

The B in F&B

**An Interview with Jason Cott,
President, Alchemy Consulting**

EDITORS' NOTE Jason Cott has spearheaded Alchemy Consulting from a company manifested solely on business cards and handshakes to a firm sought after by large corporations and successful forward-thinking owners. He is also Chief Executive Officer of One Step Syrups Inc. and Partner in Pouring Ribbons (NYC), The Catbird Seat and The Patterson House (Nashville), and The Violet Hour (Chicago), the 2015 James Beard Award Winner for Outstanding Beverage Program.



Jason Cott

COMPANY BRIEF Alchemy Consulting (alchemyconsultingnyc.com) specializes in increasing the profitability of large scale service operations through innovative beverage design. They offer the experience and creativity to adapt to the multitude of situations that invariably arise in the service industry. Alchemy Consulting believes the bar should be considered of equal importance to the kitchen and should be managed accordingly. Freshness of ingredients, quality control, and consistency of recipes are identifiable portraits of an Alchemy Consulting beverage program. They provide full documentation of all recipes and procedures, and guarantee to work seamlessly with staff to ensure that the quality of the beverages will meet the high standards set by the organization.

What did you see in the market that made you feel the time was right for this business?

The beverage in F&B typically lags behind food by four or five years. This was certainly true when I started Alchemy Consulting in 2000. Dining out was becoming the main focus of an evening's entertainment rather than an ancillary association. People were more willing than ever to spend money as long as their experience was exemplary, so I went about formulating a company that would help balance the scales between food and beverage. At Alchemy Consulting, we took our cues from the kitchen and worked to bring the highest quality of ingredients and training to the bar.

Was it challenging to get the message across?

Yes, and it continues to be challenging, which is strange when the leading generator of revenue in the service industry is alcohol. It's part of my job to assist clients in developing

a healthy and interdependent relationship between the F&B programs, which allows them both to be significantly stronger. In general, that means elevating the quality of the beverage program which is where Alchemy Consulting comes into play.

Where do you see growth coming off of your current success?

Alchemy Consulting has been forward thinking in going from cocktail programs for small, speakeasy-type bars, to larger bar programs, to restaurants, to large chain restaurants, to hotel programs that have multiple facilities, be they domestic or international. Now, we're bringing beverage programs to stadiums and arenas, cruise lines, and multi-tiered facilities that want a consistent, thoughtful, and identifiable cocktail program.

As more high-end food programs are incorporated into large-scale service, it is that much more important to develop the beverage component concurrently.

Has your focus been mostly on New York?

No, my focus has always been much more expansive. I opened The Violet Hour in Chicago years ago, banking on the idea that any city that could support a major sports team could certainly support a major cocktail program. We brought The Patterson House to Nashville and that proliferation started moving throughout the country. We've developed programs in Tokyo, Buenos Aires, and other cities worldwide. Our current focus is a direct result of this success. As more people discover craft cocktails, more people want them, and by partnering with large companies we can effectively service that demand.

How broad is the offering?

We treat each program as an individual project, be it working with a one-off hotel in New York City or a corporation that manages several stadiums and arenas across the country. Each must be looked at specifically with regard to staffing levels, quality of service, quality of ingredients, the mean level of guest experience, and the structure of the cost and pricing associated with it.

It's part of why I created One Step Syrups – it provides large entities with the means of production and the training methodology to create quality cocktails on a large scale. We often work with seasonal employees and we strive to create elegant systems that maintain the highest level of consistency.

How do you differentiate this brand?

Alchemy Consulting develops award winning cocktail bars, designs flavors and products for corporations like Diageo and Pernod Ricard, and advises on new trends in the industry. One Step Syrups is designed specifically to deal with operating high-end beverage programs on a larger scale with a focus on consistency of ingredients and specific training methodologies.

Looking at stand-alone cocktail bars, are they more of a consulting arrangement?

I have created equity structures for some of the places I've worked with; some are better in a consulting arrangement.

Individual one-off bars require ownership involvement – if we want to win awards, there is no passing the buck onto managers.

Is your focus on luxury brands or can you do it at different price points?

Our focus is on profitability. Our business model is built around operating at varying price points. While we enjoy working with the highest quality of spirits, we recognize the necessity of working within a budget. My strength within the company is marrying the creative aspects of my team with a strong financial responsibility to my clients.

What opportunities do you see for the company in bringing value to the stadium market?

The spirits market itself is a growing industry and finding new ways to deliver spirits to a captive customer base is an interesting challenge. The food in stadiums and arenas is much better than it has been in years past but we still don't have the opportunity to have a selfsame beverage that goes with that. We want to bridge that gap.

How challenging is it to manage growth and find the right talent?

It is extremely challenging. Bringing craft cocktails to a large audience is a huge undertaking. You have varying tastes by venue and region, differing access to ingredients, high staff turnover, and speed of service. That's why we are here. One Step Syrups was specifically designed as a response to scalability and staffing issues. Utilizing our products, formulas, and unique training methodologies, stadiums, arenas, and cruise lines can have a similar craft cocktail program to The Violet Hour or any other of our award-winning programs. ●