



A Rising Tide

How design helped build Tidal, a new kind of premium rum brand

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TIDAL RUM

CLIENT NAME
SHORTS BOY DISTILLERY

ENTRANT
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DBA DESIGN EFFECTIVENESS
NOVEMBER 2021

FOR PUBLICATION

In the crowded UK rum market, strategy and design helped Jersey-based startup Shorts Boy Distillery create Tidal Rum – a brand that took one of rum’s oldest tropes and made it so fresh, new and visually striking that it rapidly outsold established competitors, significantly over-delivering on sales revenue and inward investment, and returned £7.19 revenue for every £1 spent.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Tidal Rum is a new kind of premium rum brand created for a new kind of drinker. It takes familiar rum category tropes and transforms them utterly through a powerfully unconventional brand story, brought to life with fresh, disruptive design. In a crowded and competitive market where just 18,000 bottles of £35+ rum were sold across the whole of the UK in the whole of 2018, Tidal Rum, launched in 2019, sold over 15,000 bottles by the end of its second year, smashing all targets and expectations.

With premium rum tipped to be the next big thing after artisan gin, the number of rum brands on sale in the UK soared from 50 to over 200. Against this increasingly cluttered background, Jersey-based startup Shorts Boy Distillery set out to make its mark by creating and branding a £35 blend of Caribbean rums flavoured with locally-foraged Pepper Dulse seaweed.

It faced stiff competition from rival brands – some of which used similar seaweed-infused blends.

The strategy and design team worked hand in hand with the distillery partners. Their breakthrough solution was to create a new brand, Tidal Rum, that took one of rum's oldest and most overused stories – a drink of the sea – and presented it in a wholly fresh and unexpected way, a million miles from the *Pirates of the Caribbean*.

By the end of its second year, Tidal Rum's sales rapidly outstripped those of established rivals. As a result, the fledgeling brand also significantly outperformed on its inward investment targets. **With a goal of £150,001 on the funding platform Seedrs, it has already achieved £232,281 at the time of writing, and investment continues to come in.**

Tidal was a new brand so it was obviously not possible to make a direct before-and-after comparison of the effect of design. However, by comparing sales of Tidal versus average sales of similar rums, similarly priced, we can arrive at an indicative ROI of 7.19:1. Which is to say, **for every £1 spent on design, Tidal received incremental revenue of £7.19.**



CONTEXT AND OVERVIEW

THE PROJECT BRIEF

Create a brand identity for Jersey-based startup Shorts Boy Distillery and its new seaweed-infused premium rum, retailing at £35.

BUSINESS OBJECTIVES

YEAR 1 Become a **credible** player in UK premium rum, matching typical sales of existing £35+ brands.

- Year 1 volume: 4,000 bottles
- Revenue £95,760

YEAR 2 Become a **leading** player in UK premium rum, outselling the leading £26+ brands.

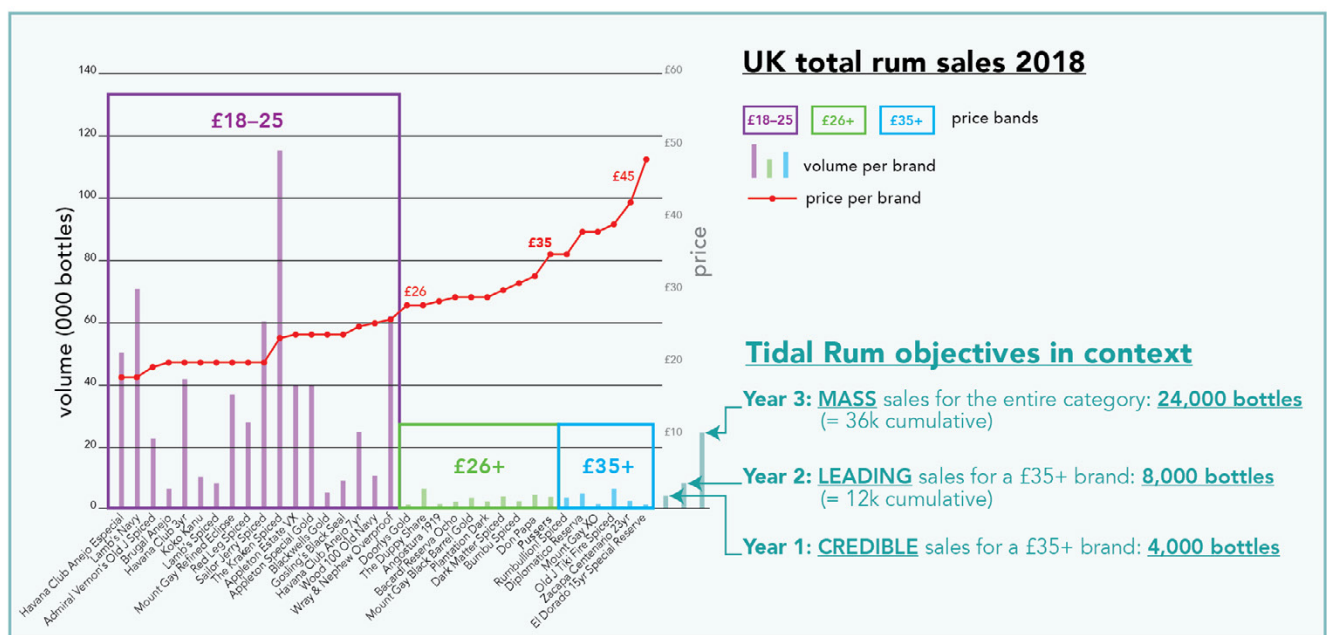
- Year 2 volume: 8,000 bottles (=12,000 cumulative, years 1+2)
- Year 2 revenue: £191,520 (=£287,280 cumulative, years 1+2)

YEAR 3 Achieve **mass-market volumes**, despite being significantly higher priced than big-selling sub-£20 brands.

- Year 3 volume: 24,000 bottles (=36,000 cumulative, years 1+2)
- Year 3 revenue: £574,560 (=£861,840 cumulative, years 1+2)

Funding target: raise £150,001 in funding on the Seedrs investment platform.

To put the volume targets in context: at £35, Tidal Rum is priced the upper end of its category. In 2018, total combined sales of all rums costing £35+ were circa 18,000 bottles.



Source: IWSR 2018

CONTEXT AND OVERVIEW

THE PROJECT BRIEF (continued)

MARKETING OBJECTIVES

- Secure distribution in retail and on-trade

DESIGN OBJECTIVES – Drive trial by:

- **Creating disruption**, standout and ‘talkability’ in a cluttered market
- **Engaging 25-40-year-old urbanites** who are starting out on their journey of discovery into premium spirits



SCOPE OF WORK

- **Strategic thinking:** explore brand territories, define a name, set out a brand story
- **Design:** create the brand identity and packaging design, source an off-the-shelf bottle, ensure sustainability throughout brand journey



CONTEXT AND OVERVIEW

DESCRIPTION

BACKGROUND TO THE BUSINESS AND THE PRODUCT

Shorts Boy Distillery is the brainchild of two friends with a passion for their home island of Jersey and its unique tidal landscape, and a love of foraging. Together they created their first product, a blended golden aged rum infused with oak-smoked 'truffle of the sea' Pepper Dulse seaweed, foraged from the local shoreline. In time they plan to launch further spirits, including a gin and various mixers.

THE DESIGN DILEMMA

Some categories have deep and abiding associations. New brands have to decide what to do about them. Scotch has its tartans, stags and grouse moors. Rum has the sea, nautical life and piracy. Sailors in the British Navy actually had a daily rum ration until 1970.



The dilemma for every new rum is whether to embrace the category tropes, or whether to reject them.

- **Embrace rum tropes.** Barti Ddu claims to be 'inspired by a famous Pembrokeshire Pirate, Barti Ddu, or Black Bart¹.' Orkney's J. Gow 'takes its name from the infamous Orkney pirate John Gow².' Bombo Rum, from Cornwall, has a skull and crossed cutlasses on its bottle.
- **Reject rum tropes.** Edinburgh's Dark Matter cuts all the traditional rum cues and goes for modern, minimalist craft spirits branding³. Scratch Rum, from Hertfordshire⁴, finds a different way to leave the baggage behind, with a 21st-century take on Victorian apothecary.
- **The dilemma for Shorts Boy** was how to launch a disruptive, standout brand when both of the main strategic options open to new rums had already been done many times before.



¹ <https://www.bartirum.wales>
² <https://jgowrum.com/#about>
³ <https://www.darkmatterdistillers.com/?agegate=1>
⁴ <https://scratchspirits.co.uk/#>



CONTEXT AND OVERVIEW

DESCRIPTION (continued)

THE STRATEGIC PROCESS

At the heart of the strategic process was an exploratory workshop, where the agency designers and strategists worked side by side with the Shorts Boy partners to evolve a series of potential territories, bringing them to life through images, materials and textures. Lateral-thinking exercises helped participants explore the clash between expected and unexpected thoughts for the category, enabling them to take their initial ideas to surprising new places.

The process yielded two things.

- **A powerful new brand story.** It took the rum category's most powerful trope – a drink of the sea – and presented it in a wholly fresh and unexpected way, a million miles from the *Pirates of the Caribbean*.
- **A name to go with it.** Tidal Rum was born.

Tidal Rum. The brand story.



CONTEXT AND OVERVIEW

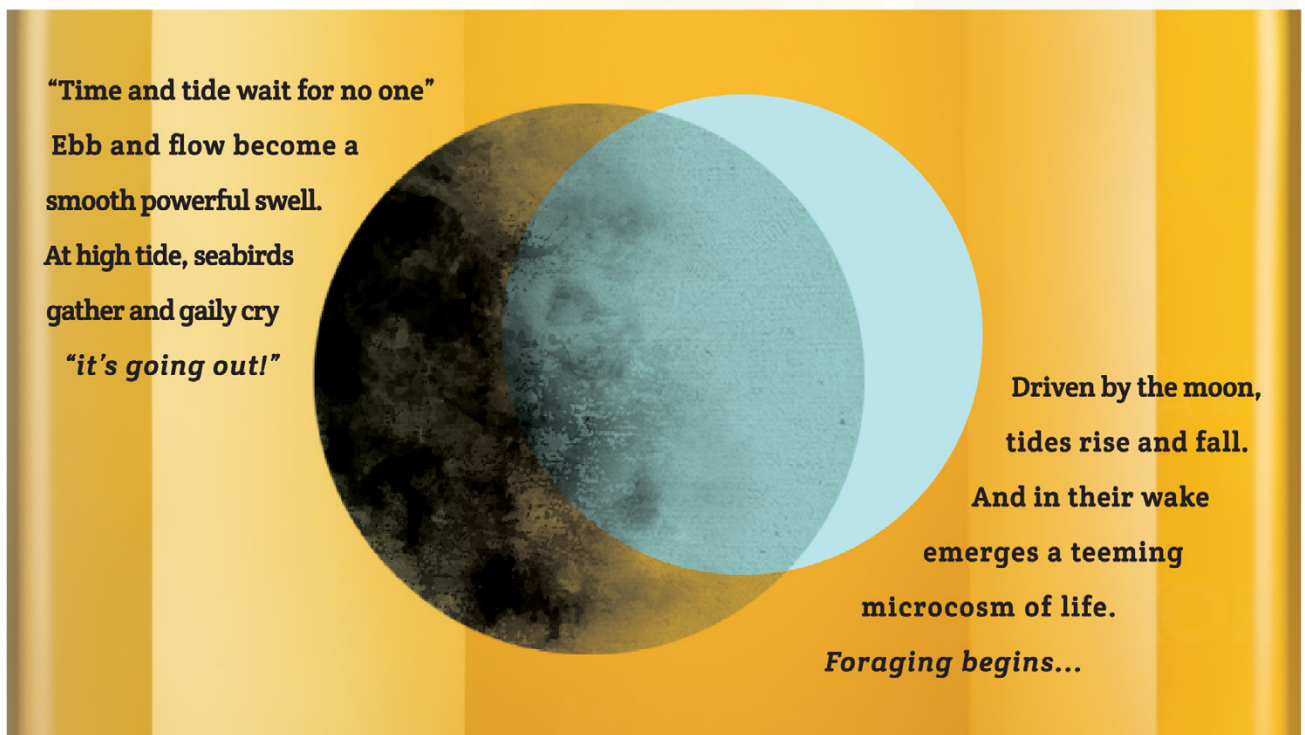
DESIGN SOLUTION

An enigmatic icon drifts across the bottle reflecting the moon and its impact on the tides. It captures a moment when the whole underwater world comes to life.

The story cradles the icon and sets the scene for foraging. The round, solid, sturdy bottle is honest and simple. It showcases the golden liquid and the play of light.

Branding is staggered across the neck revealing more of the story and adding to the experience of the bottle in the hand.

A matt black canister contrasts the pale golden spirit and takes the day into night, when the foraging begins.



"Time and tide wait for no one"

Ebb and flow become a smooth powerful swell.

At high tide, seabirds gather and gaily cry

"it's going out!"

Driven by the moon, tides rise and fall.

And in their wake emerges a teeming microcosm of life.

Foraging begins...

CONTEXT AND OVERVIEW

OVERVIEW OF THE MARKET

Rapid premiumisation of the rum market has driven a ‘gold-rush’ mentality, with a significant oversupply of brands and products and a growing risk of failure for small players without access to big marketing budgets.

Rum is the UK’s fifth-largest alcoholic spirits category, accounting for 10% of all spirits sold⁵. Around 10m bottles are sold each year, with a value of £1.2bn⁶. Sales of ‘standard’ rums from big brands like Bacardi, Havana and Captain Morgan are relatively steady, but there has been significant growth at what is now the top 10% of the market, with sales of premium-and-above rums soaring by 140% in the past five years⁷.

Growing consumer demand for high-end rums creates huge opportunities for successful brands. But at the same time it also presents formidable obstacles.

Like gin before it, premium rum is becoming a gold-rush category. Everyone wants to strike it rich, but this, paradoxically, makes it ever harder to succeed.

Since 2009, the number of rum brands available in the UK has grown from 50 to over 200, while the number of new ‘premium’ variants from existing rum megabrands has risen exponentially. The choice available to consumers is bewildering. Alongside traditional rums from Barbados, Cuba, Jamaica, Puerto Rico and Guyana, rums now come from over 90 different countries – from Silicon Valley in the US (Santeria Rum), to India (Wild Tiger Rum)⁸ and even Scotland (Dark Matter Rum). Some of these, like Orkney’s J.Gow Rum, are distilled by the brand owner⁹, while many others, like Wales’s Barti Ddu, are made from Caribbean rums bought, blended, bottled and badged, often with the addition of a botanical or spice to add character¹⁰.

The result, for both consumers and bar owners, is a significant oversupply, with many more brands and varieties than anyone can ever stock, or taste.

All of which means that without a famous name, a big marketing budget or something really special, the chances of failure for a new entrant are extremely high.

As spirits consultant Fred Minnick put it in Forbes magazine:

*“From fickle consumers to heavy regulations, the distilling business is not for the faint of heart. The marketplace gets harder and harder for every new distiller who opens. How do you differentiate your product from every other craft producer? How do you find a distributor that’s not beholden to the big brands? Why are you even starting a distillery? Sales revenue won’t even begin to cover your operating costs for up to ten years.”*¹¹

⁵ <https://www.bartirum.waleshttps://www.statista.com/statistics/305167/relative-market-share-of-spirits-catogory-sales-united-kingdom-uk/>

⁶ Source: Shorts Boy Distillery Seeds submission

⁷ <https://bbbdinks.com/inquisitive-drinks-rum-trends-2021/>

⁸ Source: Wine and Spirit Trade Association

⁹ <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/news/new-study-reveals-how-first-lockdown-impacted-alcohol-consumption>

¹⁰ <https://jgowrum.com>

¹¹ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/fredminnick/2018/10/26/want-to-start-a-distillery-read-this/?sh=6809de705e46>

CONTEXT AND OVERVIEW

KEY FACTS

Product launch: Summer 2019

Budget (identity and packaging): £10,000




 Infused with
PEPPER DULSE
SEAWEED


 Foraged at
 low tide


 Smoked and
 finished in
J E R S E Y
 by
SBD

An island hopper...
 Started in the Caribbean
 finished in Jersey

SBD

Warmed by the sun
 cooled by the sea breeze
 infused with seaweed

SHORTS BOY DISTILLERY



RESULTS

HOW THE RESULTS PERFORMED AGAINST ORIGINAL BUSINESS OBJECTIVES

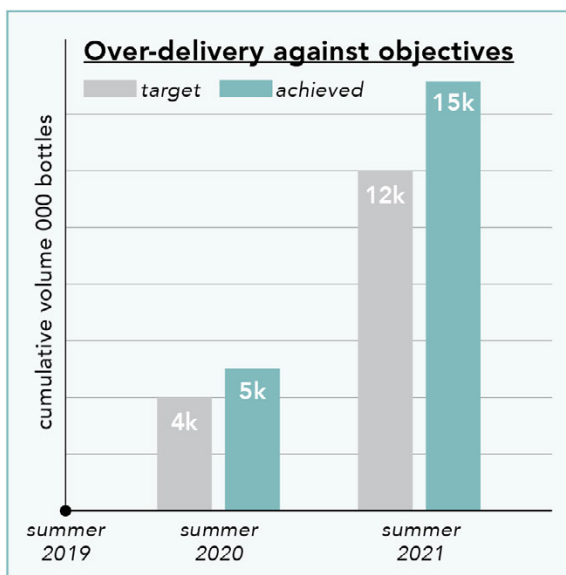
Tidal smashed both its Year 1 and Year 2 volume and revenue objectives by 25%, leaving established rivals far behind.

Volume sales

	Target	Achieved
Year 1	4,000	5,000
Year 2	8,000	10,000
Cumulative	12,000	15,000

Revenue

	Target	Achieved
Year 1	£95,760	£119,700
Year 2	£191,520	£239,400
Cumulative	£287,280	£359,100



In a market where just 18,000 bottles of £35+ rum were sold in the whole of the UK in the whole of 2018¹², Tidal Rum sold 15,000 bottles by late Summer 2021.

As a result of this, the brand attracted significant funding from a large number of investors. With a target of £150,001 on the funding platform Seedrs, it has already achieved £232,281 in direct investment from 315 investors.

¹² Source: IWSR 2018

INDICATIVE RETURN ON INVESTMENT

With an established brand it's possible to look at performance before the influence of design, and how that changes after design has taken effect. In the case of Tidal there was no before. This means that it's not possible to make a direct comparison with the brand's performance pre-design. The whole thing was launched as a package, which included the rum itself and the energy and dynamism of the distillery partners. We wouldn't presume to claim credit for their achievements.

HOWEVER, it's possible to get to an indicative ROI by comparing Tidal's sales volumes with those of similar products, similarly priced. The average £35 rum sells around 4,000 bottles a year, and 8,000 bottles over 2 years. If Tidal had sold that many bottles that would have equated to a revenue of £287,280. It actually sold 15,000 bottles, generating £359,100. This makes an incremental revenue of £71,900.

Design costs = £10,000
Incremental revenue = £71,900
Indicative ROI = 7.19:1

So for every £1 spent on design, Tidal received incremental revenue of £7.19.

£1

indicative return on investment

RESULTS (continued)

THE PERFORMANCE OF THE RESULTS: SCALE OF EFFECT AND BREADTH OF IMPACT

By using design to rise above market clutter, Tidal spread its presence nationwide.

In an increasingly crowded category, bar owners and retailers have more rum brands available to them than they can possibly stock. But the power of the Tidal Rum brand is such that Tidal secured major distribution contracts, not just locally within the Channel Islands but nationally across the whole of the UK, from upmarket 'foodie' specialists like Daylesford to Michelin-starred Cornerstone, to 25 supermarkets, including the Co-op. Tidal has become a nationwide phenomenon.

THE CAUSE AND EFFECT OF THE DESIGN SOLUTION

The design worked by creating disruption, standout and 'talkability.'

"Upon receiving the bottle, I was instantly struck with how pretty it is. The full moon design with a gorgeous poem... speaks volumes and made me want to escape to the seaside with a rum in hand."

On In London Tidal Rum Review¹³

"Very smooth at 40% with a salty caramel flavour! Beautiful bottle too." Customer review, Master of Malt¹⁴

"Beautifully bottles the taste of adventure." Crave Magazine¹⁵

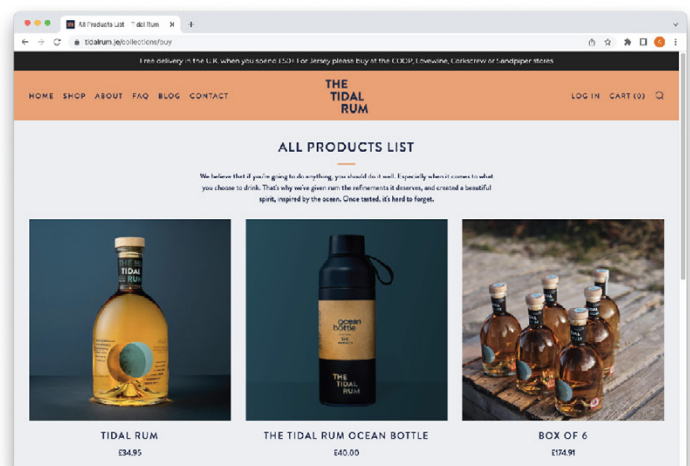
¹³ <https://onin.london/tidal-rum-review/>

¹⁴ <https://www.masterofmalt.com/rum/tidal-rum/tidal-rum/>

¹⁵ <https://cravemag.co.uk/taste-the-adventure-with-tidal-rum/>

The fledgling's budgets did not stretch to bespoke research in its first 2 years, but a number of potential suppliers carried out their own informal work to assess the brand's appeal. Cowdray Farm Shops, for example, convened a group of 30 gin/spirits drinkers to see whether they'd be interested in a £35 UK rum. On the basis of exposure to the packaging design alone, **27 expressed interest in buying the product even before tasting.**

On a wider scale, Tidal Rum now has 15,000 brand followers on social media. Many of those followers also purchase directly from Tidal, rather than buying alternative rums available locally. **Shortly after launch, direct online orders accounted for 4% of sales. At the time of writing it is now 33%.**



RESULTS (continued)

THE PROOF OF EFFECT AND ANY INFLUENCING FACTORS

- **Pricing.** A bottle of Tidal Rum typically retails for £35. Other UK-based new rum brands are similarly priced. Edinburgh's Dark Matter retails at £28–£30, while Cornwall's J Gow sells for £37–£40. Tidal Rum has no price advantage over rival brands.
- **Product.** Tidal Rum is an award-winning blend of Caribbean rums infused with local seaweed. However, neither the individual constituent rums nor the use of seaweed are unique to Tidal. For example, Pembrokeshire-based Barti Ddu (launched 2018) also uses blended Caribbean rums infused with seaweed.
- **External factors.** Covid saw an increase in home alcohol consumption. However, research by Sheffield University shows that this increase was offset by a greater drop in on-trade consumption¹⁶.
- **Marketing/events.** Like other spirits brands, Tidal took its products to music festivals. In particular, it had a presence at Plymouth's Weekender festival in August 2019. Bigger rum brands had a bigger presence at more festivals and events.
- **Distribution.** Tidal has increased its distribution greatly since launch, but in a cluttered market its branding has been a factor in achieving that distribution. Irrespective of physical distribution there has been a surge in consumers buying online directly from Tidal.

¹⁶ <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/news/new-study-reveals-how-first-lockdown-impacted-alcohol-consumption>

<https://tidalrum.je/>

ends

