

THE TASTING PANEL

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Drinking with the Duke

Jayson Woodbridge, Ethan Wayne and Chris Radomski are Keeping the Spirit of John Wayne Alive

PHOTO: LEIGH CASTELLI

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UPFRONT

Park Street Style

*Progressive,
Proactive,
Professional*

For most beverage businesses, the red tape involved in operating a spirits company is the bane of their existence. But what if everything confusing about the alcoholic beverage business could be handled with one phone call? If everything complicated suddenly became simple? Wine, spirits and beer suppliers that partner with Miami-based Park Street Imports know what that's like.

Beverage barons of Brickell Avenue: Miami-based Park Street Imports President Chris Mehringer (left) and CEO Harry Kohlmann have developed a powerful position providing back-office solutions to alcoholic beverage brands.



Up Front with Park Street Imports

by Kelly Merritt / photos by Vanessa Rogers

“It is great not to worry about label approval, taxes, logistics and registrations in all states on top of having only one back label for all the U.S.,” says Baptiste Cuvelier, Export Manager of Cuvelier Los Andes.

Cuvelier is one of hundreds of brands Park Street counts among its clients. The two founders, CEO Dr. Harry Kohlmann, a 17-year industry veteran and McKinsey & Company alumni, and President Chris Mehringer, a Harvard-trained entrepreneur specializing in operations and logistics for consumer products, lead the business. Park Street provides specialized services to emerging and established alcoholic beverage companies. Its core operating business is back-office solutions, including importing, distribution, logistics, regulatory compliance, order fulfillment, exporting, account management and accounting; in addition, the company provides working capital solutions and strategic advisory services, including strategy development, route-to-market planning, M&A and organizational effectiveness.

All 50 states have different legalities and it's easy for companies to spend all of their time and resources dealing with complicated back-office requirements. That's why so many throw in the towel after opening only one or two states. By contrast, for one of their clients, Park Street opened up all 50 states in two months. Such feats require a corporate culture that takes the “complicated” out of the equation.

“What we really do is free up time for companies to concentrate on what's most important for them, which is spending time with customers, enhancing sales and marketing, or whatever



At trendy PB Steak in Miami Beach, where craft beverages and hot dishes are the norm, Park Street CEO Harry Kohlmann (left) and President Chris Mehringer pause to savor the moment.

their objectives may be,” says Kohlmann.

For Royal Dutch Distillers President Marc de Kuyper, the convenience Park Street Imports has brought to his company stands out. “Park Street takes the whole process of navigating the complicated federal and state regulatory requirements off our hands,” he says. “That has allowed our team to focus on what we should be focusing on: building our brands and growing our business.”

As a result of Park Street’s streamlined approach, clients are able to accelerate their growth, which is evident in the many success stories. Raul Marmol, founder of Eppa Wine Company and former Chief Marketing Officer of Bacardi shares, “Park Street enabled us to scale very quickly as we opened markets across the U.S., which was the key to our growth. They also helped us manage a complicated supply chain from sourcing to bottling to warehousing.” Eppa was sold to Deutsch Family Wine & Spirits in 2013. Marmol adds, “From a data perspective, Park Street provided us an effective reporting system which allowed us to manage the business down to the retail account level. During the sale process, they managed the data room for the due diligence and then assisted Deutsch with the transition.”

Cocktail of Culture: Park Street’s Recipe for Success

Walking into the Park Street offices in vibrant Miami, Florida, is like walking onto a busy trading floor.

“We configured the large open space of our office to enable team members to hear one another’s conversations, and it is great for information transfer and innovation,” says Mehringer. “We continuously work to enhance our service, everything from reducing account manager response times to developing automated business management tools for clients.”

The office exudes an undeniable positive energy that is no accident. Kohlmann and Mehringer look for people who want to specialize in the client services business. “When you grow you have to find the right people, so we are careful about our recruiting process and finding the right culture fit for Park Street,” says Mehringer. “We try to replicate a very professional experience for our team.”

Kohlmann and Mehringer’s offices are right next to operations so staff members don’t have to make an appointment to discuss a client’s needs. Accounting and compliance, operations and IT and business development all work together. Park Street does a lot over the phone and Kohlmann and Mehringer have clients they have never met in person due to the efficient cloud solution they employ. But clients love to visit this dynamic duo in Miami.

“Our executive management team is very accessible” says Mehringer. “And team members at all levels of the organization take ownership of issues.” The two entrepreneurs have invested heavily in the process-driven operations model they’ve pioneered in the industry.

A Full-Service Solution

“From a macro level we strive to be our clients’ first phone call whenever they have a problem but also whenever they see an opportunity and that can include opportunities to help finance growth,” says Kohlmann. “You have someone who is an entrepreneur and they’re alone—but when they partner with us, they suddenly have a team of 50 people whose only purpose is helping them win in the marketplace.”

Providing working capital for faster growing companies



Some of the many spirits and wine brands for which Park Street Imports has provided logistics and other services.

means those clients don’t have to go back to the equity markets.

“This is a full-service solution that makes funds available faster and enables clients to accelerate their growth,” he says. “Regarding this and all of our services, we have clients who are in all 50 states—because back-office solutions are not our clients’ specialty, the way they are ours, the cost is higher and efficiency is lower when clients run the back-office themselves.”

Existing clients remain Park Street’s biggest referral source. In deciding to work with Park Street, control over all of the aspects of his brand was one of the clinchers for Cuvelier.

“The attractive part for me was to be in control of inventory and payments, as I learned during the 2008 financial crisis when traditional importers stopped ordering and stopped paying abroad; that’s when I determined that I needed to be in control to make sure that there was always stock in the U.S.,” he says.

“Park Street also has lower costs than traditional importers; they take a small per-case fee instead of large margin, which enables me to access the market with better pricing to my customers.”

Having his wines in the U.S. allowed Cuvelier to open markets that he would never have opened if he were selling from Argentina.

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