



CASE STUDY

Absolut Vodka

Reaching urban millennials
with a physical message



For its Limited Edition Vodka bottle, Absolut knew who to target, the question was how to reach that hip crowd during the pandemic. Direct mail got their spirits up.

Shaken or stirred, rocky or neat, it's the Vodka of choice

From early James Bond movies to Sex in the City episodes, vodka established its place in pop culture. Premium Swedish brand Absolut Vodka, and its distinctive bottle with iconic blue lettering and more delicate script, is a veteran star of the category. Artistic collaborations with Andy Warhol and other renowned creators, writers and photographers solidified its enduring reputation as a sought-after sip.

Every year during the winter holidays, the brand's owner, Absolut, issues a special edition of this classic libation. Fans keep an eye out for the limited run, so the bottles have a following of collectors and tend to sell out. Traditionally, Absolut Canada supported this special product with a multi-media campaign and made good use of in-store displays and POS elements. The 2020 holiday season, however, put a chill on that.

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Direct mail lets us hit people where they are and, right now, they're all at home. This was the perfect opportunity for us to test and learn with an elevated piece of DM. In the end, sales were phenomenal.”

Anika Sharma

Assistant Brand Manager,
Corby Spirit and Wine.

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COVID-19 requires a new strategy

Pandemic-inspired safety measures meant liquor stores were open, but to create space for physical distancing, they weren't allowing as many in-store displays.

Most brands turned to digital communication and that presented an opportunity for Absolut Vodka. "We thought it was a good time to test and learn," says Anika Sharma, Assistant Brand Manager, Corby Spirit and Wine, the Canadian distributor of Absolut Vodka. With other channels clogged, trying something new, namely a print message, let the company stand out.

For the 2020 special edition bottle, Absolut Canada targeted urban millennials. Research proves that group responds well to direct mail if it's relevant to them. "We're not used to getting mail; it's all digital culture for us," says Sharma. She also knows that campaigns that use physical and digital outreach drive higher recall.

Getting in front of the right people

Canada Post identified specific neighbourhoods with a high percentage of young, downtown professionals. To drive awareness for this new bottle, Absolut Canada would send 250,000 pieces of Neighbourhood Mail™. Each one had to count. "If we're investing in that many pieces," says Sharma, "we want to make sure they're going to the right 250,000 people, not a random collection."

Neither Sharma nor the agency for Corby Spirit and Wine had ever worked with direct mail before, so they enlisted Canada Post Expert Partner, Marketing Kitchen, to help. They made it turnkey for Absolut and took care of everything from print to prep to induction into the mail stream.

Absolut Canada targeted 10 cities in Ontario and British Columbia where the holiday bottles were available.

Working with their agency, Absolut Canada developed an oversize tri-fold, four-colour piece that, due to its size and bright design, was hard to ignore in the mailbox. With special die cut gift tags ("to elevate the gifting proposition," says Sharma), and a soft, protective coating with a super luxurious feel, the piece offered a tactile experience different than anything else in the mailbox.

It also included recipes for inspiration and a QR code where people could find a location close to them that had the bottle. "The material was high-quality and vibrant to push the premium cues," says Sharma.

The direct mail pieces were delivered in December 2020. Total sales for the limited-edition bottle were record setting; 70% higher than the previous year. "I can tell you we haven't done this level of sales in any of the past years," says Sharma. "It was phenomenal."

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