

**Annual Report on the Activities of the Virginia Spirits Board
and the Use of Moneys in the Virginia Spirits Promotion Fund**

Scott Harris
Chairman, Virginia Spirits Board

October 1, 2026

Annual Report on the Activities of the Virginia Spirits Board and the Use of Moneys in the Virginia Spirits Promotion Fund

PUBLICATION YEAR 2026

Document Title

Annual Report on the Activities of the Virginia Spirits Board and the Use of Moneys in the Virginia Spirits Promotion Fund

Author

Virginia Spirits Board

Legislative Mandate

Section 3.2-3011 of the Code of Virginia

Executive Summary

During the fiscal year ending June 30, 2026, the Virginia Spirits Board (Board) met five times, with a focus on continual support for both the Virginia Spirits Board Marketing Office (VSBMO) and the research and education grant program. The Virginia Spirits Board Marketing Office completed its first contract renewal option on June 30, 2024, for fiscal year (FY) 2025, and the Board exercised additional renewal options for both FY 2026 and FY 2027. The Board approved research and education grants, totaling \$452,731.47, in March 2026.

Background

The Virginia Spirits Board (Board) and the Virginia Spirits Promotion Fund (Fund) were established by the enactment of Chapters 85 and 410 of the 2020 Acts of Assembly. The Board and Fund were created to provide resources for promotion of the Virginia spirits industry by a number of means approved by an administrative board appointed by the Governor. The purpose of the Board is to foster the development of the Virginia spirits industry by expanding spirits research, increasing education, and promoting the production of ingredients necessary for alcohol distillation and the production of spirits in the Commonwealth.

Chapters 84 and 85 of the 2022 Acts of Assembly require that 20 percent of the 20 percent tax levied on alcoholic beverages sold by the Board of Directors of the Virginia Alcoholic Beverage Control Authority (VA ABC) that is attributable to the sale of spirits produced by a distiller licensee be deposited in the Fund. Chapters 84 and 85 also require the Board to submit an annual report to the Governor and General Assembly by October 1 of each year regarding the Board's activities and use of moneys in the Fund, including statistics regarding the extent to which use of moneys in the Fund has impacted spirits sales in the Commonwealth.

The Board consists of 11 members as follows: the Commissioner of Agriculture and Consumer Services (Commissioner) and the Chief Executive Officer of the VA ABC, both of whom shall serve ex officio without voting privileges, or their designees; and nine voting non-legislative citizen members who are appointed by the Governor, three of whom must be coopers or maltsters and six of whom must be owners or operators of a distillery in the Commonwealth.

The Board has the power and duty to (i) receive and dispense funds or donations from the Fund; (ii) enter into contracts for the purpose of developing new or improved markets or marketing methods for spirits products; (iii) contract for research services to improve farming practices related to the growing of ingredients necessary for alcohol distillation in Virginia; (iv) enter into agreements with any local, state, or national organization or agency engaged in education for the purpose of disseminating information on spirits projects; (v) enter into contracts with private or public entities for the purpose of developing marketing, advertising, and other promotional programs designed to promote the orderly growth of Virginia's spirits industry; (vi) rent or purchase office and laboratory space, land, equipment, and supplies as necessary to carry out its duties; (vii) employ such personnel as may be required to carry out those duties conferred by law; (viii) acquire any licenses or permits necessary for the performance of the powers and duties of the Board; (ix) cooperate with other state, regional, national, and international organizations in research, education, and promotion of the growing of ingredients necessary for alcohol production and the production of spirits in the Commonwealth and expend moneys from the Fund for such purposes; (x) adopt a general statement of policy and procedures; (xi) receive from the chairman of the Board an annual report, including a statement of total receipts and disbursements for the year, and file a copy of such report with the Commissioner; and (xii) submit an annual report to the Governor and General Assembly by October 1 of each year regarding the Board's activities and use of moneys in the Fund.

The Board is required to meet at least four times each year. The meetings of the Board are held at the call of the chairman or whenever a majority of the members so request. The Program Manager manages and conducts the activities required for the Board to carry out its mission and provides the Board with administrative support.

The Virginia Spirits Board Marketing Office (VSBMO) was established by the Board in February 2023 through a competitive request for proposals process. The Board selected Hodges Partnership, a strategic communications firm based in Richmond, to represent the VSBMO. The initial 17-month contract period began in February 2023 and concluded on June 30, 2024. The Board approved one-year contract extensions for The Hodges Partnership for fiscal year (FY) 2025, FY 2026, and FY 2027 and will evaluate the final one-year extension for FY 2028. The primary purpose of the VSBMO is to develop a long-term strategic marketing program to promote and grow the Virginia spirits industry.

Activities of the Virginia Spirits Board

The Virginia Spirits Board met five times during FY 2026. Two of the five meetings were conducted electronically in compliance with the Board’s electronic meeting policy, which was adopted on November 7, 2022. The policy was reviewed and renewed on June 9, 2026.

Pursuant to Va. Code § 3.2-3008, the purpose of the Board is to foster the development of the Virginia spirits industry by expanding spirits research, increasing education, and promoting the production of ingredients necessary for alcohol distillation and the production of spirits in the Commonwealth. The Board accomplishes this purpose through the annual research and education grant program and the VSBMO.

The Board received seven research and education grant proposals by the February 13, 2026, deadline. The Board awarded \$452,731.47 to the following entities: Virginia Distillers Association, Virginia Tech, Reservoir Distillery, Virginia Agriculture in the Classroom, the Common Grain Alliance, and SPIRITS Museum.

The VSBMO was created on February 3, 2023. The annual report from VSBMO, covering calendar year 2025, is included with this report in Appendix A.

Use Of Moneys in the Virginia Spirits Promotion Fund

Beginning in FY 2024, VA ABC began reporting and annually certifying to the Comptroller the number of cases of Virginia spirits sold in the Commonwealth. For each of those cases, 20 percent of the portion of tax collected that is attributable to the sale of spirits produced by a distiller licensee is distributed pursuant to Va. Code § 4.1-235, with 16 percent deposited into the state’s general fund and four percent allocated to the Fund.

In FY 2026, 20 percent of tax collections from sale of spirits produced by a distiller licensee was \$1,222,353.69. Of that total, \$725,840.53 is attributed to the sale of Virginia produced spirits at Virginia ABC stores, and \$496,513.16 is attributed to the sale of Virginia produced spirits by distiller licensees.

Financial Summary - Virginia Spirits Promotion Fund

Cash balance (June 30, 2025)	=	\$1,691,789.13
General Fund Deposit	+	\$1,241,193.00
Interest Earned	+	\$92,174.55
Other Income	+	\$132,287.50

Actual Expenditures – Marketing & Promotion	-	\$870,214.14
Actual Expenditures – Research & Education Grant Awards	-	\$332,747.32
Actual Expenditures – Administrative	-	\$4,998.10
Cash Balance (June 30, 2026)	=	\$1,949,484.62

Appendix A – Virginia Spirits Board Marketing Office 2025 Annual Report



Virginia Spirits Board Marketing Office

2025

ANNUAL REPORT



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Welcome

Letter from the Executive Director
Introductions
Awards

Digital Engagement

Website
Social Media
Blog
Consumer Newsletter
Digital Campaigns

Consumer Engagement

Virginia Spirits Map & Passport
Sponsorships & Exhibitor Events
Advertising Partnerships

Media Engagement

Press Releases & Media Pitches
Influencer Partnerships

Trade & Industry Engagement

Virginia ABC
Industry Newsletter
Major Campaigns

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



I am excited to present the Virginia Spirits Board Market Office's third Annual Report, covering January-December 2025. Our third year of operation allowed us the opportunity to refine our strategies and tactics of previous years while taking on new and exciting opportunities. We saw members of our original team move on to new adventures and welcomed new faces and fresh perspectives.

Overall, 2025 was full of great success as we made adjustments to successful campaigns and launched several new initiatives. We held the second year of the Virginia Cocktail Games, launched the First Landing Cup competition of Virginia-made spirits and had our first foray into international markets partnering with the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to take five distillers to Bar Convent in Berlin.

At the same time, 2025 began to see the impact of decreased alcohol sales across almost all sectors. On average, looking at 2025 vs. 2024, the alcohol industry saw a 5% decrease in sales overall, and the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States reported revenue for U.S. spirits suppliers fell by 2.2%. Industry reports have attempted to draw conclusions about the factors contributing to declining sales, and most experts agree five overarching factors are at play:

- Increased taxes and tariffs
- GLP-1 drugs reducing alcohol consumption
- Legal THC as an alcohol alternative
- *Gen Z drinking less overall*
- *End of "pantry hoarding" behavior post-allocation scarcity, specifically in the whiskey category*

While the overall trends in the industry continue to present significant challenges for the Virginia Spirits industry, we are seeing positive indicators for the industry within the commonwealth. **Sales of Virginia-made spirits in Virginia ABC stores and through Virginia ABC's online marketplace increased by 2.2% in 2025 over 2024.** Anecdotally, this tells us that the Virginia Spirits brand continues to gain traction in a highly competitive marketplace. We will continue to hone and refine our marketing and advertising programming to bolster this growth and adapt to an everchanging environment.

Jack W. Gorman

Executive Director

Virginia Spirits Board Marketing Office

INTRODUCTION

VIRGINIA SPIRITS BOARD MARKETING OFFICE

The Virginia Spirits Board Marketing Office (VSBMO) was established in February 2023 through a competitive Request for Proposals (RFP) process conducted by the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) on behalf of the Board. The Hodges Partnership, a strategic communications firm based in Richmond, Va., was awarded the contract. The initial 17-month contract period began in February 2023 and will conclude on June 30, 2024. Four one-year extensions will be evaluated on a year-by-year basis.

The primary purpose of the VSBMO is to develop a long-term strategic marketing program to promote and grow the Virginia spirits industry. The VSBMO's experience in year one revealed one overarching finding that drove our actions: Virginians are largely unaware of a burgeoning world-class spirits industry operating across the state; therefore, tremendous opportunity exists to grow right here in the commonwealth, and marketing efforts should be focused within state boundaries for the short and medium term.

Virginia Spirits Board Marketing Office

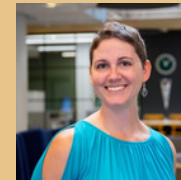
Operated by The Hodges Partnership



Jack Gorman
Executive Director



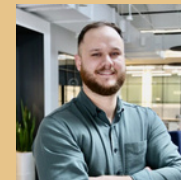
Sean Ryan
Partner/SVP, Media Relations



Erin Rebmann
Digital Marketing Manager



Amanda Christian
Senior Content Strategist



Aaron Kurz
Communications Specialist



Hillary Hammock
Operations Coordinator

INTRODUCTION

VIRGINIA SPIRITS BOARD

The Virginia Spirits Board (VSB) was established in 2020 by enactment of the Virginia General Assembly. The purpose of the Board is to foster the development of the Virginia spirits industry by expanding spirits research, increasing education and promoting the production of ingredients necessary for alcohol distillation and the production of spirits in the commonwealth.

The Board is one of 17 commodity boards under the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) and is composed of eleven members, three of whom are coopers or maltsters and six of whom are owners or operators of a distillery in the commonwealth. The remaining two members are the Commissioner of Agriculture and Consumer Services and the Chief Executive Officer of the Virginia Alcoholic Beverage Control Authority, and they serve ex officio without voting privileges.

Virginia Spirits Board Members

Scott Harris, Chair

Catoctin Creek Distillery

Vicki L. Haneberg, Vice Chair

Virago Spirits

Andrew Yancey, Treasurer

Tarnished Truth

Kelly Gordon

Springfield Distillery

Matthew Harris

Grain producer

Tom Murray

MurLarkey Distilled Spirits

Jeff Bloem

Murphy & Rude Malting Company

Joshua Chandler

Speyside Bourbon Cooperage

Tim Nichols

Appalachian Heritage Distillery

Dale Farino, ex officio

Virginia ABC

Charles Green

Virginia Dept. of Agriculture and Consumer Services

AWARDS

PUBLIC RELATIONS SOCIETY OF AMERICA (PRSA) AWARDS

- ★ Commonwealth Awards – Extended Events
The Virginia Cocktail Games Hits its Stride in Year Two
- ★ Commonwealth Awards – Consumer Products/Services
First Landing Cup: Presenting the Best of Virginia Spirits
- ★ Capital Awards – Influencer Marketing
First Landing Cup: Let the Influencer Be the Judge
- ★ Capital Awards – Social: Organic
The Viral Raccoon

THE ADVERTISING CLUB OF RICHMOND: RICHMOND SHOW

- ★ Bronze Award - Interactive Category
The “Make it Virginia-Made” Video Series

AMERICAN ADVERTISING FEDERATION (AAF) ROANOKE: WESTERN VIRGINIA ADVERTISING AWARDS

- ★ Silver Addy Award - Webisode Series
The “Make it Virginia-Made” Video Series



The trophy icon indicates award-winning work. Look for it throughout the report to learn more about each recognized project.

IN-STATE SALES OF VIRGINIA-MADE SPIRITS CALENDAR YEARS 2024 VS. 2025

These numbers were provided by the Virginia Alcohol Beverage Control Authority. The source of the data for Virginia ABC retail and online sales is the Virginia ABC data warehouse, which is fed by point of sale machines in each store and the online marketplace. The source of the data for distillery store sales is the culmination of reporting provided to Virginia ABC by individual distilleries.

YOY TOTAL SALES 2024 VS 2025

	2024	2025
Distillery store sales	\$15,504,017	\$14,696,816
Virginia ABC retail store and online sales	\$21,006,748	\$21,486,518

\$36,183,334 Total Sales

Compared to \$36,510,765 in 2024

YOY SEPTEMBER SALES 2024 VS 2025

	2024	2025
Distillery store sales	\$1,938,390	\$1,585,186
Virginia ABC retail store and online sales	\$2,339,007	\$2,196,657

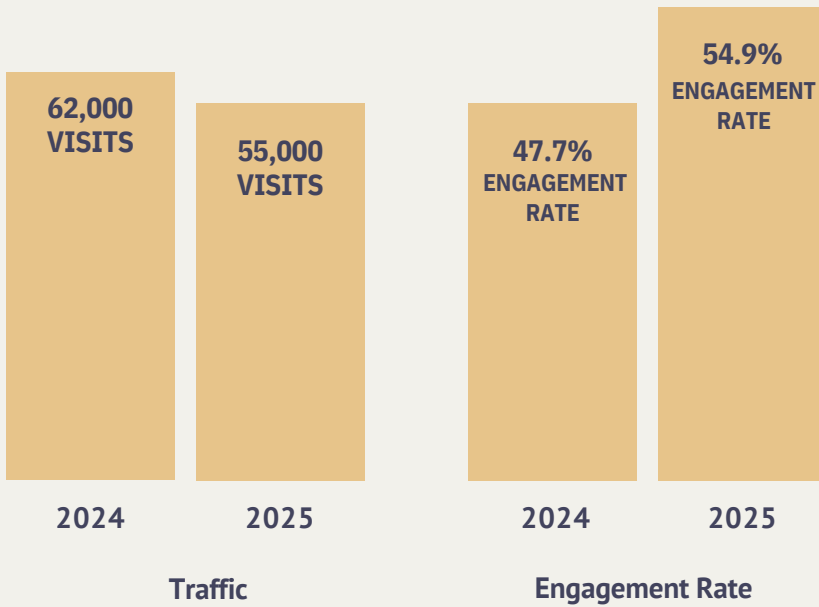
\$3,781,843 Total Sales

Compared to \$4,277,397 in 2024

DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT

VIRGINIASPIRITS.ORG

VirginiaSpirits.org serves as the face of the Virginia Spirits industry. In 2025, we improved the site's structure, functionality and user experience. Cocktail recipe pages were reorganized and reformatted to improve searchability and help users more easily discover Virginia-made spirits and cocktails. We also implemented Search Engine Optimization (SEO) enhancements across all distillery profile pages, which contributed to a significant increase in website traffic and visibility across web searches. In addition, we refreshed the site's layout and design to create a cleaner, more modern presence with improved User Experience/User Interface across both desktop and mobile.



SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media continued to play a key role in promoting Virginia Spirits throughout 2025, helping increase consumer awareness, highlight participating distilleries and drive engagement across statewide campaigns and initiatives. Through educational content, campaign promotions, event coverage, cocktail features, video storytelling and trend-driven creative content, Virginia Spirits expanded its digital reach and strengthened connections with consumers across multiple platforms. During the year, Virginia Spirits also launched its LinkedIn presence to better connect with industry professionals, partners and stakeholders.

Content throughout the year supported major initiatives including Virginia Spirits Month, the First Landing Cup, the Virginia Cocktail Games and seasonal tourism promotions while showcasing the people, products and stories behind Virginia's distilling industry. Strategic social media efforts helped expand audience growth, increase engagement and reinforce Virginia's position as the Birthplace of American Spirits.

Beginning in 2025, social media reporting metrics changed due to platform reporting updates. As a result, certain metrics are not directly comparable to prior years.



SOCIAL MEDIA TOOLKITS

Throughout 2025, the Virginia Spirits Board Marketing Office (VSBMO) created easy-to-use digital toolkits designed to help distilleries amplify statewide campaigns and strengthen their own marketing efforts. Each toolkit featured editable and ready-to-download social media graphics, suggested social copy, branding assets and promotional guidance to support consistent messaging across the Virginia Spirits network.

WE WENT VIRAL

A lighthearted raccoon-themed social media post unexpectedly became one of Virginia Spirits' most successful organic content moments of 2025, generating significant engagement, shares and audience interaction across platforms. The viral post helped introduce new audiences to Virginia Spirits through humor and relatable storytelling while showcasing the value of creative, personality-driven content in expanding brand awareness and increasing social media reach.



VIRGINIA SPIRITS BLOG

The Virginia Spirits blog was a valuable storytelling and educational platform, highlighting the people, products and experiences shaping Virginia's distilling industry. Blog content helped promote participating distilleries, showcase seasonal cocktails and travel experiences and provide consumers with deeper insight into Virginia-made spirits and the commonwealth's growing spirits culture.

Articles throughout the year supported major campaigns and initiatives while improving website engagement and search visibility through consistent, SEO-focused content. The blog played an important role in driving traffic to the Virginia Spirits website, supporting tourism efforts and reinforcing Virginia's position as the Birthplace of American Spirits.

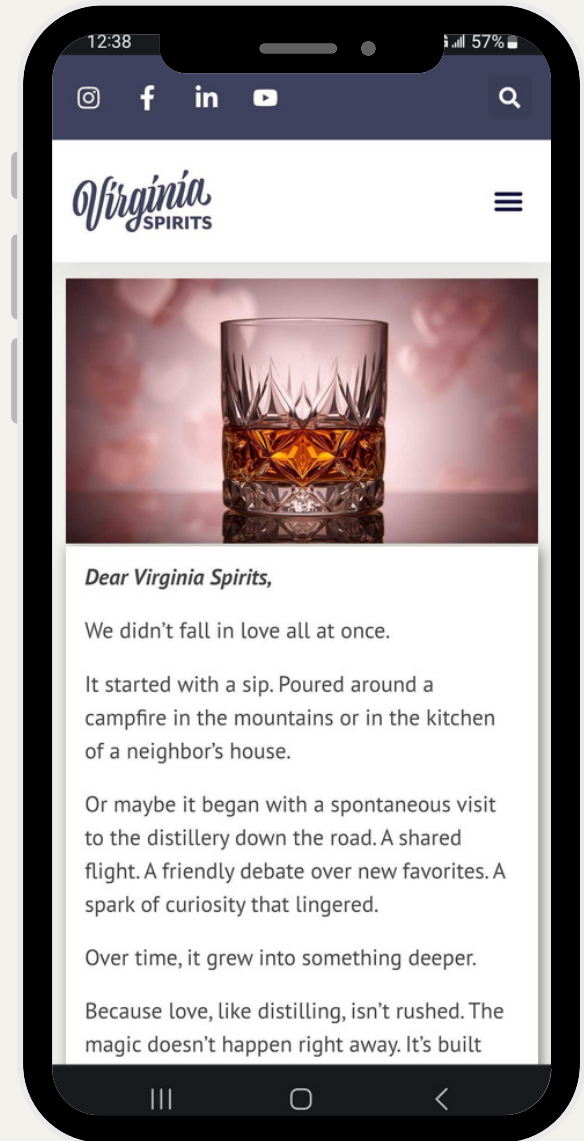
BLOG TOPICS INCLUDE:

- 1 Seasonal/Holidays
- 2 Experiences
- 3 Cocktails
- 4 Education
- 5 Campaigns
Virginia Spirits Month, First Landing Cup, Virginia Cocktail Games, etc.

POSTS
22

NEW READERS
3,722

TOTAL VIEWS
5,407



CONSUMER NEWSLETTER

The Virginia Spirits consumer newsletter served as a key communications channel for engaging consumers and promoting Virginia distilleries, events and tourism experiences. Efforts were focused on strategic audience growth, leveraging major initiatives including the Virginia Cocktail Games, the Virginia Spirits Passport and in-person event activations to expand the subscriber base and introduce new audiences to Virginia Spirits.

As the audience grew, newsletter open rates remained near the industry benchmark, reflecting continued audience interest and content relevance. Ongoing refinements to the newsletter's design, structure and user experience also helped optimize engagement. Each newsletter featured a seasonal introduction, events, cocktails, industry news and curated content highlights from other channels like social media. Distillery spotlights continued to introduce consumers to the people and products behind Virginia Spirits while encouraging deeper exploration.

TOTAL SUBSCRIBERS

11,496

OPEN RATE

35.10%

SUBSCRIBER GROWTH

28%



Keep the Spirit(s) Flowing! 🍷

Virginia Spirits Month may have wrapped up, but celebrating local doesn't stop in September. With crisp fall days ahead, it's the perfect time to discover new seasonal pours, revisit your favorite bottles and plan your next distillery adventure.

And if you're looking for a chance to sip and savor in good company, don't miss the [Taste of NoVA festival](#) coming up soon (see below). Here's to keeping the spirit of Virginia alive — every season of the year!



DIGITAL CAMPAIGNS

Our paid digital strategy focused on growing awareness of Virginia Spirits with a focus on Virginia residents. Major digital campaigns promoted Virginia Spirits Month, the First Landing Cup and the Virginia Cocktail Games, which all ran across Meta, Google and Pinterest. Micro campaigns promoted the Virginia Spirits Guide and the Virginia Spirits consumer newsletter to encourage engagement. Our mix of campaigns helped us gather key data about our audience, potential audience and audience behavior.

In 2025 we instituted the use of a new platform, Placer.ai, to help better target our digital marketing dollars by better identifying current customers and where opportunities exist to increase penetration. This tool provides invaluable insights into distillery and Virginia ABC foot traffic, allowing us to better define our target personas and audiences.

VIRGINIA SPIRITS MONTH

During Virginia Spirits Month 2025, we ran a targeted digital campaign promoting the Virginia Spirits Month 20% Off Sale-a-bration, encouraging consumers to explore and purchase Virginia-made spirits throughout the month.

32,114	2,744	8.54%
IMPRESSIONS	CLICKS	CTR

FIRST LANDING CUP



We ran a targeted digital campaign announcing the winners of the 2025 First Landing Cup, highlighting award-winning Virginia spirits and driving consumer awareness of the competition statewide.

646,092	321,296
IMPRESSIONS	REACH

VIRGINIA COCKTAIL GAMES



During the 2025 Virginia Cocktail Games, we promoted a digital campaign encouraging consumers to vote for their favorite cocktails while highlighting participating bartenders and Virginia-made spirits.

108,426	6,408	5.31%
IMPRESSIONS	CLICKS	CTR

MAKE IT VIRGINIA MADE



The Make It Virginia-Made series promoted Virginia-made spirits through bartender features and cocktail storytelling, encouraging consumers to discover local distilleries and experience the people and products shaping Virginia's craft spirits industry.

37,503	16,048	307
IMPRESSIONS	REACH	SHARES

CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT

VIRGINIA SPIRITS MAP AND GUIDE

The Virginia Spirits Guide and Map remained an important promotional and tourism resource for the Virginia Spirits industry in 2025. Distributed at events, welcome centers, partner locations and industry activations across the commonwealth, the guide provided consumers and visitors with an easy way to discover Virginia distilleries, plan travel experiences and learn more about Virginia-made spirits.

40K+ DISTRIBUTED TO DISTILLERIES, WELCOME CENTERS,
VIRGINIA ABC STORES & AT EVENTS

VIRGINIA SPIRITS PASSPORT

The Virginia Spirits Passport Program served as a key consumer engagement initiative, encouraging exploration of Virginia distilleries and driving tourism, visitation and direct connections between consumers and producers across the commonwealth.

Designed as a digital check-in experience, the Passport Program allowed users to discover participating distilleries, earn points through visits and redeem rewards while learning more about Virginia-made spirits.

Throughout the year, the Passport Program supported broader Virginia Spirits marketing efforts by promoting distillery events, seasonal campaigns and educational content while providing valuable consumer insights that helped inform future tourism and marketing initiatives.

In 2025, the Passport Program introduced a QR code-based check-in system that streamlined participation and improved the visitor experience. Distilleries received promotional materials to help drive passport sign-ups and check-ins, while the rewards program shifted toward quarterly sweepstakes and destination-based experiences. These enhancements increased accessibility, encouraged engagement at lower point levels and further supported distillery tourism across Virginia.



PASS PERFORMANCE 2025



SPONSORSHIPS AND EXHIBITOR EVENTS

The Virginia Spirits Board Marketing Office (VSBMO) served as a sponsor, exhibitor or active participant at many events and industry gatherings throughout 2025. These efforts help to increase awareness of Virginia Spirits, promote participating distilleries and engage directly with consumers, hospitality professionals and tourism partners statewide, nationally and internationally.

Through these partnerships and activations, VSBMO secured sponsor visibility, distributed Virginia Spirits maps and promotional materials, promoted the Virginia Spirits Passport Program and provided educational information about Virginia-made spirits and distillery experiences across the commonwealth.

Roanoke Restaurant Week

Taste of Northern Virginia

Virginia Beach Restaurant Week

Black RVA Annual Awards Banquet

Lynchburg Restaurant Week

Richmond Triangle Players Theater

Charlottesville Restaurant Week

The Virginia Bourbon Invitational

Best of Charlottesville

Wytheville Convention and Visitors Bureau Annual Tourism Summit

Style Magazine People's Party

Virginia Distilled at the Virginia Museum of History and Culture

DC Cocktail Fest

VA1 Governor's Tourism Summit

*Association of Communications Officers
of State Departments of Agriculture*

Bar Convent Berlin

ADVERTISING PARTNERSHIPS

All advertising efforts were consumer focused in 2025. We utilized a wide range of tools and tactics to communicate our messaging to Virginia's spirits drinkers. We made a concerted effort to ensure advertising resources amplify campaign messaging and reach every corner of the state. Advertising channels in 2025 included print, radio, billboards, digital, video and television. Wherever possible, VSBMO advertising includes responsible consumption messaging: "Please enjoy Virginia Spirits responsibly."

Virginia Public Media

Northern Virginia Magazine

Virginia Distilled Magazine

Cville Weekly

American Whiskey Magazine

Virginia Living Magazine

Edible Blue Ridge Magazine

*Virginia Restaurant, Lodging, and Tourism Association:
Slice, Virginia Travel Guide, Inside Virginia Hospitality*

Lamar Communications (billboards in Tidewater region)

Comcast (NoVA, Western VA, Southern VA)

Lakes Media (radio in Southern Virginia)

NBC 12 Richmond



MEDIA ENGAGEMENT

PRESS RELEASES AND MEDIA PITCHES

VSBMO distributed press releases and coordinated media outreach to local, regional and national publications, resulting in earned media coverage to help increase visibility for Virginia-made spirits, drive consumer engagement and strengthen industry recognition. Media efforts supported key initiatives including Virginia Spirits Month, the First Landing Cup and the Virginia Cocktail Games.

These communications highlighted Virginia distilleries, industry achievements, statewide campaigns, educational initiatives and consumer events while positioning Virginia as the Birthplace of American Spirits.

TOPICS HIGHLIGHTED

- The Virginia Spirits Board Marketing Office
- The Virginia Spirits Trail
- Winners of the First Landing Cup
- The Virginia Cocktail Games Competition
- Tariff Impacts on the Industry
- Featured Distilleries

2025 PRESS COVERAGE

DISTILLER™

n p r one

AMERICAN
WHISKEY

THE FIELD

The Virginian-Pilot

VIRGINIA
LIVING

12
On Your Side

6

Richmond richmondmag.com **mag**

THE **VIRGINIAN**  **REVIEW**

Richmond Times-Dispatch

1140
NEWSRADIO
WRVA

10
WAVY.com

Richmond
BizSENSE

INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION FOR VIRGINIA WHISKEY

In 2025, Virginia's growing reputation as a world-class whiskey destination received international recognition when UK whiskey writer Jonathan Ray featured several Virginia distilleries in *The Field*, one of the United Kingdom's most respected sporting and lifestyle publications.

After traveling throughout the United States in search of exceptional American whiskey, Ray dedicated a portion of his article, "Make Mine a Double," to Virginia producers, highlighting both the quality of their spirits and the strength of the commonwealth's distilling community.

His coverage showcased Virginia's ability to produce award-winning bourbons, rye whiskeys and innovative grain-to-glass spirits that can stand alongside some of the nation's most celebrated whiskey regions.

The article concluded with perhaps the strongest endorsement of all:

"Many of these gorgeous whiskies are now finding their way across the pond and, although nobody loves Kentucky bourbon more than I do, I urge you to look towards the bourbons, ryes and single malts of, say, Oregon, Tennessee, Texas and, of course, Virginia."

For Virginia's distilling industry, the feature served as valuable international exposure, helping introduce Virginia-made spirits to new audiences while reinforcing the commonwealth's position as the Birthplace of American Spirits.

DISTILLERIES VISITED

- George Washington's Mount Vernon Distillery
- Open Road Distilling Co.
- Virginia Distillery Company
- Catoctin Creek Distilling Company
- Copper Fox Distillery
- A. Smith Bowman Distillery
- Reservoir Distillery

THE FIELD

“Since my liver-function test result was just this minute come back normal, I know you'd be pleased, I'm celebrating with a large Virginia Distillery Co Courage & Conviction Single Malt.”

- Jonathan Ray, *The Field*

INFLUENCER PARTNERSHIPS

In addition to traditional media outreach, the VSBMO partnered with Virginia influencers to create content that focused on Virginia spirits and resonated with their respective audiences.

SAILOR GUEVARA



Award-winning spirits writer, judge and influencer based in Salem, Massachusetts, with an engaged social audience of more than 12,500 followers and editorial reach exceeding 250,000 readers through American Whiskey Magazine. Sailor partnered with Virginia Spirits to document the **First Landing Cup** through social media storytelling and editorial coverage, helping introduce Virginia spirits to a national audience

24K+

VIEWS

12K+

INTERACTIONS

25K+

READERS

LAUREN Z RAY

Richmond-based travel and lifestyle creator with an audience of more than 25,000 followers across social media. During **Virginia Spirits Month**, Lauren partnered with Virginia Spirits to create a series of reels featuring Mt. Defiance Cidery & Distillery, MurLarkey Distilled Spirits and Virago Spirits, sharing tasting experiences, cocktail inspiration and behind-the-scenes looks at Virginia's craft spirits industry.

16K+

VIEWS

1.5K+

INTERACTIONS

307

SHARES

VA FOODIE

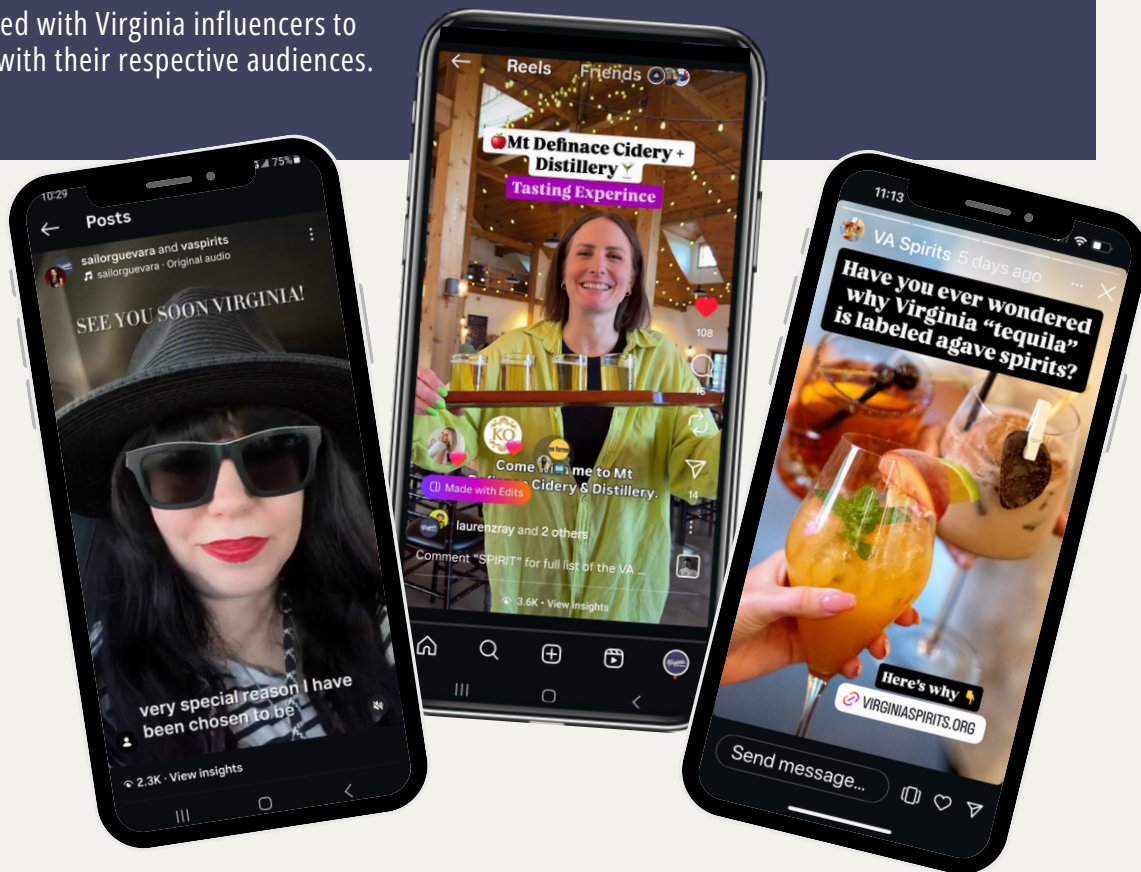
Virginia-based food, beverage and travel media brand with a combined audience of more than 56,900 followers. Through its website, email newsletter and social media channels, VA Foodie helped promote **Virginia Spirits Month**, the Virginia Spirits Passport and Virginia-made spirits to an audience passionate about local food and drink experiences.

41,435

IMPRESSIONS

1,109

ENGAGEMENTS



TRADE & INDUSTRY ENGAGEMENT

VIRGINIA ABC

As the only retailer of distilled spirits in the commonwealth, Virginia ABC is arguably the VSBMO's most important and valued partner. We remain grateful for the many people within the organization who share our goal of seeing growth in Virginia's spirits industry.

2025 provided opportunities to strengthen existing partnerships and to build new opportunities. One of the largest joint initiatives each year is September's Virginia Spirits Month "Sale-A-Bration," which encourages consumers to support local distilleries through a statewide discount on participating Virginia-made spirits at Virginia ABC stores. As marketing resources at Virginia ABC have dwindled, we have worked creatively and collaboratively to find new avenues to feature Virginia-made products in retail stores.

The "Sale-A-Bration" during Virginia Spirits Month continues to be our largest and most impactful joint program. In 2025, Virginia ABC continued to promote the event with digital and in-store marketing and worked with the VSBMO to place more than 10,000 bottle tags on sale products during the month of September.

New for 2025, we worked closely with Virginia ABC to feature top winners of the First Landing Cup in many retail stores. The Authority facilitated the placement of Virginia Spirits displays in the state's top 30 stores, brought in new and additional products from winning distilleries and featured winners in-store and online.

We continue to work closely with Virginia ABC to expand dedicated Virginia-Made sections within many store locations, helping consumers more easily discover Virginia-produced spirits.



INDUSTRY NEWSLETTER

The industry newsletter continued to serve as an important communications tool for reaching Virginia distilleries and industry partners throughout 2025. While direct outreach remained an important part of engagement efforts, the newsletter functioned as a centralized, comprehensive source for timely updates, industry opportunities, campaign information and partner resources. A dedicated section was introduced to amplify announcements and resources from Virginia ABC and the Virginia Distillers Association.

Industry trends, conference takeaways and relevant learnings also were shared to help keep partners informed of broader developments impacting the spirits landscape. Distributed monthly, the newsletter continues to be refined with a more streamlined, clickable format designed to encourage readership and engagement.

TOTAL SUBSCRIBERS

295

OPEN RATE

27.20%

CLICK THROUGH RATE

7.6%



Dear Virginia Distilleries,

Happy almost Virginia Spirits Month! We have an exciting period ahead of us promoting the Virginia ABC Sale-A-Bration and what makes Virginia Spirits so special. Our comprehensive marketing roll-out will include email campaigns to consumers and trade, social media and blog content, digital and traditional paid advertising across markets, media relations and so much more!



Keep reading for the full details, but here's the newsletter at a glance:

- Learn more and [sign up for Virginia Distilled](#), the signature Virginia Spirits Month event on September 13 in Richmond.
- Scroll down to stay abreast of VDA legislative happenings!
- Confirm your participation in Virginia ABC's Black Friday Sale by emailing [John Moreland](#) and [Erin Mitchell](#). Due 8/22!
- Save the dates for the next Virginia Spirits Board meeting, first-ever Virginia Spirits Summit & Conference and the 2026 First Landing Cup competition!
- Get the [Virginia Spirits Month marketing toolkit](#) and learn best practices to make the most of the Sale-A-Bration next month!
- Vote for your favorite cocktails in the [Virginia Cocktail Games](#) once per day through Aug. 19. Stay tuned to see who from each region will make it to the live round at Virginia Distilled!

MAJOR CAMPAIGNS

The VSBMO achieves our goals through a sustained series of activities and marketing campaigns throughout the year. Each activity, program or campaign likely includes components of each of the strategies outlined in this report.

Each year, we anticipate several campaigns will play a dominant role and span all engagement touch points: The Virginia Cocktail Games, The First Landing Cup Spirits Competition and Virginia Spirits Month.

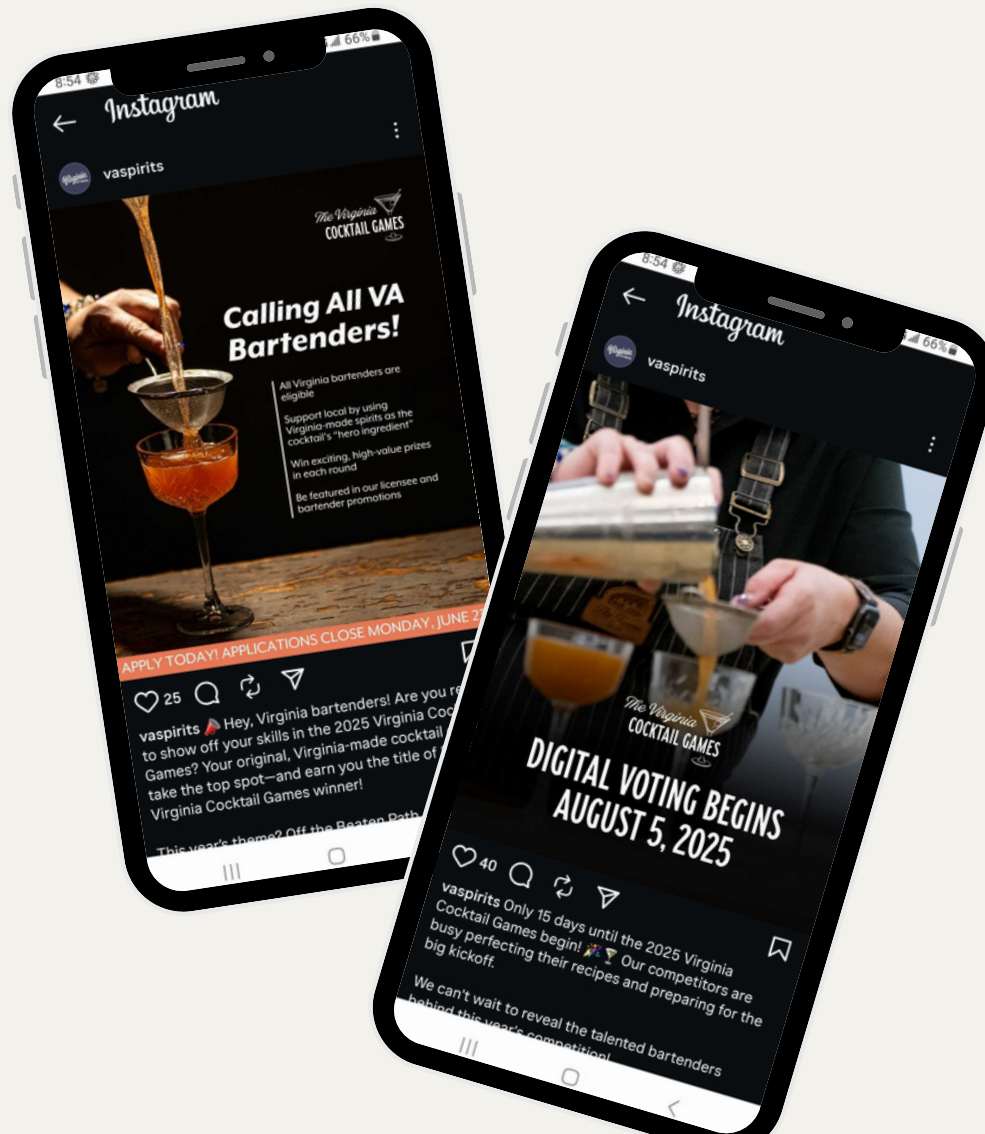




VIRGINIA COCKTAIL GAMES

The Virginia Cocktail Games is a multi-phase marketing campaign developed by the Virginia Spirits Board Marketing Office to strengthen trade relationships, drive consumer engagement and elevate awareness of Virginia-made spirits.

Running June through September 2025, the Games were intentionally structured as extended programming rather than a single event. The campaign began with trade outreach, expanded into statewide digital voting and culminated in a live competition at Virginia Distilled, the flagship Virginia Spirits Month celebration in Richmond.



22 BARTENDERS COMPETED

19 LICENSEES REPRESENTED

18K+ TOTAL # OF VOTES

101K+ SOCIAL IMPRESSIONS

23K+ WEBSITE VISITS



FIRST LANDING CUP COMPETITION

In 2025, the Virginia Spirits Board Marketing Office launched the First Landing Cup, Virginia's first blind-judged spirits competition. Designed as a three-day industry event in Richmond, the program convened expert judges for rigorous evaluation, immersive hospitality and relationship building. The goal was clear: Establish third-party credibility for Virginia spirits, strengthen industry alignment and build a repeatable platform capable of long-term reputation building and promotion.

108 SPIRITS SUBMITTED

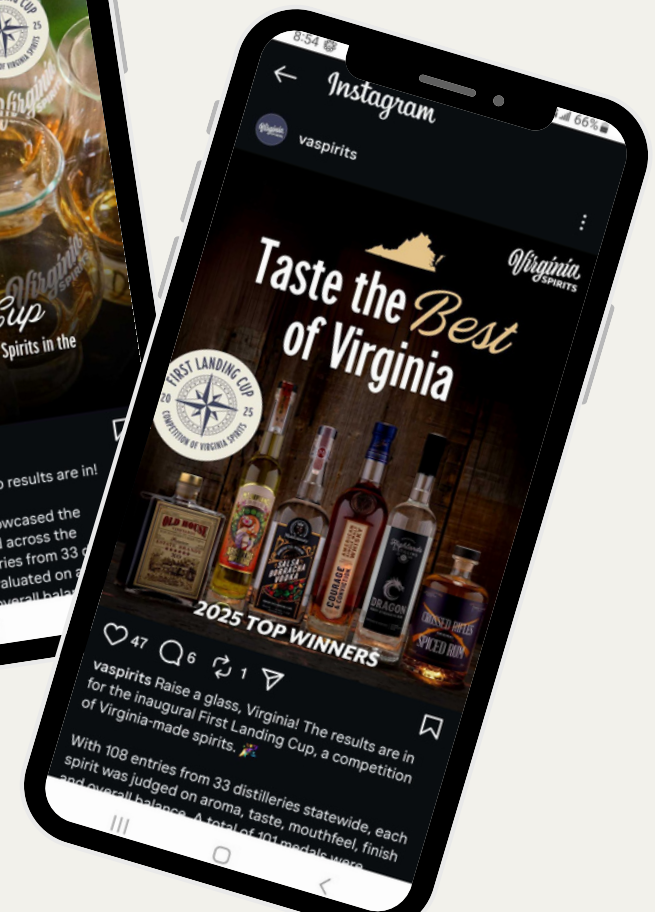
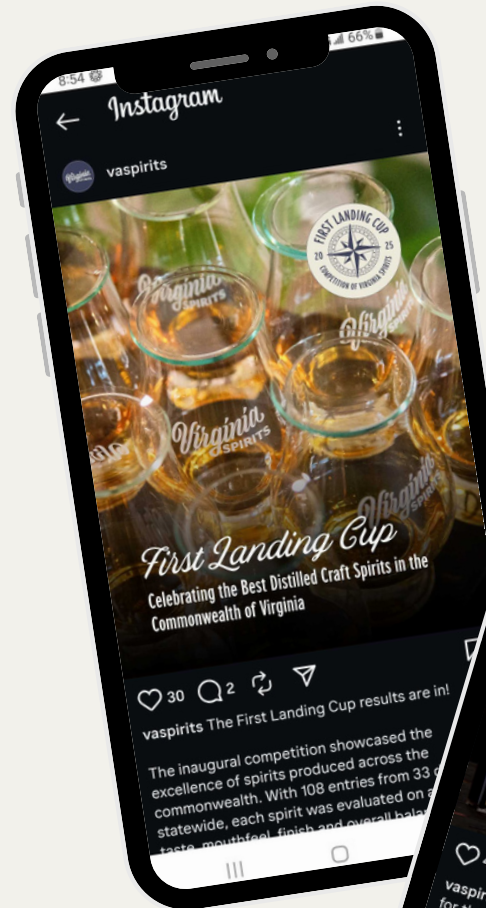
33 DISTILLERIES PARTICIPATED

21 JUDGES

101 MEDALS AWARDED

24K+ SOCIAL IMPRESSIONS

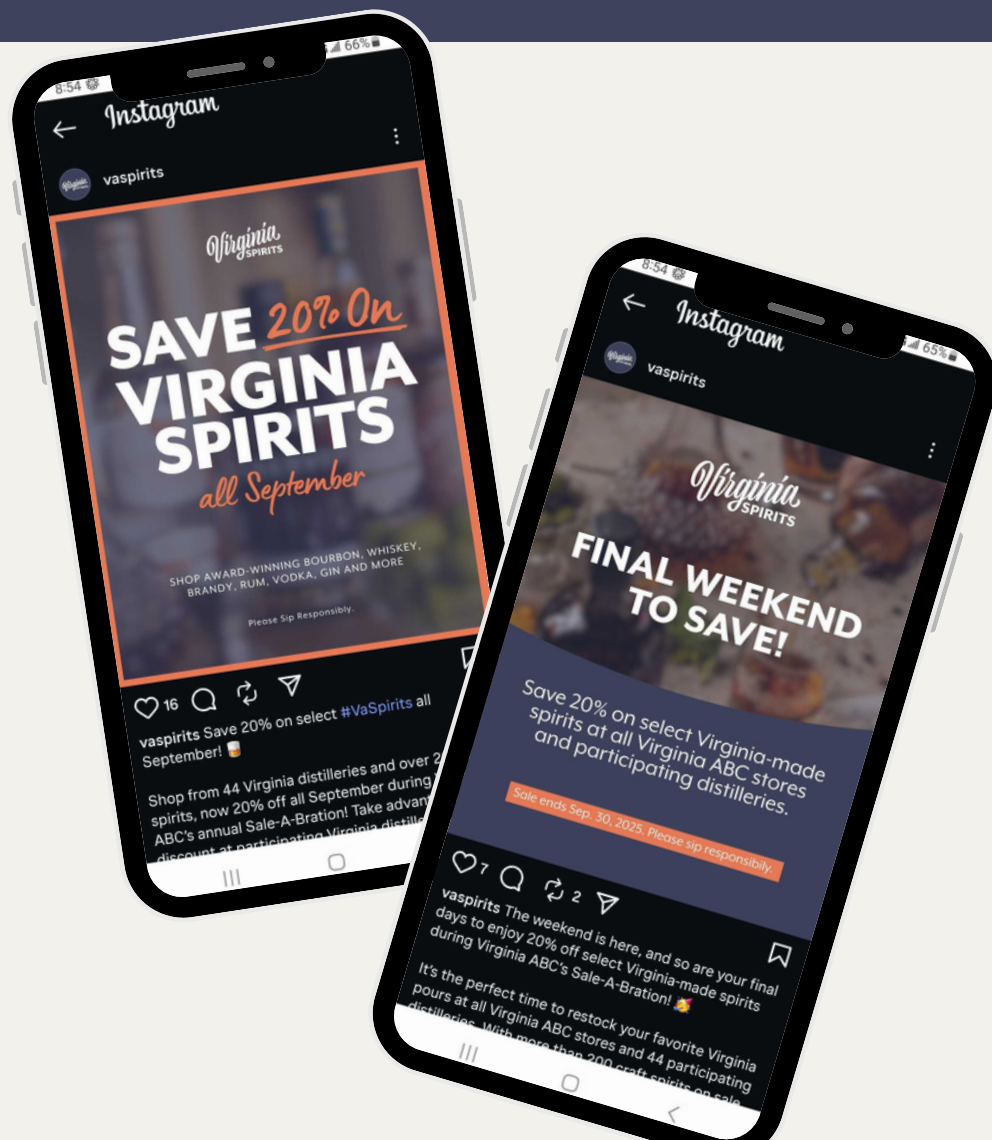
1,278 WEBSITE VISITS



VIRGINIA SPIRITS MONTH

September is Virginia Spirits Month, a month-long celebration of the distilleries, makers and craft spirits that define Virginia as the Birthplace of American Spirits. Across the commonwealth, Virginia distilleries and the Virginia ABC come together to encourage consumers to sip local, discover new favorites and support Virginia-made products.

Throughout the month, many participating distilleries and Virginia ABC stores offer a 20% discount on select Virginia-made spirits, making it one of the best times of year to explore the state's growing craft spirits scene. From award-winning bourbons and whiskeys to innovative gins, vodkas, rums and ready-to-drink cocktails, Virginia Spirits Month highlights the quality, creativity and agricultural heritage behind every bottle.



40+ DISTILLERIES PARTICIPATED

\$1.8M+ TOTAL SALES

80K+ BOTTLES SOLD

101K+ SOCIAL IMPRESSIONS

10K+ WEBSITE VISITS



Virginia Spirits Board Marketing Office
Operated by The Hodges Partnership

3301 West Moore St.
Richmond, Virginia 23230

(804) 788-6899

VirginiaSpirits.org
@VaSpirits
info@virginiaspirts.org

Please enjoy Virginia Spirits responsibly.