

Bristol inventor creates drink that can transform into any spirit and sees demand surge after Fortnum & Mason deal

A Bristol biochemist who has created a way of turning one bottle of alcohol into bourbon, gin, vodka or rum is hoping to transform the drinks industry with his invention.

Mark Stone, who previously worked in the food and drinks sector, has developed a (seemingly magical) way to process premium spirits into two parts – the concentrated essence and the alcohol.

The result is a bottle of spirit called Hocus – in a nod to alchemy – that comes with a case of capsules that mix together to create different types of branded drink.

The company is working closely with high-end craft and local brands, which are put through the special process to create a concentrated version that can be later mixed up.

How it all works is a closely guarded secret, but Mr Stone says the drinks “taste identical” to the original and the bourbon capsule won an award against some major brands in 2021.

Hocus is already garnering serious interest from retailers, with Fortnum & Mason agreeing a major deal to sell the brand earlier this year.

Mr Stone has come a [long way in just two years](#), when he initially launched 1Spirit (the parent company of Hocus) in

Bristol.

He has grown the business to a team of eight staff and brought designer Chris Malbon, who has worked with the likes of Disney and Nike, on board to transform the brand.

“We are super proud of how the product looks,” he said. “It’s selling really well.”



Hocus was founded by Bristol-based Mark Stone

(Image: Hocus)

He's also being mentored by 81-year-old drinks industry pioneer David Gluckman, who launched Baileys in 1973.

"What a legend he is," said Mr Stone. "He has given me his time, and his advice on marketing has been fantastic.

"He says if you get a gut feeling to go for it, in terms of marketing. He's incredible and it's the only time I have felt a bit starstruck."

Mr Stone isn't just targeting the drinks industry with his invention though; he is also hoping to help airlines cut down on carbon emissions by stocking Hocus on board.

"Rather than planes stocking glass bottles, which can weigh a lot, Hocus would save space while still allowing airlines to offer a wide range of well-known branded drinks," he explained.

"Instead of just three or four choices in first class it would be one Hocus bottle and 150 different brands in capsules."

He recently attended the UK Aviation Show in a bid to demonstrate to airlines there is a different way of stocking spirits – and has since had a number of carriers get in touch.

"The concept went down really well in the innovations area. Weight saving, space and CO2 was a big feature and requirement of the event.

"Any little saving in any area is the goal of the industry at the moment so it was amazing to see all the future technology coming."

But it's not all been plain sailing for Mr Stone; lockdown hit as the rebranded version of the drink launched in 2020, and it took six months for the business to start picking up again.

"It was a real struggle as it killed the show-and-tell

element, which is so important for Hocus," he said.

"But in the interim I managed to speak to a lot of the high-end craft companies who are going to come in as part of the Hocus Golden 10 which we are launching in March 2022 in bars, clubs and restaurants.

"It will be Hocus as the vehicle and 10 award-winning spirits under their branding. It will give smaller brands shelf space. Eventually it will be Hocus with a publicised brand underneath."

Hocus will be working in partnership with other brands – and profiting together too, with both taking a percentage share of every shot sold.



A box of the capsules that are mixed with Hocus to create different types of drinks

The firm is also planning to look for investment, which Mr Stone said he was “reluctant” to do before.

“A lot of people offered me investment in November last year but I couldn’t take it because it was lockdown and I didn’t want to take anybody’s money knowing there was such uncertainty.

“I had to make sure we got through. I would rather have

investment in from professionals who know the risks rather than people who know me. I would feel awful if I even lost someone £10.”

Looking to the next 12 months, Mr Stone is hoping to sell Hocus into high-end restaurants and is planning something within the magic arena, although he can't divulge what.

He admits he's also been approached by a company that does investment on television – something he's declined for the past two years but is now considering.

He's also got ambitions to move to a larger facility and start expanding internationally, specifically to the US.

“Scotch whiskey has a 40% levy in America and it's declining over there because of the price,” he said. “But if our method is used, they could essentially remake back up a scotch whiskey or malt, which would be the same product minus the levy.

“My plan is to go out there and pitch to different companies. I have to start small at the moment and there are lots of things to do. We will get there one day.”

His advice to other would-be entrepreneurs is to step outside their comfort zone.

He added: “Just go and do it and surround yourself by people who will look at the positives rather than the negatives.

“There will be some people who say certain things can't be done and that is not necessarily the case. But also listen to advice, as that has really helped me on my business journey.”

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