



# Insight & Strategy: Feliz St Patrick's Day /

KAHLÚA

How a coffee liqueur brand used humour and a beer-heavy occasion to drive consideration for its product

27 MAR 2024

► [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JxF1c7u\\_rmM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JxF1c7u_rmM)

In the lead up to St Patrick's Day (17 March 2024) Pernod Ricard-owned coffee liqueur brand **Kahlúa** launched a campaign to get people to consider an espresso martini at a time when many opt for a traditional stout.

Created by **Wieden+Kennedy London**, the **Feliz St Patrick's Day** campaign kicked off with a print ad featuring an espresso martini on a black background, reminiscent of advertising for Irish stout brand Guinness. The ad copy read 'Black, creamy... Espresso martini' and featured the 'Feliz St Patrick's Day' tagline.

In the lead up to the St Patrick's Day weekend, the brand promoted the campaign with a digital out-of-home van and posters placed strategically outside Irish bars in cities in the UK and Ireland. At London venue Dirty Martini, Kahlúa gave away mini pint glasses with orders of two-for-one espresso martinis from Thursday to Sunday (14-17 March).

Supporting the stunt, the brand released a 30-second film directed by Michael Lennox (*Derry Girls*), starring Irish TikTok father-son duo, Tadhg and Derry Fleming, and Ian Ryan, stout aficionado and founder of social media account Beautiful Pints. The film lives on Kahlúa's Instagram and YouTube channels and was supported by social content by Tadhg and Derry Fleming, Ian Ryan and former Irish Rugby player Rory Best.

Feliz St Patrick's Day is part of Kahlúa's new brand platform Stir Up, which debuted in November 2023 and aims to 'capture the dramatic nature of Kahlúa, giving the brand a playful role in people's lives', according to a press release.

The platform launched with a campaign starring Salma Hayek, called 'Friday called, it's bored of wine'. In a series of telenovela-style ads, Hayek (who is from Veracruz, Mexico – the birthplace of Kahlúa) framed the drink as a playful treat that isn't just for special occasions.



**Results /** According to the brand, the campaign bagged **5.5 million** views in one weekend. It achieved **310 million** in Earned Media Reach, as well as **+1050%** more engaging than competitors, and there was a **+864%** increase in Kahlúa's web traffic on St. Paddy's Day.

In terms of drinks, **3** Espresso Martinis sold every second during our launch week, and **2.2 million** Espresso Martinis were sold during St Paddy's Weekend – a **300%** sales uplift from the previous year.

To find out more about the insight and strategy behind the St Patrick's Day campaign, Contagious quizzed Wieden+Kennedy brand strategy director Brian Ritter, and head of comms planning Anjali Patel. They said:

- Kahlúa is aiming to expand consumption occasions and become synonymous with espresso martinis
- The brand is targeting younger drinkers who are branching out from beer and yet want to identify with a signature drink
- St Patrick's Day is a crowded space and Kahlúa's competitors have larger budgets, so the brand needed to create a campaign that punched above its weight



**Give us some background on Kahlúa and where it sits in the market.**

**Brian Ritter:** Kahlúa is a coffee liqueur – its biggest competitor in the category is probably Bailey's, which is quite different and a much bigger brand than Kahlúa. [Kahlúa's] biggest challenge is probably the fact that you might think of [the product] on a Saturday night when you're out buying an espresso martini, but you're probably not thinking about it on a Tuesday at home. The other part is the fact that they can't compete with those bigger brands in terms of media budget and share of voice and things like that – the work has to work a bit harder.

**So the biggest challenge for the brand is around perception?**

**Ritter:** Yeah, because it's a coffee liqueur, everyone thinks that it's full of caffeine, which isn't totally true. But at the same time, when your main drink is espresso martini, you have to either overcome or lean into the idea of being a bit too much. The other thing is, when you go to a bar and you order an espresso martini, it's whatever the bartender decides to make it with, which is oftentimes Kahlúa because it's big in that space, but that doesn't necessarily help drive up awareness among everyday consumers at the bar. It's not like ordering an Aperol spritz where the brand is actually in the name of the cocktail.

**Who is the brand targeting and has that audience grown or changed in recent years?**

**Ritter:** Espresso martini has been around since the 1980s. But it's really taken off in the UK especially. It's now starting to catch on a bit more in the US. But, like most alcohol brands, they're targeting those in their early 20s, when you establish your tastes and your drinking preferences. If they can get to you at that time and get you excited about their brand, you'll stay with them for a long period of time.

**Anjali Patel:** Also, it's when people are starting to switch into cocktails, because it's not like you're drinking Kahlúa on its own. So it's when you are getting to an age where you might be ordering cocktails more.

**Ritter:** Yeah, you go from university days where you're probably having pints and things like that, then all of a sudden you have some disposable income and you can order a cocktail.

**Patel:** Yeah, and maybe you want something that's not a gin and tonic, or vodka soda.



**Tell us about the genesis of the 'Bored of...' platform.**

**Ritter:** Credit goes to Freddie and Phil, who are our creative directors, and then our planner, Mel Eckersley. It stemmed from that same problem of talking to consumers and seeing that they were saying, Oh, it's a coffee liqueur, so you think coffee, you think caffeine, you think mudslides and espresso martinis. The challenge from our clients was to get people to not see [Kahlúa] as just a thing for Saturday night, but for other drinking occasions.

The first instinct we had was, how do we change that perception around being 'too much' – but the more we talked it out, we were like, actually, we probably shouldn't run away from the fact that it is a bit too much. It is coffee[-flavoured]. It is exciting. It is that over-the-topness and that's actually a good thing for us to lean into. Alfred Hitchcock said, 'drama is life with all the dull bits cut out'. That's really nice – let's play with this idea of drama and bringing a bit of excitement to a Tuesday. Why can't Tuesday be as exciting and energised as a big Saturday night out? So we started playing with this language: 'Friday called, it's bored of wine.' Because everyone falls into that [habit] of reaching for the same thing over and over again, and maybe once in a while, it's worth switching it up.



**The recent St Patrick's Day work is part of the same 'Bored of...' platform as the Salma Hayek campaign from last year – did you have a separate brief?**

**Ritter:** No, we just have really good clients who always bring us new stuff and it'd be silly for us not to have an eye out for moments when we can try to get Kahlúa and espresso martinis more tied together. It's quite silly when we talk about how this campaign came about.

**Patel:** Yeah, because there was no brief.

**Ritter:** Basically, someone came to us with a pint glass full of what we thought was beer. And we were like, okay, and they were like, no, look at it, it's an espresso martini. And we were like, oh, it is funny, what do we do with it? St Patrick's Day was coming up, it's a holiday dominated by stout brands, and we thought it could be really funny to try to get Kahlúa and espresso martinis into a really big drinking occasion across the world, in a fun way, not taken too seriously.

**Patel:** That's it, it's quite a simple proposition – they just look the same. That's the insight. How do you take that and play with it in a way that would get other people excited about it? We're really lucky that we've got such an eager and open client team that is willing to dive in with us.

**Ritter:** And we did dig into it and find that a lot of stout drinkers were talking about how they wish they had other [options], or maybe not even liking the taste of [stout] in the first place.



**And presumably you were seeing coffee liqueur trends like baby Guinness [a shot made with coffee liqueur and Irish cream].**

**Ritter:** Exactly – we saw people experimenting with lots of different espresso- or coffee-based things, whether that's baby Guinness or martinis or other stuff. So we knew that people were liking it. And to your point, baby Guinness had brought it closer to the bar and pub culture space.

**How does this campaign build upon the previous campaign?**

**Ritter:** It's definitely about trying to find moments in culture where we can insert Kahlúa, where you probably wouldn't expect it to. It felt like a natural opportunity – before it was 'Friday called, it's bored of wine', this time it was about St Patrick's Day defaulting to pints. It was another space in which to disrupt that status quo and the default patterns we fall into. I love a stout, but there are other things out there – just have a bit of fun of, you don't always have to have the same thing.

**Patel:** Even when it's the tradition, maybe you have what you actually enjoy, which might be an espresso martini. You don't necessarily have to adhere to what the norm is, which ties back to that 'Stir up' language in the original campaign.



**What research did you do to uncover that insight that people were looking for alternatives to stout? Because incidentally, the stout category has actually been growing.**

**Ritter:** Yeah, there have definitely been lots of new entrants to the stout category. We did some digging into Reddit sub-threads and stuff like that, and people's opinions like, 'I really love St Patrick's Day, but I really don't like drinking this'. We saw that it could be a really funny thing to play with – incognito pints on St Patrick's Day that are actually espresso martinis. The PR agency did some research into the percentage of people who prefer not to drink stout, and even though it's growing, the number of people who said it's not their favourite thing to drink is pretty high.

**Patel:** Yeah, the UK version of the survey found that around 60% of Brits would rather drink an espresso martini than a stout. And when they dug into it even more, they found that people are actually a bit ashamed or nervous to order something that isn't a stout on St Patrick's Day. So that reinforced that we were onto something that might work really well in terms of the narrative and the conversation around St Patrick's Day.

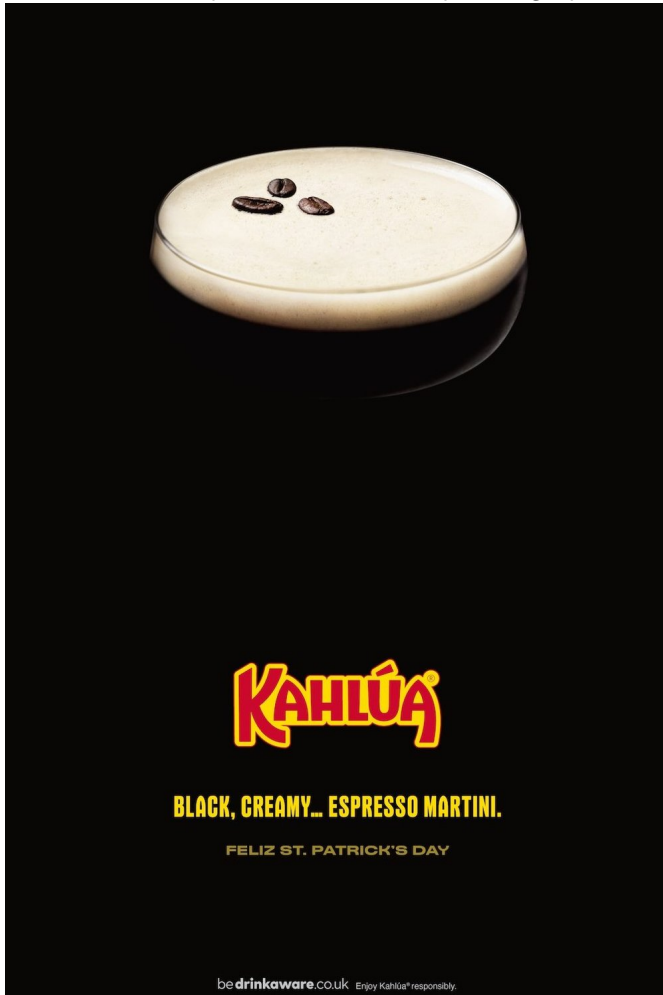
**We had to be really scrappy and find ways to punch above our weight. That meant focusing on ideas that we felt could generate conversation, rather than going after things that feel like mass reach**

Anjali Patel, Wieden+Kennedy London

**We saw the print ad first, and you made a campaign film – how else did the campaign come to life?**

**Patel:** We did a load of different things. The original idea at its core was print. And that was what was initially sold in. But we've got an amazing set of creative directors and a creative team here that is constantly ideating on what else we can do. So throughout the entire process, we just kept adding more things on. So the print work had that beautiful image of our espresso martini looking like a stout. And under that, the really clever line, 'Feliz St Patrick's Day'. We also did a big influencer partnership across all three markets – the US, UK and Ireland – where we worked with different Irish influencers, and influencers you wouldn't typically expect to drink an espresso martini. Imagine really rugged rugby players, for example.

We had them do a little piece of content where they were drinking something that appeared to be a stout, but is actually an espresso martini. We also engaged our on trade partners and created a mini pint glass that held the entire amount of an espresso martini; we did a partnership in London with a bar called Dirty Martini, where they gave out the pint glasses and a two-for-one espresso martini offer. In the US they did a big Venmo giveaway [offer] when [customers] ordered espresso martinis during the St Patrick's Day weekend. We also did a digital travelling billboard during the week leading up to St Patrick's Day – we drove around London and parked in front of Irish pubs to get patrons to order an espresso martini or consider it instead of a stout.



### Did you come up against any challenges in the process?

**Patel:** When you've got a global campaign and a simple idea that you have to deploy across multiple markets, that comes with a set of challenges. We're working with media teams and PR teams in multiple markets, so there's quite a lot of coordination happening to be single minded. If we can all stay on the same page and tell the same story, that leads to the greatest impact. Also, in terms of the competition on St Patrick's Day, Kahlúa is just not a natural choice.

It's not a brand that has ever stood out during St Patrick's Day, so we were an outsider stepping into a place that's dominated by a lot of Irish whiskey brands or stout brands. We certainly don't have the budgets that they have, we had to be really scrappy and find ways to punch above our weight. That meant focusing on ideas that we felt could generate conversation, rather than going after things that feel like mass reach, because we just don't have those kinds of budgets.

**We can't really predict what's going to take off but we can do our best to try to set as many little fires as possible**

Anjali Patel, Wieden+Kennedy London

**It's a little early to discuss results but what was your general sense of how it was received?**



**Patel:** We're still waiting for the numbers to come in, but overall, the campaign was really well received. For Kahlúa, it was probably their highest-reaching, highest-performing campaign to date. If you look at a lot of their social content, it's definitely the most engaging piece of social content they've ever made. I also think it's a true testament to how, when you get it right in terms of the coordination of all of the teams – we had a lot of people working really hard to stay on the same page and make something amazing happen – you end up with a product that we're all really, really proud of.

It's done a lot internally at Pernod Ricard and within the Kahlúa team to show what work that is meant to drive earned and fame could be, and the kind of response you can get from consumers. The engagement was just phenomenal, to see how many people are talking about the ad on social is a great learning for us. Who we cast in the film was really smart, for example – we had a stout enthusiast, who if you knew, you knew. If you look at the comments, a lot of the conversation was about who was in the film.

**Ritter:** The feedback we've had from the people that are closer to the accounts, like the bars and the retail accounts, was great. We had bartenders talking to us about it and getting excited about – that is always a good thing. Because if they know that Pernod and Kahlúa are going to do interesting stuff, they'll stock it, which is half the battle for us.

**Patel:** It's funny to see [which parts of the campaign] people latch on to. It's interesting to think about how we can set lots of little bonfires and take these small bets – we can't really predict what's going to take off but we can do our best to try to set as many little fires as possible.



### So you have this evergreen brief – what's next for the platform?

**Ritter:** There are a few things in the works – there are lots of briefs around [how] people buy espresso martinis out of their homes but don't make them at home. So that'll probably be something that we start to look at in the future. There are probably other holidays that we can play with. I think it's just finding those spots where Kahlúa is a bit unexpected, but not unwelcome.

**Patel:** And really owning the espresso martini. Because most people don't know liqueur is going in, so a challenge for us is to [make it so that] when you think 'espresso martinis', you always think a Kahlúa espresso martini.

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