

STRONGER TOGETHER

Viborel, Portugal's biggest drinks distributor, puts its success down to building lasting ties with the likes of Cia Müller, the Brazilian producer of the world-famous Cachaça 51 rum, as General Manager João Braga explains.

JOÃO BRAGA
GM @ VIBOREL

João Braga is no stranger to big business. As the General Manager of Portuguese drinks distributor Viborel, he's been pushing the company to the next level since 2008. It delivers legendary brands including Brazilian Cachaça 51 (market share leader), Quinta da Bacalhoa, Quinta do Carmo, Murganheira sparkling wines (market share leader), FAVAIOS sweet wines (market share leader), Champagne Laurent-Perrier, Perrier Waters, and Whyte & Mackay.

"When I joined Viborel we were a profitable but relatively low-profile entity," he says. "My first goal was to form a marketing department to make the company even more professional."

Invaluable knowledge

This decision set Viborel on a path that would see it collaborate with partners and sponsors at some of the biggest events in Portugal, including football teams and huge festivals.

"People started to acknowledge us, not just other industry players, but successful multinational companies too. We began working with

"The greatest values Viborel and Cia Müller share are our pursuit of excellence and unwavering commitment to improving our companies. We both demand honesty, transparency, and brilliant results. We believe that entrepreneurship is best for business. These values shape our approach to work, to our clients, and to each other. We have been working together for more than 30 years and we hope we'll be working together for 30 more!"

João Braga

Monster Energy in 2011 and three years later we were already in the top sales volume – higher than Red Bull, which had been at the top for more than 20 years. It's a similar story with CapriSun; after three years we were the second biggest brand in the market."

After a career spent at the forefront of organisational growth and development in import/export markets, it's perhaps unsurprising that João was able to make such a progressive impact in only a few years. But the wealth of experience he brought to Viborel was earned through dedication and hard graft.

João explains: "I began working in the food industry, specifically in tomato paste, one of the most important agricultural industries in Portugal. We worked with clients from all over the world such as Heinz, Nestle, Craft Company, and Unilever, so it's fair to say I have a lot of good contacts."

These contacts – and João's knowledge of the sector – have proven invaluable for Viborel.

"During my time in the tomato industry, I gained so much experience," he says. "Viborel was



already a successful company – profitable from year one – but I envisioned it as becoming even more professional and ultimately as one of the biggest distributors in Portugal.”

Lofty ambitions are exactly what one would expect from a man who has also started his own successful business. At the beginning of this century, João left the food industry to work with his wife, who had a business portfolio of French fashion brands. The duo started working with the likes of Lancel and JACADI, acting as agents. They witnessed behemoths H&M and ZARA Group enter the scene and the massive changes this brought with it. “It was only a business for rich global brand owners,” adds João. In 2005-06, he and his wife had 50 outlets across the country, before deciding to take a step back.

Virus response

“In 2008 I was ready for something different. Why? I had a range of skills and experiences in the import/export business as well as in marketing and wanted to put this to good use” he explains.

This is where João’s story with Viborel began – but where’s it going? Over the next 12-18 months Viborel intends to build on digitalisation, specifically reaching out to its clients on a “one-to-one” basis. The COVID-19 pandemic has proven a testing time for the business, which has seen a decrease of 23-25% turnover due to that fact its direct market – restaurants, hotels and bars – have been forced to close for two months, while tourism has tanked. With this unforeseen turn of events in mind, João recognises that communication is now more vital than ever before: “If anything, the pandemic has taught us that we must improve the ways we contact our clients, in order to give them the best service possible. It’s been tricky because thanks to the virus, people are now afraid of contact. To be effective, we must display our information and reach out to our customers through our products and promotions in a way that makes people feel safe and inspires trust.”

With thousands of wine brands and producers throughout Portugal (the company delivers 24/7 to 1,500 clients all over the country), Viborel has its work cut out maintaining and developing relationships at the best of times. With the option of personal contact now defunct, the company is improving its digital offering to keep in touch and maintain the same excellent standard of service.

“This is of the utmost importance,” says João. “Our customers are choosing to invest their mon-



“ Both Viborel and Cia Müller understand the market and the desire of the consumers – we anticipate consumer needs and market changes. From conception through to communication, everything is designed to please our clients. Honesty, professionalism, and daily dedication to our brands are strong characteristics that we share. Viborel and Cia Müller hold a long-term view for our partnership, dedication, and honesty, while aiming for sustainable and consistent growth.”

João Braga

ey in us and we must respond as efficiently as possible.”

While this year has been something of an anomaly, Viborel is a famously stable company with year-on-year growth of between 3-6%. This is one of the factors that sets it apart from the competition, a trend João is determined to continue long-term. Maintaining close ties with clients and partners is another factor.

“We have our own sales team that visits hotels and restaurants, which allows us to get a feel for the market and our clients. Brand owners like to sit with other brands and producers that complement their portfolio – every other week we meet producers wanting to partner with Viborel.”

How has Viborel worked with its suppliers over the years to form stable partnerships? The answer sounds simple: “hard work.”

“We stick to our word,” he continues. “We work with our supplier’s partners very closely, discussing plans and targets for each year and keeping things transparent. We let our suppliers know where and when their products are sold and at what price. If something goes wrong – say we didn’t hit our targets – we discuss the issues and we find new solutions. We relay our new figures every month, which in turn breeds confidence.”

It’s clearly a formula that works; Viborel has kept the same partners for up to 30 years. The company relies on a small, agile group of around six to eight key suppliers, enabling them to pivot and react to market trends with ruthless efficiency.

Support network

A good example is Cia Müller, the Brazilian owner of Cachaca 51, for which Viborel has built a new spirits category in Portugal. During almost three decades of partnership, Cachaca 51 has managed to nail down a market share of 60% in the country, becoming one of Portugal’s most popular spirits in the process.

With such reliable suppliers, Viborel is able to concentrate on creating strategies to pre-empt market changes.

“With my input, Viborel has strengthened interpersonal relationships with our stock suppliers and customers,” remarks João. “And this means we can be confident in our successful long-term vision for the business.”

In one of the toughest ever years to hit the food and beverage industry, João’s unwavering conviction is tonic for these troubled times. We can all drink to that. 🍷

Companhia Müller de Bebidas



WHY IS CACHAÇA 51 A GOOD IDEA?

“Cia Müller de Bebidas is the most awarded and therefore the most important producer of Cachaca in the world. Cachaca 51 is the market leader and we sell 270 million measures every month – that’s 9 million a day, 374,000 an hour, 6,200 every minute!

A big part of Cachaca 51’s popularity around the world is down to its versatility. Enjoy it as a shot or mixed with your favourite fruit, a little sugar, and ice. It is the base ingredient of the famous and universally loved Capirinha Brasileira.

Cachaca 51 is proud to be present in more than 50 countries, with the same love, quality, and secret ingredient: the passion and warmth of Brazil. Cachaca 51 is a good idea.”

Rodrigo Carvalho, Director of Cia Müller de Bebidas (Cachaca 51)

