goldman's Just Ice Tea. Goldman launched the brand in 2022 after Coca-Cola discontinued Honest Tea, which Seth had earlier sold to the soft drink company. Big Geyser helped incubate Honest Tea and had been the brand's largest distributor. On the other end of the spectrum, Big Geyser distributes protein shake Muscle Milk for PepsiCo. "Each month we receive several potential new brands," Reda said of entrepreneurs seeking to work with Big Geyser. "We have an intense vetting process and sometimes we bet the jockey more than the horse. Brand leadership is of paramount importance. When brands are paralyzed, subservient to their boards, or distracted raising money, that is a red flag."

**REACH.** Founded in 1986 by Irving "Big H" Hershkowitz as Crystal Geyser East, the company started out distributing Crystal Geyser Water. The name was later changed to Big Geyser after the company picked up other brands. Today Big Geyser is run by CEO Lewis Hershkowitz, Irving's son, and COO Reda. Big Geyser services more than 22,000 retail accounts, ranging from bodegas to Walmarts. The service area covers the five boroughs of

New York City (Manhattan, the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens, and Staten Island), as well as the New York counties of Westchester, Nassau, and Suffolk.

**BD TAKE.** A recent market tour with Big Geyser sales representatives brought home the unique nature of the New York market, especially up and down the street in Manhattan. Reps have to protect their shelf space from interlopers, create space for incremental displays in cramped stores, and try to convince store owners not to price product far above suggested retail prices, which can undermine brand building. Most importantly, the sales reps establish deep relationships and collaboration with store owners by being constantly present.

**BRANDS SHOW OFF.** BD recently attended a trade show hosted by Big Geyser in Manhattan for its retail customers. It's a chance for brands to show off their latest product, packaging, formula, and brand marketing innovation. A second show for retailers will be held this month in Long Island. Other shows are geared to food service customers. The following are brand updates from the recent Manhattan show.

**DARIGOLD SIGNS ON.** Late last month, Big Geyser took on distribution of Darigold single-serve flavored and white milk, a Nestle Nesquik competitor. Seattle-based Darigold, owned by one of the country's largest dairy producers, is looking to expand the shelf-stable offering nationally from the West Coast. The New York entry is Darigold's first foray into the East Coast market, according to the company. Big Geyser previously distributed Nesquik before the brand was taken in-house by Nestle.



**POPPI GOES BIG FOR C-STORES.** Poppi, the gut health soda that recently parlayed its successful social media presence into a Super Bowl ad, has now introduced 16-oz can at some 7-Eleven, Speedway, and Stripes convenience stores. CEO Chris Hall, formerly the CEO of Talking Rain, said the package was designed for c-stores to create the kind of presence that a 12-oz can can't deliver in the channel (which is highly competitive and profitable). Hall said men are also more attracted to a 16-oz offering. Flavors for the size are a new Wild Berry, as well as existing Strawberry Lemon and Orange. The package will be merchandised

behind the soda door, Hall said, in keeping with the probiotic brand’s messaging as “the future of soda.” The drink will retail for \$2.99, which Hall pointed out is close to the \$2.79 pricing on a 16.9-oz can of Coca-Cola in some c-stores. Hall expects to reach 20% ACV nationally in the first 30 to 60 days after launch.

### **SPARKLING ICE DEBUTS NEW LABEL DESIGN.**

Talking Rain’s Sparkling Ice will soon launch new packaging that places the product name above the familiar image of an ice cube filled with fruit. Executives told BD that the change will make the brand more visible on shelf. The design is bolder, cleaner, and modernized, they said. The change comes as PepsiCo’s Bubly sparkling water brand enters the sweetened and flavored sparkling water space with Bubly Burst.



**LEMON PERFECT CANS.** Lemon Perfect is now selling canned versions of its organic lemon water at three airports in the US. The package was a solution for facilities that aren’t allowed to use PET packaging, Founder Yanni Hufnagel told us. The company also has been rolling out a new “version two” formula for its Original Lemon flavor. The product is showing up on shelves as the previous formula sells through. The drink is still sweetened with stevia. Hufnagel said he expects Lemon Perfect to reach \$100 million in sales this year, up from \$50 million last year.



**SUPER COFFEE ADDS 11-OZ ESPRESSOS.** Super Coffee showed off a line of Espresso coffees in 11-oz cans that the company debuted at the recent Expo West show. Flavors will be Triple Shot Black, Double Shot Espresso & Cream Vanilla, and Double Shot Espresso & Cream, all with 5g of protein. A can of Triple Shot black contains 10 calories and 180mg of caffeine. Double shot versions, sweetened with sucralose and sugar, contain 150 calories per can. Besides Being Geyser, Super Coffee is distributed by Polar Beverages in New England and nationally by way of the Anheuser-Busch network. Super Coffee Co-founder Jim DeCicco said the

company continues to focus on profitability over sheer growth under CEO and President Tyler Rocks, who took over in late 2022 as DeCicco moved to the role of executive chairman and chief brand officer.

**SWOON UPDATES LABEL.** Swoon, the maker of zero sugar lemonades and teas without artificial ingredients, has revamped its packaging to more prominently display the brand name and flavor, Co-founder Jen Ross told us. The company's line of five-calorie lemonades now will be sweetened with Reb-M stevia and monk fruit, instead of just monk fruit. Swoon also makes teas.