



Freezie — with a twist

If Ontario's coolest cooler is the hottest thing on the alcohol beverage market, does that mean that BlackFly Beverage Company's newest product — which is even colder — will be hotter?

Brace yourself for Vodka Infused Spiked Ice, an innovative novelty beverage that comes in the guise of a freezie.

Cathy Siskind-Kelly and husband Rob Kelly exploded on to the alcohol beverage market last year with their London-made cranberry, blueberry and vodka drink called BlackFly.

Initially placed by the LCBO in six London stores, the drink — which is made and packaged at the company's London micro-distillery on the corner of Talbot and Dundas streets — is now available at more than 400 LCBO stores provincially.

"We were thrilled and delighted with the explosive growth," said Siskind-Kelly.

The beverage became the subject of a CBC documentary that first aired in January and has been broadcast three more times since then.

"Sales quadrupled after it aired the first time," said Kelly. "I'm blown away by how many people have seen the show. It created lots of nationwide interest."

Plans are in the works at Ontario's only micro-distillery to take the not-too-sweet, all-Canadian, real-juice cooler to other provincial markets and, eventually, south of the border. There is also thought being put into another cooler flavour or two.

But before that happens, BlackFly's frozen novelty beverage will have a chance to advance the brand and tap even further into the "sophisticated palate" demographic.

"Some people think of coolers as appealing to younger consumers," said Siskind-Kelly. "But our product is a premium product, it's targeted at a more sophisticated consumer."

When the original BlackFly cooler was introduced, much care and attention was put into packaging — everything from the resealable, plastic, wide-mouth bottles to the labelling, which needed to appeal to men as well as the more traditional cooler-buying female customer.

"We are very aware of recycling

and environmental issues, not to mention the safety issues surrounding glass," Kelly said.

With the launch of Spiked Ice, which should hit London and Toronto area LCBOs in time for the Canada Day long weekend, the couple is very aware of the perception of an alcohol-based freezie.

"From a business perspective, the last thing we would want to do is create a product that gives us a negative response," said Siskind-Kelly.

Spiked Ice, like BlackFly, is a premium product — meaning it's not cheap. And the package design by London's Hall Associates, which also designed the labels and packaging for BlackFly, is meant to

appeal to an upscale consumer.

Once Spiked Ice is launched and in the market, the couple plans to turn their attention to marketing, which has till now taken a back seat.

"A lot of our success has been driven by word-of-mouth advertising," said Siskind-Kelly. "We just don't have the resources to have a marketing rep in every town that sells the product."

This means a lot of road trips for the tiny BlackFly team in the coming months as they tour LCBO stores, cultural events and licensed establishments around the province.

"We're uniquely Canadian," said Kelly. "We're competing with big international companies, but we're cutting edge, progressive and responsible with every detail."

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