Sunshine Labs

The Future of Drinks

It may not be another drink.

November 2026



Report at a glance

The next growth opportunity may not need another drink. It may need a familiar drink to do a clearer job, fit a routine people already have or become easier to buy again. Start with what limits that choice, then decide whether the answer is a new product, a better experience or a different route to market.

Start with the habit

Clarify what people already do, what they are choosing between and what might make the new option worth buying again.

Build for access and repeat

Each channel can help at a different point. A creator can show how a drink fits into someone's day. A tasting can give them a reason to try it. A nearby shop can make it easy to buy again. The economics need to work at each step.

Match the route to the constraint

Decide whether the opportunity needs product capability, distribution, a partner, investment, an acquisition or local adaptation.

Contents

Page	Section
03	Introduction
04	What's changing in how people drink
06	Where the industry is making moves
07	How brands turn demand into scale
09	Where the next opportunities could come from
11	What has to change across markets
12	The strategic playbook
14	Let's talk about drinks
15	Method and sources

INTRODUCTION

A day in drinks

The first coffee of the day is often decided before we are fully awake. By the afternoon, after a hot commute, the choice can be whatever is cold and close at hand. At dinner, the drink someone orders may depend on what everyone else is having, whether they are driving or simply what sounds good with the meal.

Look across those moments and the same person can ask different things of a drink. Some choices are almost automatic. Others open up when a familiar option comes with a benefit that makes sense right then, or when a new option lets someone take part in a ritual they already enjoy.

That is how a bottle of water can become a way to carry electrolytes on a hot day, or a beer at dinner can keep its place at the table with the alcohol taken out. The appeal comes partly from what people already know how to do. They can picture where the drink belongs, what they would choose it over and when they might reach for it again.

For brands, those moments are a starting point. The format has to suit the way people drink, the price has to make sense alongside the alternatives, and people have to be able to find the drink again. Sometimes the opportunity is in the recipe. Sometimes it is in the pack, the shelf or the way it reaches the shopper.

This edition looks at those choices across functional and better-for-you beverages, alcohol alternatives and drinkable nutrition. It draws on selected examples from North America, Europe and Asia-Pacific. The fuller commercial cases are US-led. Examples from Asia and Australia illustrate different drinking occasions, formats and retail contexts. Across these examples, we ask what makes a drink worth choosing again, and what it takes for a brand to build a viable business around that choice.



01 / WHAT'S CHANGING IN HOW PEOPLE DRINK

Familiar drinks are taking on new jobs

Coffee, tea, soda and water give brands a starting point people recognise. The additional benefit has to earn its place in the experience.



Japan's green tea exports rose 25% by value in 2024, driven largely by demand for powdered teas such as matcha. [20]

Product • A familiar drink with a clearer job

Hydration can be relevant during sport, travel or a hot workday. The drink still has to feel appropriate to the moment. A sachet someone drops into a bottle can suit a commute or a hotel stay, while a chilled ready-to-drink format can make sense at a convenience store. In both cases the proposition depends on a simple connection between the occasion and the benefit. Liquid I.V. shows how powdered electrolytes can give ordinary water a specific role. [1]

Choice • People can choose what to add and what to leave out

Some drinkers want an added benefit, such as protein or electrolytes. Others want to keep the taste and social cues of a familiar drink while changing what's in it. Heineken 0.0 gives people in Singapore a recognisable beer choice at the table. Both choices start with what people want to keep about a drink they already know. [2]

Experience • The context helps explain the product

A beverage served over ice in a café is judged against the drinks people already enjoy there. Sold as a supplement, the same benefit may prompt questions about regimen, ingredients and evidence. Placement, temperature and pack design shape how people interpret the proposition, how they compare the price and whether they can imagine using it again.

First test
Put the drink in the intended setting. Ask buyers when they would choose it, what they would buy instead, and what would bring them back.

01 / WHAT'S CHANGING IN HOW PEOPLE DRINK

Discovery and repeat happen in different places

The place that introduces someone to a drink may be different from the place they buy it again.



Purchase • Several paths can lead to the same drink

Think of someone stopping at a convenience store before heading up to the office after a late night. A chilled morning-after drink is easy to spot and ready to open. Someone might have first seen it online, but the shop makes it available at the moment it feels relevant. Once a drink becomes part of a routine, a multipack ordered online can serve a different purpose.

Habit • What gives people a reason to come back?

A fibre drink with weekend breakfast and a beauty or sleep-positioned drink at night would fit different rhythms. Someone might finish the first pack over several weekends and the second over a few evenings. A second purchase means more when it arrives around the time the buyer would naturally run out. A promotion might bring that purchase forward without telling us much about the routine.

What a first sale can tell us

Start with three questions. Did people try it? Could they find it when they wanted it again? Did they come back when the pack would normally run out? A launch can look busy because of a promotion. The picture gets clearer when people return at the usual price and the business still makes money after discounts, delivery and retailer fees.

The insight
Discovery earns attention. A drink becomes easier to buy again when it is available where the need comes up.

02 / WHERE THE INDUSTRY IS MAKING MOVES

Where does the next sale come from?

PepsiCo can put poppi in more shops, giving more people a chance to try it. Growth follows if enough of them buy it again. For Celsius, the question is which drink someone would have bought without Alani Nu. If they would have picked a competitor's drink, Celsius gains a sale. If they would have picked another Celsius drink, the sale shifts between brands in the same portfolio. [3, 4]

The portfolio logic

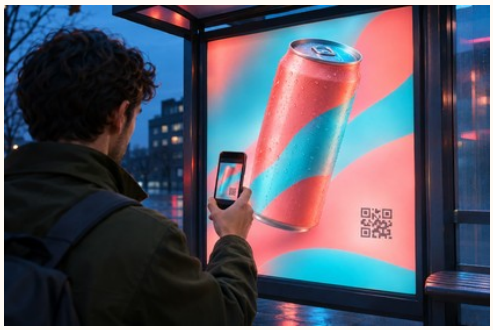
A drinks company can use an acquisition to enter a category or to add a brand that competes for a different shopper in a category it already serves. The value can also come from what the buyer brings. Keurig Dr Pepper's distribution network gives GHOST a way to reach more stores. A challenger with its own plan for expansion can take a different route, as OLIPOP did by raising capital while continuing to operate independently. [3–6]

Selected capital commitments, US dollars [3–6]

Brand	Reported terms	What the buyer or investor gains
poppi	US$1.95bn announced price; US$1.65bn net of anticipated cash tax benefits. Closed May 2025.	A position in prebiotic soda within a larger beverage portfolio.
Alani Nu	US$1.8bn announced price; US$1.65bn net of tax assets. Closed April 2025.	Broader audience reach within functional energy.
GHOST	US$990m for an initial 60% stake, announced October 2024.	A staged entry and a route to wider energy-drink distribution.
OLIPOP	US$50m Series C at a reported US$1.85bn valuation, February 2025.	Exposure to an independent challenger through a funding round.

How to tell if expansion adds sales

For a brand entering more shops, track sales per outlet, repeat purchases and the margin left after promotion and distribution costs. If an acquisition adds a brand to a category the buyer already serves, measure how much of its sales the portfolio would have captured anyway.



Concept illustration · Shoppable bus-stop ad.

03 / HOW BRANDS TURN DEMAND INTO SCALE

Bloom built capacity behind creator-led demand

Bloom Nutrition illustrates how content, retail and fulfilment can work together as a brand moves from digital discovery to wider availability.

1. Make the use case visible

Creator content helped people see when and how Bloom's greens products could fit into their routines. A demonstration turns an abstract pitch into an observable action: portion the powder, mix it and drink it. Bloom later applied paid discovery to energy drinks on TikTok Shop. In one US campaign, TikTok reported 23,100 assisted new customers. That is a campaign attribution measure. For a product that needs some explanation, seeing it used can make the first purchase easier to imagine. [7]

2. Turn a retail stop into a reason to try Bloom

On the way to Coachella in 2026, a stop at 7-Eleven could be part of getting ready for the day. Bloom built a public pop-up around that moment, with samples of its sparkling energy drink, live DJs and road-trip giveaways. The setting made the idea work: people could try Bloom when an energy drink already made sense, in the kind of store they could visit again. The published coverage describes the experience. Whether the pop-up lifted sales or brought people back is still an open question. [16]



Concept illustration · Sampling a drink at a convenience-store pop-up.

3. Be ready when demand arrives

Imagine a creator post takes off on Friday and orders jump over the weekend. The drink has to be in stock, packed and delivered while people are still excited to try it. ShipBob says it supported Bloom's direct orders through four fulfilment centres and had shipped over 1.5 million orders for the brand when it published its case study. That gives us a sense of the work behind the sale. It would take repeat-purchase and cost data to see how much of that activity became lasting growth. [8]

The insight
The promise made in the video carries through to what shoppers find in store and how reliably the brand gets the product to them.

03 / HOW BRANDS TURN DEMAND INTO SCALE

Format can change where a drink belongs

Packaging can make a drink feel at home in a particular setting.

Liquid Death • Water that fits the gig

Liquid Death's tall, beer-style can makes water look at home at a concert. In 2021, Live Nation announced it would make Liquid Death the exclusive water at many of its US venues and festivals. Concertgoers could buy it in a setting where the can already looked familiar. [14]



The beverage growth system

Stage	What it needs
Need	A recognisable job
Proposition	A clear benefit
Experience	Taste, pack and context
Access	A place to buy
Behaviour	A fit with the occasion
Repeat	A reason to return
Scale	Viable reach and margin

What the two cases have in common

Bloom made a product easier to picture in everyday use, then built the retail and fulfilment to meet the demand. Liquid Death used a familiar pack to make water feel at home in a social setting, then secured access to that setting. Use the growth system to find where demand stalls. If the drink fits the occasion but shoppers struggle to find it again, test availability before changing the product.

The insight
Format and distribution are strongest when they serve the same moment. Where the pack feels at home can help determine where the brand should show up.

04 / WHERE THE NEXT OPPORTUNITIES COULD COME FROM

Start with routines people already have

A routine gives a new drink something to fit into. People already know when the moment comes, what they usually spend and what they expect from it.

Everyday routines • Breakfast, commuting and work



Tea already has a place in many people's days. CHAGEE's BO·YA Jasmine Green Milk Tea in Singapore gives that familiar flavour another way into the day, as something someone could pick up at lunch or on the way to meet a friend. CHAGEE reported 7,639 teahouses worldwide as of June 2026. That shows how widely the format is available. The growth opportunity is to turn convenient access into a reason to come back. [17, 18]

Social occasions • Keep the ritual available

A beer alternative can serve the choice to join a toast, enjoy a familiar taste or have a drink with dinner. In a 2025 Japanese survey of people in their twenties, about six in ten respondents drank alcohol less than once a month or never. That offers a signal for exploring the occasion. The finding applies to that surveyed group. The commercial opportunity in another market depends on the occasion, local expectations and availability at the point of choice. [2, 9]

The insight
A familiar taste or ritual gives people a way into a new offer. The format and setting can make it easier to choose in a new part of the day.

04 / WHERE THE NEXT OPPORTUNITIES COULD COME FROM

Life stages and milestones change what feels relevant

A need becomes commercially relevant when a specific group recognises it, has a way to act on it and finds the offer worth repeating.

Beauty from within • An established format in Asia

Singapore brands such as Kinohimitsu and The Purest Co show how collagen is offered in drinkable formats. The products illustrate an existing way of presenting a beauty routine. For a growth team, the next question is how the timing, pack and retail context could change who buys and why. [10, 11]

From maintenance to preparation

A wedding, milestone birthday or reunion could give someone a reason to try a beauty ritual within a defined period. The strategic question is whether this creates a viable occasion-led offer or an entry point to an ongoing routine. A time-bound pack or shared purchase for a bridal party could test that distinction. Measure paid take-up, contribution after the costs of reaching and serving buyers, and whether anyone returns after the event. A one-off purchase can still be worthwhile if the economics work; it should not be mistaken for a daily habit. This is an occasion hypothesis, not evidence of a beauty or health outcome.

What people share on the day

Sydney's Frost & Found reimagines desserts such as iced cendol and falooda in plant-based formats, offers shakes and fizzes, and takes event-catering bookings. At a celebration, the appeal can be a familiar flavour or tradition that guests get to share. [19]



Healthy ageing and menopause • Life stage reshapes the routine

Ageing and menopause can change what someone looks for in a daily routine, but people in the same age group may want very different things. A drink might fit because it is easy to have with breakfast or because the serving size and taste make it welcome every day. The opportunity is to understand the change in the person's life and where a familiar format can fit. Any claim about a health outcome needs its own evidence.

The insight
A milestone can give people a reason to prepare or a reason to share something on the day. A change in life stage can alter what they value day to day.

05 / WHAT HAS TO CHANGE ACROSS MARKETS

Keep the promise clear and adapt how people buy

A beverage can address a recognisable need across markets while requiring different prices, formats or channels to serve that need locally.

What stays consistent and what changes locally

Keep coherent	Test and adapt locally
Core consumer need and promise	Flavour, sweetness and the cues shoppers use to recognise the benefit.
Reason to believe and quality standard	Ingredients, formulation, evidence and claims under local requirements.
Brand character and role in the portfolio	Pack, entry price, channel, placement and how the occasion is presented.

Remedy Drinks • Keep a recognisable proposition

Austrade reports that Remedy's sugar-free kombucha is available in 20 countries, including markets in Southeast Asia. That signals the reach of a recognisable idea: a sparkling kombucha with a clear sugar-free proposition. What a shopper compares it with may vary by market. It could sit alongside soft drinks or be compared with other fermented drinks. That comparison shapes whether its price, placement and flavour make sense. [12]

HK inno.N • The format has to work for retailers too

South Korea's HK inno.N lists a 24-month shelf life and room-temperature storage for its bottled Condition Lady drink. That lets a retailer hold stock at room temperature and chill what it expects to sell that day. Kwangdong's Vita500 illustrates another choice in the same market. Its 100 mL bottle gives shoppers a single-serve vitamin C drink. Small packs can suit quick purchase and consumption, while shelf life shapes how a retailer can stock the product. Requirements may differ by retailer. [13, 15]



Room-temperature stock. Shelf-stable bottles can wait in the stockroom until needed.



Chilled display. Retailers can chill a smaller quantity for customers who want a drink now.

The insight

Keep the promise recognisable, but test how the business delivers it locally. Choose the change most likely to affect purchase or retailer viability, such as pack size, entry price or storage. A successful format elsewhere is a lead to investigate, not proof that the same choice will work in the next market.

06 / THE STRATEGIC PLAYBOOK

Choose the route that solves the constraint

Pinpoint what limits growth today. Match the response to the problem, then decide what evidence would justify the next commitment.

The six routes describe different ways to grow. Build when you can develop what's missing in-house. Partner when another business brings a capability you need. Distribute when the drink is ready for more outlets. Invest when you want a stake in a business with room to grow. Acquire when owning the brand or capability is important to the strategy. Localise when the drink has promise in a new market and the pack, price or way it's sold needs to fit local habits.

Six routes to scale

Route	When it fits	First test
Build	The business has the capability and its brand credibly fits the opportunity.	Run a small paid trial and measure repeat at the target price.
Partner	A gap in product expertise, manufacturing or access is slowing progress.	Pilot with clear responsibilities, service levels and ownership of customer data.
Distribute	Demand is credible in one channel and availability is the constraint.	Measure availability, sell-through per outlet and contribution in a limited rollout.
Invest	The opportunity merits exposure while the business model develops.	Set milestones for repeat, margin and evidence of reaching new customers.
Acquire	An established proposition, audience or capability would take longer to build.	Verify retention and channel economics, then test the integration assumptions.
Localise	A proven promise needs a different format, price, claim or route to market.	Run a one-market pilot that tests the most consequential local change.

Where we'd start

We'd start with the occasion. What does the shopper reach for today, what would make them switch, and what would bring them back?

If shoppers want the drink but struggle to find it, we'd test distribution before changing the recipe. If it's easy to find but people rarely buy it again, we'd look at the proposition, the experience and the price. If we need a capability the business lacks, we'd compare what a partner can offer with what it would take to own it.

Before the pilot, we'd agree what shoppers need to do and what commercial result would justify a bigger commitment.

06 / THE STRATEGIC PLAYBOOK

Five questions before you build the next drink

1. What consumer needs are we solving?

Name the person, occasion and current alternative. Describe the job in terms a buyer would recognise. Test whether they can explain the value in their own words.

2. Where could the proposition become more relevant?

Look for a routine, channel or audience where the same benefit has a better fit. Compare purchase and repeat in the new occasion with the proposition's performance in its current one.

3. Which route best addresses the constraint?

Use the six routes on the preceding page. State what is limiting growth and the evidence that would tell you the chosen route is fixing it.

4. What should stay consistent when we enter a new market?

Keep the core promise and the reasons people trust it clear. Then look at what shoppers and retailers in the new market need. Pack size, entry price, flavour, claims and channel can each change how the drink is understood and how easy it is to stock.

5. Which parts of a familiar ritual do people want to keep?

Watch what people choose with family, colleagues or friends. A beer alternative can keep the ritual of a toast in some settings. The part worth carrying forward is the experience people value in the particular moment.



Use it in your next planning session

The next growth opportunity may be in a drink you already sell.
Choose one occasion, one growth constraint and one test. Set a pass threshold for shopper behaviour and commercial performance before the pilot begins.

Let’s talk about drinks.

If this report sparked a conversation with your team about the future of drinks, we’d love to hear where it led. And if you’re ready to shape where your drinks brand grows next, we can help. **Message us**

Curious where your business could grow next?

You may be deciding where to grow an established portfolio, how to earn repeat purchases for a promising brand, or what needs to change before entering a new market. We can help you identify what’s limiting growth and design a test that informs your next investment.

Step into The Sunshine Studio.

About the author



From a visit to the Great Wall of China to a stopover in Las Vegas, Cher Joven rarely passes up a chance for a retail safari. A detour into a neighbourhood shop often tells her something about a place that its landmarks can’t.

Cher leads The Sunshine Studio and splits her time between Asia and the US. She travels for consumer and trends research, working with researchers, designers, strategists and local teams across cultures and sectors, from technology and travel retail to home interiors, beauty and wellness.

That curiosity drives Sunshine Labs, where The Sunshine Studio explores how shifts in everyday life create openings for brands. In The Future of Drinks, Cher asks how a drink earns a place in someone’s day and what it takes for that habit to catch on in another market.

Build What Comes Next.

© 2026 The Sunshine Studio Pte Ltd

METHOD AND CREDITS

How this report was researched

Scope and cut-off

This qualitative briefing draws on selected examples from North America, Europe and Asia-Pacific. The fuller commercial cases are US-led. Examples from Asia and Australia illustrate different drinking occasions, formats and retail contexts. It covers functional and better-for-you beverages, alcohol alternatives and drinkable nutrition. Research cut-off 15 November 2026.

How to read the evidence

Company announcements describe deal terms and stated intent. Product pages show what a brand offers. Partner case studies and trade coverage describe reported activity. Store counts indicate reach. Repeat purchase, profitability and the impact of an individual activation require their own evidence.

Sources

01 Unilever / Liquid I.V. brand profile
02 Heineken Singapore / Heineken 0.0 product page
03 PepsiCo / poppi acquisition close, May 2025
04 Celsius Holdings / Alani Nu acquisition close, April 2025
05 Reuters / GHOST majority stake announcement, October 2024
06 Fast Company / OLIPOP Series C valuation, February 2025
07 TikTok for Business / Bloom Nutrition US campaign, November 2026
08 ShipBob / Bloom Nutrition fulfilment case study, July 2026 update
09 Nippon.com / Japan drinking survey, September 2025
10 Kinohimitsu Singapore / Collagen Diamond Pro product page
11 The Purest Co / Collagen Glow Berries product page
12 Austrade / Remedy Drinks export case, June 2026 update
13 HK inno.N / Condition Lady product and storage specifications
14 Live Nation Entertainment / Liquid Death venue partnership, May 2021
15 Kwangdong Pharmaceutical / Vita500 brand and serving format
16 Event Marketer / Bloom and 7-Eleven's Coachella pop-up, 2026
17 CHAGEE Singapore / Fresh milk tea menu
18 CHAGEE Holdings / Q2 2026 operational results
19 Frost & Found / Sydney menu and event catering
20 Reuters / Japan's matcha supply and green tea exports, July 2025

Image credits

Cover · Supertree Grove vending machine. AI-generated illustration.
Page 5 · Taiwan convenience-store drinks shelves. Raymond Yeung / Unsplash.
Page 6 · Shoppable bus-stop concept. AI-generated illustration.
Page 7 · In-store sampling concept. AI-generated illustration.
Page 8 · Canned water at a festival. AI-generated illustration.
Page 9 · Sydney lunch break. AI-generated illustration.
Page 11 · Room-temperature stock and chilled display. AI-generated illustrations.
Page 13 · Canned drinks during a gaming hangout. AI-generated illustration.

Use of AI in the research

The Sunshine Studio took a human-led approach to this report, using AI to help gather and organise source material. Cher Joven led the interpretation and strategic analysis.