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ALCOHOL-REMOVED WINE: WHY SPARKLING IS THE WINNING FORMAT

A behind-the-scenes look at how Rack & Riddle & Solos are redefining production, speed, and partnership in modern winemaking.

Co-authored by Manveer Sandhu, *Executive Director of Winemaking* and Sarah Qualters, *VP of Marketing at Rack & Riddle*, and Matt Hughes, *General Manager of Solos USA*

The Shift Isn't Less Drinking, It's More Choice

The beverage alcohol landscape is not shrinking, it's evolving. Consumers today are not simply drinking less. They are drinking differently. Daily and across occasions, consumers are making more intentional choices about when and how they consume alcohol. This means sometimes opting for full-strength wine, choosing lower-alcohol options, and increasingly incorporating alcohol-removed alternatives.

SEVERAL STRUCTURAL SHIFTS ARE DRIVING THIS CHANGE:

+18%

CATEGORY GROWTH IS ACCELERATING

The no-alcohol segment is projected to grow at +18% CAGR through 2028, reaching nearly $5 billion, signaling sustained momentum rather than a short-term trend.[1]

58%

TRIAL IS TURNING INTO ADOPTION

Consumer curiosity is translating into action, with 58% of consumers planning to try non-alcoholic beverages, indicating continued growth ahead.[3]

61 Million

THE CONSUMER BASE IS EXPANDING RAPIDLY

Globally, 61 million new consumers have entered the no-alcohol category, with an additional 38 million entering low-alcohol between 2022 and 2024—a significant expansion of the addressable market.[2]

84%

AND DRINKING REMAINS DEEPLY EMBEDDED IN SOCIAL CULTURE

Despite these shifts, 84% of consumers say drinking remains an important part of American culture, reinforcing that occasions are not disappearing, they are evolving.[3]

57%

YOUNGER CONSUMERS ARE LEADING MODERATION TRENDS

Moderation is being driven by younger demographics, with 65% of Gen Z and 57% of Millennials actively trying to drink less, compared to 49% of the total population.[3]

The implication is clear:

THIS IS NOT A REPLACEMENT TREND. IT'S AN EXPANSION OF OCCASIONS.

For wine brands, the opportunity is not to replace existing products, but to extend portfolios to meet consumers across more occasions.

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How New Technology Is Redefining Alcohol-Removed Wine

For years, the challenge with alcohol-removed wine was not the concept. It was the execution. Earlier generations of alcohol-removal technology often resulted in wines that felt incomplete. Removing alcohol impacted more than just ABV. It affected the core sensory experience of the wine:

- Aromatics could be diminished as delicate volatile compounds were lost in the process
- Body and texture were reduced, leading to a lighter palate
- Balance became more difficult to maintain, as alcohol plays a key role in integrating acidity, sweetness, and structure

These limitations shaped early perceptions of the category. But the technology has evolved.

The SOLOS Aroma Recovery System is setting a new standard for alcohol-removed wine. Built on patented technology, the system is designed not only to remove alcohol, but to capture, preserve, and reintroduce the wine's original aroma compounds. This approach helps maintain both the integrity and character of the wine.

> *"Alcohol-Removed technology has existed for quite some time. It's just never delivered what consumers expect. This changes now."*
>
> **–Matt Hughes,** *General Manager at Solos USA*

With the first SOLOS system in the United States starting to produce in March 2026, this next generation of technology is bringing new capabilities to domestic wine production. For the first time, producers will have scalable access to advanced aroma recovery solutions within the U.S. market.

As a result, the conversation is shifting. It is no longer about whether high-quality alcohol-removed wine is possible. It is about how to best deliver that quality across different wine formats. That is where format becomes a strategic decision. And where sparkling wine offers a distinct advantage.

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Why Sparkling Wine Performs Better

While advances in technology have significantly improved the quality of alcohol-removed wines, not all wine formats respond equally to the process.

Sparkling wine stands apart because it is inherently designed with structural and sensory elements that help compensate for the effects of alcohol removal.

1 BUILT-IN STRUCTURAL BACKBONE

Sparkling base wines are intentionally crafted with higher acidity and structure. These elements are essential during traditional production, but they also become critical after alcohol removal.

Because acidity remains intact, it provides the backbone needed to maintain balance, freshness, and length on the palate. Even without alcohol, the wine retains a sense of vibrancy and definition.

2 SENSORY ENHANCEMENT THROUGH EFFERVESCENCE

Carbonation plays a unique role in shaping the drinking experience.

HOW CARBONATION ENHANCES THE DRINKING EXPERIENCE:

- Adds texture and perceived weight
- Lifts and enhances aromatic expression
- Creates movement and energy on the palate

3 NATURAL ALIGNMENT WITH OCCASION AND RITUAL

Sparkling wine is closely tied to celebration, social connection, and shared experiences.

These are the same occasions where consumers are increasingly seeking alcohol-free options. Rather than replacing the ritual, alcohol-removed sparkling wines allow consumers to fully participate in it:

- Pouring and sharing a bottle
- Raising a glass for a toast
- Marking a moment with intention

> ***"Sparkling wine checks all the boxes. This type of wine is perfect for alcohol removal because it maintains its integrity while naturally fitting into the social occasions that consumers don't want to give up."***
>
> **–Sarah Qualters,** *VP of Marketing at Rack & Riddle*

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What Happens During Alcohol-Removal

Even with advanced technology, removing alcohol changes how a wine is experienced.

AT A FUNDAMENTAL LEVEL, ALCOHOL PLAYS SEVERAL ROLES IN WINE:

1

IT CONTRIBUTES WEIGHT AND VISCOSITY

Alcohol adds body and fullness to the palate. When it is removed, wines can feel lighter.

2

IT CARRIES AND AMPLIFIES AROMATICS

Alcohol helps lift aromatic compounds, influencing how aromas are perceived.

3

IT INTEGRATES STRUCTURE

Alcohol acts as a bridge between acidity, sweetness, and texture, helping create balance.

Modern technology, such as the SOLOS Aroma Recovery System, is designed to preserve and reintroduce key components, significantly improving quality. When alcohol is removed, each of these elements must be carefully managed to maintain the overall drinking experience.

"A well-composed wine is like a well-composed piece of music. If one element is out of place, you notice it. With alcohol-removed wine, getting that balance right between acidity, sweetness, and mouthfeel is what makes it feel whole. That balance isn't optional. It's everything."

–**Manveer Sandhu,** *Executive Director of Winemaking, Rack & Riddle*

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What This Means for Wine Brands

The rise of alcohol-removed wine is not a departure from the category. It is an expansion of how consumers engage with it. For wine brands, this shift presents a clear opportunity to evolve portfolios in a way that aligns with changing behaviors while maintaining brand integrity.

EXTENDING PORTFOLIOS WITHOUT REPLACING CORE PRODUCTS

Consumers are not abandoning traditional wine. They are adding new occasions where alcohol may not be consumed. Alcohol-removed sparkling wines allow brands to participate in:

- Weekday and wellness-driven consumption
- Social occasions where moderation is preferred
- Events where inclusivity across drinking preferences matters

This creates incremental opportunities without displacing existing products.

REACHING A BROADER AND YOUNGER CONSUMER BASE

Moderation trends are being driven by younger consumers who are redefining how and when they drink. Introducing alcohol-removed options enables brands to:

- Engage Gen Z and Millennial consumers earlier
- Build long-term brand relationships across life stages
- Stay relevant as consumption habits evolve

This is not just about capturing a trend. It is about future-proofing the consumer base.

STRENGTHENING BRAND PRESENCE ACROSS THE PORTFOLIO

Offering both traditional and alcohol-removed wines allows brands to remain present across a wider range of occasions. Rather than forcing a choice between drinking and not drinking, brands can:

- Stay within the consumer's consideration set at all times
- Reinforce brand loyalty across different consumption moments
- Position themselves as adaptable and consumer-centric

In this way, alcohol-removed sparkling wines function less as a separate category and more as a natural extension of a well-rounded portfolio.

As the category continues to evolve, the brands that succeed will be those that approach alcohol-removed wine not as a compromise, but as an opportunity to expand relevance, reach, and connection with today's consumer.

"Alcohol-removed sparkling wines function less as a separate category and more as a natural extension of a well-rounded portfolio."

–Sarah Qualters, *VP of Marketing at Rack & Riddle*

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How to Enter the Category Successfully

As interest in alcohol-removed wine grows, execution will be the key differentiator. Bringing a high-quality product to market requires cross-functional alignment from the outset.

1. START WITH THE RIGHT BASE WINE

Success begins before alcohol removal. Base wines should be designed with:

- ☐ Higher acidity for structure
- ☐ Clean, expressive aromatics
- ☐ Balance that holds through the process

2. LEVERAGE ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY

The quality of the outcome depends on the technology used. The SOLOS Aroma Recovery System enables producers to capture, preserve, and reintroduce key aroma compounds, maintaining a profile that closely reflects the original wine.

3. PLAN FOR SCALE AND CONSISTENCY

Commercial success requires:

- ☐ Scalable production capabilities
- ☐ Consistent quality across batches
- ☐ Flexibility across formats

4. MOVE WITH SPEED AND CONFIDENCE

The category is evolving quickly. Brands that can launch efficiently and adapt to demand will be best positioned to capture early momentum.

5. CONSIDER YOUR PRICING STRATEGY

If you already have a premium or luxury brand, alcohol-removed wines should be considered an extension of your portfolio and generally be line priced. This is the industry standard thus far and consumers understand and expect that a high quality alcohol-removed product would be in line with their current premium brands. Sparkling is usually priced above still wines, so a modest price increase is also an option.

SPARKLING WINEMAKING EXPERTISE

PATENTED AROMA RECOVERY TECHNOLOGY

SCALABLE PRODUCTION BUILT FOR SPEED AND CONSISTENCY

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Four Questions to Determine If This Is Right for Your Brand

1. ARE YOUR CUSTOMERS ALREADY EXPLORING MODERATION OR ALCOHOL-FREE OPTIONS?
If yes, this is a natural extension of existing behavior—not a new demand to create. And if you're unsure, they probably are exploring these options, just not in your brand yet.

2. DO YOU ALREADY HAVE A SPARKLING WINE PROGRAM, OR ARE YOU CONSIDERING ONE?
If yes, this is a seamless portfolio extension. If not, sparkling offers a strategic entry point into the alcohol-removed category.

3. HOW IMPORTANT IS IT THAT YOUR ALCOHOL-REMOVED WINE DELIVERS A TRUE-TO-WINE EXPERIENCE?
If maintaining structure, balance, and drinkability is critical, then the alcohol-removed technology matters and sparkling wine will best deliver this experience.

4. ARE YOU POSITIONED TO MOVE QUICKLY AND EXECUTE AT SCALE?
As the category grows, speed and production capability will define early success.

As technology advances and consumer adoption accelerates, alcohol-removed wine is becoming a meaningful extension of the category. Sparkling wine offers a clear path forward, combining structure, sensory experience, and occasion alignment in a way that few other formats can. For wine brands, the opportunity is not just to participate, but to do so with the right foundation in place.

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About Rack & Riddle

Rack & Riddle is the #1 custom sparkling wine producer in the U.S. With a legacy of creating sparkling wines for wineries of all sizes, the company pairs traditional methods with modern innovation. Founded in 2007, the company delivers turnkey sparkling wine solutions and custom brands, including Méthode Champenoise, CALSECCO® Charmat style wines, flavors, and no- and low-alcohol wines. Production spans three world-class Sonoma County facilities, reflecting Rack & Riddle's commitment to quality, sustainability, and long-term partnerships.

For more visit RackAndRiddle.com. Follow Rack & Riddle on LinkedIn. For the complete Rack & Riddle Press Kit click here.

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About SOLOS

Solos is a global leader in aroma recovery and dealcoholization for premium No/Low beverages. At the core of its offering is the Aroma Recovery System (ARS), a multi-patented solid-phase extraction technology that captures and restores original aroma profiles, enabling true-to-source results across wine and other beverage categories.

Through a growing international network, Solos provides advanced No/Low production capabilities and contract manufacturing services across key markets, including Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Spain, France, and the U.S., with further expansion underway.

By combining technology, ingredients, and product development expertise, Solos partners with producers across wine, beer, and spirits to deliver high-quality No/Low beverages with precision, consistency, and respect for the original product.

Learn more at www.solos-technology.com. Follow Solos on LinkedIn.

RESOURCES

1. https://www.theiwsr.com/insight/key-statistics-and-trends-for-the-us-no-alcohol-market
2. https://www.theiwsr.com/insight/growth-of-4bn-expected-from-no-alcohol-category-by-2028/
3. https://www.circana.com/post/sober-curious-nation-alcohol-survey