



Chester Brandes,
President and CEO
of the newly-formed
Imperial Brands, Inc.

Imperial Brands

Strategizes in its Branding and Acquisitions

by Meridith May

Chester Brandes is taking on the world. As President and CEO of the newly-formed Imperial Brands, Inc.—headquartered in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida—Brandes has assembled a dream team of beverage industry sales veterans to build a world class wine and spirits company. The formidable sales team is headed up by Bob Reider, V.P., National Sales Manager who has over 35 years of experience in the wine and spirits industry.

Imperial Brand, Inc. is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Belvédère S.A., a publicly-listed French company. The principal shareholders, Christophe Trylinski and Jacques Rouvroy, were the original creators of Belvedere and Chopin vodkas.

The Belvedere Group's initial focus market was Poland, where the company's flagship brand—Sobieski Vodka—was born. "In a relatively short period of time," Brandes told THE TASTING PANEL, "Belvédère S.A. has captured 30 percent (10 million cases) of the white spirits market in Poland, the birthplace of vodka, which is quite an achievement."

Named for Poland's heroic King Jan III Sobieski, the No.1-selling premium Polish vodka and the world's seventh bestselling international vodka, according to Brandes, is now entering into the U.S. market with a unique positioning strategy. "It's time vodka drinkers knew the truth about the category," Brandes insists. "Consumers are spending upwards of \$30 a bottle for so-called super-premium vod-

kas. The reality is that they don't have to pay exorbitant prices to get great vodka. At a suggested retail price of \$10.99 for a 750 ml bottle and \$19.99 for a 1.75 liter, Sobieski Vodka offers an outstanding price/value relationship. Distilled from 100 percent Dankowski rye, a traditional grain prized by vodka connoisseurs, Sobieski Vodka has an exceptionally smooth taste delivering unparalleled quality at an affordable price," remarks Brandes.

In 2006, Belvédère S.A., one of Europe's largest producers and distributors of white spirits and wines, purchased Marie Brizard. In addition to the cordial line, Imperial Brands has plans to add California wines to its growing portfolio of brands. In anticipation of this move, Brandes has recently appointed Brad Coughlin, a 25-year wine industry veteran, as V.P., Sales Director of Wines. Belvédère S.A. also has extensive viticulture interests in Bulgaria and plans on launching a selection of premium wines from this historic wine producing country in 2008. You can practically hear the engines running when Brandes, a 33-year spirits industry veteran, speaks about his vision for Imperial Brands. The former V.P. of Cruzan International and President and CEO of Finlandia Vodka Americas has established himself in the global market as a brand architect. The superstructure is in place; the building has commenced! ■■



Brad Coughlin, a 25-year wine industry veteran, is the newly appointed V.P., Sales Director of Wines for Imperial Brands.



Sobieski trade and consumer ads are already gracing national magazines.