

Food & Lifestyle

Austin's Blue Norther hard seltzer going gangbusters since launching in June

Company swipes at White Claw; H-E-B already on board

“Knowing that this pandemic might be with us for a long time, to fold up and not launch for six months or a year, we would be losing valuable time,” [Austin T. Pittman](#) said.

There are numerous hard seltzer makers based in Austin alone, including Mighty Swell, Canteen, Shotgun Spiked Seltzer and [Brizzy, made by Future Proof](#). Then there are the market leaders such as White Claw and Truly, not to mention the many recent entrants by legacy beer companies such as Bud Light Seltzer and Corona Hard Seltzer.

The Pittmans approached Brown with the idea “of getting creative,” the CMO said, and “targeting a smaller-scale launch, focusing on specific stores.”

Brown told them: We think you can pull it off.

The two Austins went into social media marketing overdrive and on June 15 introduced two flavors into Austin H-E-B stores: agave lime and wild blackberry.

“We were initially targeting about 20 stores,” Austin M. said. “By July, we were in 205.”



Austin-based hard seltzer maker Blue Norther sells two flavors, with a third on the way this fall.

BLUE NORTHER

Today, consumers can find Blue Norther – named after the famed Texas cold-front weather phenomenon that can cause temperatures to plunge within minutes – in more than 330 Central Texas and San Antonio grocery stores. And that number climbs “every day,” the CMO said.

Blue Norther launched in San Antonio stores on Aug. 25. Houston is the next target market, the CEO said, followed by Dallas.

Ultimately, the Pittmans plan to make Blue Norther a national brand.

The Pittmans chose the flavors to reflect the distinctive taste and culture of Austin and Texas.

“We’re developing a product in a very competitive space,” the CMO said. “We wanted to approach the market with a distinctly southwestern flavor profile. That’s our differentiation.”

He described agave nectar as, “like a kind of honey,” with a “difference in flavor that’s distinctive and nice. It’s our hero ingredient.”

The CEO added that Blue Norther’s flavor palate is purposefully “based on Texas fruits. It’s a natural thing for Texas drinks to be sweetened with agave. We have wild blackberry on our ranch.” Both, he said, are examples of “good, simple, true Texas heritage.”

And the company plans to launch its third flavor, prickly pear, on Oct. 1.

“We call it Texas champagne,” the CMO said. Blue Norther also will donate some proceeds to fight breast cancer during October, which is breast cancer awareness month.

Blue Norther currently sources its agave from the Laredo area of Texas, and its other fruit from throughout the state and country, Austin T. said. But the sources may change, depending on seasonal and climatic changes, he said.

A small group of investors helped the company close a friends and family round of funding to help launch Blue Norther. The CEO declined to disclose the amount, but said the business is “well-capitalized.”

The company recently hired its seventh employee. During the next 12 months, Blue Norther intends to hire for positions in sales and marketing, and other jobs to “support new market launches,” the CEO said.

Its office is at The Yard at 506 E. Elmo St. in South Austin. The company plans ultimately to build out a 5,000 square-foot space, where it can hold events, the CEO said. It also will feature a stage for live music. Blue Norther did not use a commercial real estate broker to secure the location.

With the pandemic shutting down social events that could feature Blue Norther tastings, the CMO said creating experiences to introduce the product to prospective consumers remains the company’s largest hurdle during these times.

The CEO projected the company could have a run rate of 10,000 cases a month within a year, surpassing \$1 million in sales “in 12 to 18 months.”

Blue Norther is not yet profitable as it focuses on expanding throughout Texas, and, eventually, nationwide.

The Pittmans aren’t thinking exit strategy yet. First, the CEO said, they want to “build a strong business and see where it goes from there.”