



Jean-Philippe Aucher SPI Group

World class brand to shine brightly

Having been in the job for only one year Jean-Philippe Aucher, Director of Global Travel Retail at SPI Group, is using the skills he built up during his previous role heading up travel retail at tobacco manufacturer Altadis Group to build SPI Group's core product Stolichnaya vodka.

Aucher sees many similarities between Altadis' French Gauloises cigarette brand and that of the Russian vodka brand with both having a "great brand with great history" and the potential to grow significantly.

Although SPI has a number of wines and spirits brands in its portfolio, Aucher says it is only Stolichnaya that is sold in the travel retail channel: "The key objective is to build or rebuild vodka in the duty-free channel worldwide, notably in Europe. I need to open doors – to gain new listings and partnerships."

In Europe this involves working directly with the key accounts World Duty Free and Heinemann Duty Free while in Asia and Latin America SPI relies on regional distributors for both domestic and duty-free sales. In the US it has a distribution partnership with William Grant.

The plan is to grow the brand around the world, but Aucher says there is a priority on Europe followed by the Middle East and then emerging markets India and China. This is based on the group already having a base of listings in the US and Latin America markets.

Within these markets the priority is on airports but Aucher says other channels are being targeted: "Airports are a showcase but we're trying to spread the distribution and trying to do more in ferries and airports. We currently distribute in cruise ships in the US and we do well in border shops in North America."

Aucher is benefiting from operating in what he describes as a "very dynamic white spirits category" and working with a brand that "has the big advantage of people knowing about it". He adds: "Stolichnaya is not just another smaller supplier."

With this backdrop he says SPI has been developing its range – from Stolichnaya Red to the super-premium Gold and very high-end luxury spirit 'Elite by Stolichnaya'. In addition, at Cannes the company launched a limited edition Red and there are also 12 flavoured vodkas.



The latter have fewer listings as they require more space beyond the core range but they enable Stolichnaya to talk to a different audience, such as addressing women, so they do have benefits in specific outlets and markets.

Premium products also appeal to a specific audience and despite a fall off in demand during the downturn there has been a distinct improvement in 2011, according to Aucher, who says: "The high-end segment suffered in 2008/09 but today it has picked up again. For premium vodka you can sell at Euros 50/60 and we sell Elite in Asia at US\$100."

Although he admits Elite by Stolichnaya is never going to sell in its thousands Aucher says there are still plenty of travelling vodka connoisseurs from China, India, and Russia who "do not hesitate" when spending large

amounts on the brand. "There was an interval due to the tough economic backdrop but premiumisation is back," he suggests. **DM**

PERSONAL FILE

Based Limosol (Cyprus), Paris and various airports

Drives Public transportation preferred

Essential gadget Blackberry
Favourite city New York, Istanbul and Berlin

Favourite airport Bangkok, Barcelona and Istanbul