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Constellation Buys Stake In Breaking Bad Stars' Dos Hombres Mezcal



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Bryan Cranston and Aaron Paul of *Breaking Bad*, the runaway TV hit that aired for five years until 2013, had real chemistry—both on screen and off. The two actors are now partners in Dos Hombres, a new brand of mezcal, a spirit distilled from the agave plant that is a cousin to tequila.

Cranston and Paul are the latest celebrities trying their hands at creating – not just endorsing - brands, leveraging their fame to attract a new category of fans. Paul Newman may have put celebrity F&B brands on the map with Newman's Own, but he was not alone for long.

Celebrities such as Newman, Steve Schirripa, Patti LaBelle, George Clooney and Jay-Z have all become entrepreneurs in the F & B sector, whether their brands raise funds for charity or revenues for shareholders. Or both.

Bigger companies are taking notice, hoping to cash in on celebrity appeal. Constellation Brands is one of the latest. Constellation recently took a minority stake in Dos Hombres, hoping fans (including the beverage's 368,000 Instagram followers) will buy in.

“Our goal is to make strategic, minority investments in high potential brands in growing categories,” is the way Jennifer Evans, vice president of Constellation Ventures, puts it, “and the U.S. mezcal market continues to show great potential.”

Big brands often use big stars as spokespeople, from George Clooney for Nespresso to Beyonce for Pepsi and Taylor Swift for Diet Coke. But for celebrities, *creating* a brand means *being* the brand.

After he gave up boxing, lovable George Foreman took on the high-stakes battle of home grilling. Steve Schirripa, of *The Sopranos* and *Blue Bloods*, is the namesake of Uncle Steve's sauces. For those with a sweet tooth, there's Sugarpova candies, where tennis star Maria Sharapova gets to show her capitalist side. Patti LaBelle went beyond cookbooks with Patti's Good Life baked goods at Walmart, complete with her picture on the boxes.

Not all celebrity brands, however, bear the celebrity's name. In fact most don't, although the celebrity is often a big player behind the scenes. Jennifer Garner co-founded Once Upon a Farm, making food pouches for children, using organic fruits and vegetables. And Sarah Michelle Gellar's Foodstirs offers organic baking mixes and kits.

Will Cranston and Paul's on-screen chemistry catalyze a brand that can thrive in this celebrity universe? Or will it combust like a trailer in a dry desert? Dos Amigos launched in 2019, about six years after *Breaking Bad* came to an end. It taps mezcal from the village of San Luis del Rio, in Oaxaca, Mexico.

Big companies are buying into celebrity beverage brands, putting their muscle and marketing behind the names. Bethenny Frankel, of *The Real Housewives of New York City*, launched Skinnygirl products. She sold the cocktail line to Beam (now Beam Suntory) in 2011, reportedly for \$120 million, but still has a large portfolio of products.

Diageo bought Ryan Reynolds' Aviation American Gin for \$610 million last August after acquiring George Clooney's Casamigos tequila in 2017, according to Food Dive. And Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton in February bought a 50 percent stake in Jay-Z's champagne company, Armand de Brignac.

Constellation Brands Ventures in a statement said it seeks to "strategically partner with the leaders and brands of tomorrow" and acquire "disruptive brands that produce, market, and sell beverage alcohol in new and trailblazing ways." Part of the idea is that big names can lead to bigger sales.

Aaron Paul and Bryan Cranston are all over the brand in images of both at a pool table, beside bottles, and on a desert road.

The right product, however, matters as much as the right people. U.S. mezcal sales grew 14% in 2020 according to IWSR, which projects premium mezcals priced above \$30 will be the fastest-growing segment within the category. Dos Amigos costs more than \$60 a bottle.

IWSR in its most recent report said tequila "overtook rum to become the third-largest spirits category in the U.S.," behind vodka and whisky, rising 9.6

percent in 2020 globally, fueled by U.S. gains. “Interest in mezcal has also lifted that category,” according to IWSR, positioning the Breaking Bad actors’ brand for possible growth.

“We have fallen in love with all things mezcal – the process, the community behind the spirit, the tradition,” Paul is quoted as saying. “We’ve put a lot of energy into this.”

Cranston, whose Walter White character seems to stare back from brand images, calls the company “an incredible journey” that started with “an idea at a bar” in New York City (no doubt sketched out on the back of a cocktail napkin).

Whatever happens with Dos Hombres, it is a new venture for the two Breaking Bad stars – and now for Constellation Brands. This time, consumers will write the script, although the brand will have a little help from Constellation, which is counting on the actors’ chemistry.