

HOW TO WIN COCKTAIL COMPETITIONS

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Some of the World's Biggest Competitions:

- Diageo World Class
- Bombay Sapphire Most Imaginative
- Appleton Remixology
- Beeteater MIXLDN

Who Benefits from Competitions and How?

FOR THE BRAND

Brands can pay millions of dollars for cocktail competitions. What's in it for them?

- They get bartenders to work with - and get creative with- their brand
- Increased sales & exposure
- Great PR for the brand
- Ongoing Endorsement from Participants

FOR BARTENDERS

Sure, the winnings are awesome - but there are lots of other great reasons to compete.

- Great exposure to future potential employers
- Inspiration to learn & do new, interesting things
- Practice for real life - competitions teach you skills like operating under pressure & quick turnaround
- Make new friends & contacts - with fellow participants, judges, etc.
- Winnings come with recognition, publicity, and maybe even travel & prize money

- They are a lot of fun!

FOR JUDGES

Why judge a cocktail competition?

- If you're the judge, you get to travel (if finals are held abroad, etc.) but can't lose!
- Judges also get huge exposure to media, brands, etc.
- You (judge) learn a lot too!
- Network w/ professionals outside the industry (May even meet celebrities, etc.)
- Create & foster great brand relationships

FOR VENUES

Got an opportunity to host a competition at your bar or venue? Here's why it might be a great idea!

- The cocktail competition's advertising mentions you - free promotion!
- Brand Support - the brand will support the competitions
- Hosting competitions is a great way to grow relationships & network within the industry
- It adds prestige to your brand & makes you a desirable place to work, inspiring loyalty in your team
- Inspires creativity in your own team.

Cocktail Competitions are good for the Industry!

"There are few industries where people can win prizes, trips & acclaim just for being good at their jobs... I wasn't there to compete, but to honor the craft." – John Lermayer

How to Win Cocktail Competitions in Four Parts:

Part 1: Get Involved

1. Choose the right competition for you. Compete for brand you are (or could be) excited about.
2. Read the rules! Know...
 - a. Permitted ingredients
 - b. Drink composition
 - c. Number of ingredients
3. Read the Judging Criteria. What's important to the judges? Focus on that. Example:
 - a. If they care about time but NOT bartending skill, then be quick!
 - b. If they care about skill but NOT time, then be careful & focused

4. Know the brand (and category) & pay it respect
 - a. The brand is paying a lot of money for the competition.
 - b. Make sure your drinks feature the brand well, and that your presentation to the judges does the same.

5. Understand what the competition is about
 - a. What are other competitors doing? Keep an eye on social media & see if you can find out what your competitors are working on.
 - b. "You know what standard you're up against."

6. Less is more
 - a. In general, keep ingredients simple, limit them to what makes sense in the drink.
 - b. Brands want simpler, more easily replicable drinks so they can promote with them

7. Have a concept or story
 - a. Take inspiration from your life story, the venue, brand history, etc.
 - b. Should be thought provoking

8. Don't reuse a recipe from previous competition.
 - a. For example:
If you design a cocktail for Absolut, then reuse it in a competition for Skyy, the judges will know. This is poor form & tells the judges that you think the brands are not unique, special.

9. Pay homage to who is paying!
 - a. Use & feature the spirit that's paying
 - b. If you have to use other brands, try to keep it in the same portfolio

10. Make it personal
 - a. The drink should resonate w/ your style - be yourself. Don't just do whatever's "hip"

11. Think about seasonality
 - a. Big competitions may have the regional competitions & finals in different times of the year. Make sure your drink works in the finals as well.
 - b. If you create a hot coffee cocktail but the finals are in the summer, it'll be tough to win.

12. Don't submit a drink you can't actually make. Make it first!

13. Don't leave entering to the last minute. It's your job to get your entry in on time - nobody's going to help you if Facebook crashes, your internet goes down, etc.

Part 2: Pre-Game Training

Your entry into the competition was accepted - what's next?

1. Build your confidence & Self-Assess.
 - a. Rework if needed until you feel your cocktail can't lose.
 - b. If you aren't confident, the judges will see that!
2. Make a checklist. Don't wait until the competition to think through what you need to bring & do.
 - a. What tools will you need?
 - b. What are the ingredients in your drink and in what order?
3. Save the Celebration
 - a. If you win at this stage, remember that you represent something - your city, your bar, etc.
 - b. Everyone else around you lost. Respect that.
 - c. This is just the Semifinal, it is not a victory yet.
4. Prepare, Practice & Respect
 - a. Practice multiple times. Make it muscle Memory.
 - b. This is a performance art.
 - c. Honor the craft & behave yourself.
5. Know thy Judges
 - a. Who are the judges and what do they care about?
 - b. Have they written a book? Read it!
6. Find the Scoresheets
 - a. This is where you find out exactly what matters & how much.
 - b. Know how you get points and how you lose them.
 - c. "The best bartender doesn't win, the bartender with the most points wins" – Meehan
7. Clean & Cut your Fingernails
 - a. Not kidding!
 - b. Personal hygiene & personal presentation are really important.
 - c. Shows respect.
8. Get some sleep.
 - a. You need your best brain - try to get a decent night's sleep before the competition.

Part 3: The Competition

Today's the day!

1. Get there early
 - a. Get familiar with the bar
 - b. Gives you time for mental clarity/ no rush
2. Bring your own stuff
 - a. Don't assume anything (ingredients, tools, glassware)
3. Setup for Success
 - a. Line up ingredients in order (prevents forgetting)
 - b. If your competition lets you pre-measure – do it!
4. Introduce yourself
 - a. When you get onstage, tell your story – where you're from, who you are, why you're there
5. Physical exercises
 - a. Breathe
 - b. Bend your knees
 - c. Drink water
 - d. Do some Power poses (Watch This: http://www.ted.com/speakers/amy_cuddy)
6. Dress to impress
 - a. Look professional
 - b. Look like you respect the brand & the competition
7. Do. Not. Do. Shots.
 - a. Alcohol can help lower nervousness BUT also reduces concentration
 - b. Don't be that guy. Behave yourself & watch your drinking.
8. Represent
 - a. Know, show & respect where you came from. Who do you represent?
9. Talk while you work
 - a. If you practiced enough you can talk while you work
 - b. This engages the judges and audience
 - c. A good way to differentiate yourself from the competition.
10. Listen while you work
 - a. If judges ask you questions – engage with them and answer.
 - b. Again, if you have practiced enough this shouldn't derail you.

11. Now is not the time for improvisation
 - a. Don't improvise just for kicks! Do what you practiced!
 - b. Flip side: if something unexpected happens or changes, be able to think on your feet.

12. Be confident, not cocky
 - a. "If you don't think it's the best cocktail, why would the judges"?

13. It's the little things
 - a. Chill your glass
 - b. Where you touch your straw
 - c. Attention to detail

14. Engage, the crowd, have fun!

15. Attitude - Be likeable!
 - a. If its down to ¼ point, likeability matters.

16. Do your research
 - a. Find out something that's not well known about the brand - Talk w/ people who work there
 - b. Don't trust Wikipedia for this!

17. Don't make excuses.
 - a. Keep the negativity out of it.
 - b. Judges don't want to hear "I've been really busy but.."

18. Slow down, not a speed match.
 - a. BUT be mindful of time limits. If you go over time this can mean disqualification or major points reduction.

19. Don't get thrown off on small stuff.
 - a. Drop something? Roll with it

20. Have fun!

21. Remember The X-factor
 - a. You can prepare, but sometimes there's something truly unexpected that happens
 - b. Be ready. And if you can? BE the X-Factor!

Part 4: You Won!

Now what?

1. Congratulations! Take a deep breath. Celebrate but be gracious in victory & defeat.
2. Be yourself. Don't act or pretend to be someone you're not.
3. Don't complain.
 - a. If you don't win, don't be a sore loser. The right person usually wins.
 - b. If possible, politely ask judges for feedback.
4. Keep in touch!
 - a. You get to meet the best bartenders at these competitions - don't let those relationships go stale.
 - b. Stay in touch w/ everyone - competitors, brand folks, judges.
5. Be grateful/say thank you
 - a. Thanks to staff, support, bar backs...
 - b. Thanks to the one marketing guys in a suit who funded it (often hiding in a corner somewhere.)

Key Points:

- 1. Be Prepared**
- 2. Respect the Brand**
- 3. Represent yourself, your story and the Brand**
- 4. Be flexible**
- 5. Have Fun & enjoy it!**