

Sovereign Brands CEO Brett Berish Is Building A Self-Made Spirits Empire

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Julian Mitchell, Contributor I cover entrepreneurs and startups disrupting industries. Opinions expressed by Forbes Contributors are their own.



Photo by Neal Edelstein

Sovereign Brands CEO Brett Berish

The spirits industry is valued at an estimated \$645 billion globally, with the United States currently standing as the top domestic market in the world. In 2017, the U.S. spirits market grew by 4% to \$26.2 billion, while exporting a record \$1.6 billion in U.S. spirits worldwide. The total market value is projected to reach a staggering \$48 billion by 2020.

For years, the wine and spirits market has been controlled by a conglomerate of power players such as Diageo, Bacardi Limited and LVMH — each boasting a portfolio of legacy brands prevalent within pop culture. As these companies continue launching brands and acquiring competitors, building an independent imprint strong enough to challenge these giants appears nearly impossible. Yet, for Sovereign Brands CEO Brett Berish, standing alone as the underdog provided a blank canvas to experiment, innovate and break all of the rules.

Founded in 1999, Sovereign Brands is an independent international wine and spirits company. Family owned and operated for nearly two decades, the company is responsible for producing a growing list of leading global spirits brands across categories.

In 2012, Berish launched Luc Belaire, an award-winning line of French sparkling wines. Since being notably touted by longtime ambassadors Rick Ross and DJ Khaled, their signature black bottles have evolved into symbols of self-made success for prominent artists, athletes and entrepreneurs alike. In just five years, the brand's flagship blend Belaire Rosé ranks as the top-selling French sparkling wine sold in the United States.

Tapping into this spirit of independence, Belaire launched their Self-Made Tastes Better campaign to celebrate artists who have challenged convention and paved their own path to success. The campaign is driven by a video series that features Brett sitting down with various artists to discuss the process of building their career from the ground up. In addition to highlighting the journey of Rick Ross and DJ Khaled, Belaire has shared the self-made stories of artists such as Post Malone, Steve Aoki, Nipsey Hussle, Dave East, Diamond Platinumz, A Boogie Wit Da Hoodie, Russ and Rapsody.

With a continued focus on creating more high quality brands across segments, Sovereign Brands is also the force behind Bumbu. Standing as the most awarded rum in the world to date, the company recently launched their first commercial for the new brand starring rap icon Lil Wayne.

Prior to launching Belaire and Bumbu, Brett and his team created Armand de Brignac, an exclusive brand of champagne that became widely known as "Ace of Spades". Sovereign Brands famously sold Ace of Spades to Jay Z in 2014, in addition to selling their D'USSE Cognac brand, which is currently managed by Bacardi Limited with Jay Z remaining part-owner.

Watch Brett Berish share his self-made story, the vision behind Sovereign Brands and the importance of trusting your instincts when building a new business within a competitive market.

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