José Cuervo
200 years of top tequila

Founded by Don José María Guadalupe de Cuervo in 1795, the famous tequila brand has more than 200 years of history behind it. Not only is it the world’s oldest tequila, it’s also the biggest-selling tequila brand globally.

The name in itself is an interesting point – ‘cuervo’ means ‘crow’ in Spanish, and the image of this bird that now symbolizes the famous brand was first used by Don José to label the barrels of his fiery liquid in a smart effort to communicate his family brand to illiterate customers.

Aside from savvy branding right from the start, what makes Cuervo tequila so successful? According to Vonne du Plessis, brand manager for Cuervo in South Africa, the outstanding feature that ensures José Cuervo’s success is its long consistency of excellent quality.

She remarks that while it may be an ancient brand, Cuervo makes sure that it keeps up to date with the best, most modern processes in its production to ensure its consistency and quality remain exceptional.

While the crow symbol proved an effective branding mechanism in the beginning, Cuervo’s brand initiatives today have developed far beyond a simple picture. In fact, there is now an actual island in the Caribbean known as CuervoNation Island, which exemplifies the laidback, fun-loving attitude that is synonymous with the brand. Cuervo fans can view CuervoNation Island and even become a citizen on the website (www.cuervonation.com).

The current citizenship is around 200 000 people from all corners of the globe.

CuervoNation citizens can receive news on all the latest competitions, send postcards to non-citizens, visit the Cuervo museum or even find out about local customs and traditions.

The various Cuervo websites are scattered with interesting information about the brand and tequila in general.

For example, many people believe that tequila should contain a worm in the bottle. However, this has never been the case. The alcohol called Mezcal is often confused with tequila. The difference is that tequila is made only from the Blue Agave plant, while Mezcal can be made from any variety of Agave, is much stronger, and has a worm in the bottle.

Government regulation specifies that to be called Tequila, a product must have an NOM (Norma Oficial Mexicana, meaning official Mexican standard) number on the bottle and be made from the Agave Azul Tequilana Weber. Furthermore, all 100% Agave Azul Tequila must be bottled in Mexico.

Another little known tequila fact listed on the website is that the name ‘tequila’ means ‘mountain with fire’, and the drink was named after the Tequilla Indians and the volcano that towered above the town where tequila was born. The popular Margarita cocktail was named after an exotic nightclub dancer.

In South Africa, the brand tends to focus its activities in the local rock music industry, specifically targeting the group du Plessis calls ‘YAMS’ – young, adult and mainstream.

This target group is aged between 18 and 30, and du Plessis says, ‘We believe that SA rock music gives us a communication platform to connect with our target market. We are involved in the music scene in all aspects, from giveaways to helping bands to tour overseas, and by being the mainline sponsors for prominent rock festivals.’

Cuervo has consistently been involved with the Oppikoppi festivals (both Easter and August shows) and has been involved with supporting bands like Seventh Son and Evolver in gaining exposure and recognition.

As the population of CuervoNation grows and the brand increases its market share around the globe, it seems as though Don José Maria Guadalupe de Cuervo’s now famous drink will always ensure that his spirit lives on.