

The Club Soda Guide final report and evaluation

BACKGROUND

In 2018, Club Soda received funding from the City of London to technically develop the Club Soda Guide (www.clubsodaguide.com) from the prototype website developed in 2016, and to get as many City of London venues as possible to list on the site. The Club Soda Guide is the UK's first and only listings site of low and no alcohol drinks, and the venues where to find them. The Guide works by rating venues out of 5, based on how good their low and no alcohol drinks offer is.

Following our initial round of development, we have used the data and insight we have gained to determine a further set of aims to take the Club Soda Guide to the next level. These included:

- Making it easier for venues to navigate around the website, being able to add their drinks on their profile, and generate an updated "Club Soda Score"
- Giving users more information about specific drink brands and where to find them
- Signing up more venues to the Guide
- Developing a business model for the long term development and financial viability of the Guide.

TECHNICAL DEVELOPMENT

We began redeveloping the technical aspects of the Guide in January 2018.

We started by revisiting our user profiles and user experience design, to gain a detailed understanding of what drink brands, licensed venues, and general users needed to make the most of the Guide. We wanted to allow venues to be able to list the specific drink products they stocked, as well as giving them log-in functionality to allow them to maintain their listing pages. We also wanted to be able to list drinks as well as venues on the site, so that users would be able to discover new low and no alcohol drinks, and where to find them in both the on and off trades. Finally, we wanted users to be able to navigate easily through the website to discover great drinks and great venues.

We are pleased to have managed to combine these different demands to create a brand new website with the functionality to allow:

- Users to search for venue by their location
- Venues to be able to log in and list the drinks they stock
- Over 850 low and no alcohol drinks are already listed
- Supermarkets and wholesalers can be linked into drink brand pages, so customers can find drinks to buy for home as well, and venue managers can easily find suppliers for them

- Mobile responsiveness (we think the site actually looks better on mobile than on a computer screen!)
- A redeveloped venue scoring system that applies equally to bars, pubs, hotels and restaurants (the old one favoured pubs and penalised cocktail bars).

The technical development of the Guide also allowed us to set up a **drink brand membership scheme**, which is helping to guarantee the Guide’s financial viability. We created additional features, such as enhanced brand pages and more prominent drinks listings to encourage brands to join Club Soda as members, and we are pleased to already have twenty brands sign up in the past two months.

Now that everything is up and running, we will continue to make technical tweaks in response to user feedback, including improving the search functionality, and making drinks recommendations more specific.



Explore All Drinks



Explore All Drinks



Great Drinks For Mindful Drinkers



BrewDog Clerkenwell
London
EC1M 5RS
Bar
★★★★★



Exmouth Arms
London
EC1R 4QL
Pub
★★★★★



VENUE RECRUITMENT

One of our key outputs within this round of funding was to increase the number of City of London venues signed up to the Guide. We have over **doubled the number** signed up with 235 City of London venues now listed (from 108 in the pilot project in 2016-2017).

Following the technical development, venues are scored automatically based on an algorithm in the website which calculated their result from the low and no alcohol drinks they say they offer (including the number of alcohol-free cocktails on their menu).

Score	5	4	3	2	1	0
% of venues	42%	12%	15%	12%	9%	6%

City of London venues have a higher mean score (3.48) than the national average (3.32), and a higher percentage of venues which score the maximum of 5 (42% as compared to 35% nationally).

As well as working with independent venues, we have engaged with a number of high profile pub and restaurant groups to increase sign-ups nationwide. We have already worked with Mitchells and Butlers, EI Group, Stonegate and Star, as well as several smaller chains such as BrewDog, Dishoom and Balans Soho Society among others.

Working with the national chains is allowing us to start collecting some illuminating data about the state of low and no alcohol drinks within venues across the country. This also demonstrates how the Club Soda Guide can operate as both an educational listings site and a research dataset.

We are continuing to reach out to venues in the City and nationally in order to continue to grow the number of venues listed on the Guide.

ENGAGEMENT EVENTS

We launched the rebooted version of the Club Soda Guide at our two-day Mindful Drinking Festival at Brick Lane’s Old Truman Brewery, on the fringes of the City in January 2019, with Peter Dunphy, City of London Chair of Licensing, Jo Dring from Heineken UK, Adrian Chiles, and Paul Mathew of the City bar The Arbitrager. The Festival included experts from the beer industry (Jane Peyton, Emma Inch, Pete Brown), wine industry (John Downes), as well as panel discussions and over 60 drink brands.



The January launch was followed up with two industry launches at Pub19 (Olympia, London) and ScotHot (SEC Centre, Glasgow) trade exhibitions, where we presented the Guide and the importance of low and no alcohol drinks to large numbers of venue managers and other stakeholders.



Since then, we have continued to promote the Guide in the media and at events. It will again be a highlighted feature of our next Mindful Drinking Festival, on 20th July at Spitalfields Market, east London, where we have engaged a number of nearby venues in the City and Hackney to offer special alcohol-free drink offers to the 10,000 expected festival attendees.

Thanks to **funding from the Brewer's Research and Education Fund**, we have this year also been able to conduct a research project on increasing the sales of low and no alcohol beers.



This research has allowed us to:

- Host our first low and no alcohol beer summit with a dozen breweries, beer writer Jane Peyton, and the Morning Advertiser editor Ed Bedington; the summit was opened by Adrian Chiles who issued a challenge to the brewers to get their beers to be served on draught in every pub.
- Undertake experiments in venues on different ways of selling alcohol-free beer
- Carry out desk research on sales and promotion of low/no alcohol beer in other countries
- Create training videos for venues on how to sell low/no alcohol beer.

This research will be published in the near future.

Club Soda hosted the first low and no alcohol beer tasting with the **All Party Parliamentary Beer Group**, which was attended by almost 30 beer brands and 15 MPs/Lords.

We will also be bringing two low and no alcohol beer brands to the **City of London Beer Festival** in July, having been invited to do so by the Worshipful Company of Brewers. This will be the first time that low and no alcohol beers will feature at this event.

THE FUTURE OF THE GUIDE

With the rebuilt Club Soda Guide now fully functional, there are a number of avenues we intend to pursue in order to improve it for users and to use it as a tool to enhance the world of mindful drinking.

We will continue to **recruit drink brand members** to ensure the financial longevity of the Guide. Heineken 0.0 sponsored the launch of the Guide, and we expect to find ongoing drink and other sponsorship for the Guide itself, and projects related to it.

We want to utilise the data that the Guide collects to do continued **research on the low and no alcohol drinks industry**. We have already started to do this through two research partnerships; one with Heineken 0.0 on drink driving, and one with Lyre's on the sales of alcohol-free spirits and cocktails in bars. Through our work with Heineken, we are focusing on the City of London as a research area, to look at how commuters who drive navigate after work drinks. The Guide is an unparalleled resource for information about the state of play within the industry, and we will be using it to help brands and venues make wholesale changes to their attitudes towards low and no alcohol drinks to the benefit of Club Soda members and the general public.

We believe that the Club Soda Guide can become an **industry standard for best practice**, as part of a criteria for local councils to be rated as good for Mindful Drinkers. We have carried out presentations about the Guide at a number of licensing events and received positive feedback about its potential utility for local authorities. We are now looking at an initial pilot scheme within a local area to demonstrate how licensed venues' presence and high scoring on the Guide can dovetail with Late Night Levys to create Mindful Drinking areas. We are also in discussions with Best Bar None to include presence on the Guide as one of the inputs to the BBN evaluation of licensed venues.

OUTPUTS

Our key outputs from this funding from the City of London have been:

- A **fully functional redeveloped Club Soda Guide website**, listing low and no alcohol drinks as well as the licensed venues that stock them
- Almost **200 City of London venues** signed up the Guide with a **higher than national average rating**
- **Launch events** to the public and trade drawing attention to the utility of the Club Soda Guide.

NEXT STEPS

We are really proud of the outputs from this piece of funding. As part of our next steps on the Club Soda Guide, we would like to:

- Talk to the City of London licensing team about how they can use the Guide
- Discuss the possibilities of designating the City of London as UKs first mindful drinking place
- Discuss some additional research and campaign ideas that have come from the Guide work in the City, including work with caterers, workplaces, and students and universities to encourage and promote more mindful drinking.