PUSHPULL · FOUNDER'S FIELD GUIDE

THE FIRST 90 DAYS

A founder's playbook for going from first placement to first reorder

For the founder in one or two markets, doing every job themselves, who needs the next ninety days to count.

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A LETTER BEFORE THE WORK BEGINS

To the Founder Holding This

Ninety days from now, your brand will not be famous. Let's get that out of the way on page one, because every playbook that promises otherwise was written to be sold, not used. What the next ninety days can do is something better: they can make you a brand with a route. A short list of accounts that know your name, a shelf you have stood in front of, a distributor conversation you walk into carrying proof instead of hope.

I have spent 39 years in this business, from riding routes as a young rep to running categories and national accounts for some of the biggest names in beverage. I have watched hundreds of founders launch. The ones who made it were almost never the ones with the best liquid or the biggest raise. They were the ones who treated the first ninety days like a route to be ridden instead of a lottery ticket to be scratched.

This book is that route. Four ways of thinking, one operating system, four tools you can run on a Monday, and a ninety-day plan with three honest intentions. None of it requires money you do not have. All of it requires showing up when the showing up is boring.

Nobody outworks you. Let's prove it on the street, not on the internet.

Truthfully,

Sam

THE LAY OF THE LAND

The Road Your Bottle Has to Travel

Beverage alcohol is not like selling candles. Between you and the person who drinks your product stands a legal structure called the three-tier system: you make it, a distributor moves it, a licensed retailer sells it. You cannot skip the middle in most states, and you cannot pay the end. Those two facts shape everything in this book.

The three-tier system, and the founder's real job inside it.

Here is the part nobody explains on day one. Your product and your invoices flow to the right in that picture. But the energy that makes any of it move flows to the left: a drinker asks a bartender, a bartender tells a buyer, a buyer calls a distributor rep, and suddenly the distributor who would not return your email is asking about your brand. Push wins the account. Pull wins the consumer. You need both, and for ninety days, you are both departments.

WHAT IS IN THIS PLAYBOOK

The Route Map

Part I · The Mindset

Four ways of thinking that separate the founders who get reorders from the founders who get compliments.

Part II · The Operating System

Push, Pull, Proof: the three-part loop you will run every week, and how each part actually works.

Part III · The Frameworks

Four diagnostics you can run on a Monday morning: the Push/Pull Score, the Two-Market Test, the Reorder Ledger, and the 20-Minute Compliance Pass.

Part IV · The 90-Day Plan

Three thirty-day blocks: Get Honest, Get in the Truck, Get a Reorder.

The Back Pocket

Scripts, the bingo card, the pin-up daily card, and a glossary of the words the trade uses when they think you are not listening.

PART I

The Mindset

Tactics are cheap. You can find a hundred lists of what to post and where to pour. What decides your first ninety days is what you believe about the work, because belief is what you fall back on at four in the afternoon when the buyer did not show and the cooler in your trunk is sweating. Four principles. Earn them before you spend a dollar.

Principle 1: Depth beats breadth

The most common way a young brand dies is not failure. It is dilution. A case here, a case there, fourteen accounts across three states, none of them visited twice. On paper it looks like growth. On the street it looks like nothing, because in every one of those neighborhoods you are a stranger.

A brand that is everywhere thinly is nowhere.

Pick two markets you can physically stand in. Not the two biggest. The two where you know people, where you can be at the account in under ninety minutes, where the bartender will pour you a favor. Then go deep enough that the neighborhood cannot ignore you.

- Two markets, chosen because you can work them, not because they impress investors.
- Twenty-five target accounts total, written down by name, not 'bars in Austin.'
- Every dollar and every hour goes inside those lines until the reorders say otherwise.

> **SAM SAYS**
> *“When a founder tells me they are in six states, I hear that they are homeless in six states.”*

Principle 2: The reorder is the whole game

Your first order from an account is not a win. I am sorry, but it needs saying that plainly. A first order is a favor, a flyer, a buyer taking a small chance because you were likable on a Tuesday. The shelf is loaded with brands that got a first order and were quietly gone in a season.

> ***The first order is a favor. The reorder is a business.***

The reorder means a stranger picked you off a crowded shelf, the account noticed, and the account's money voted yes a second time. Everything in this playbook aims at that moment. It is the only scoreboard that cannot be argued with, and it is the one number a distributor respects without a slide deck.

WAR STORY · STOP ELEVEN

> Early in my career I rode routes with a rep who never once asked an account 'how are sales?' At stop eleven, a corner store, he walked straight to the shelf, counted facings with his finger, checked the dust, and said to the owner: 'You moved four since my last stop. I will put six on the next truck.' The owner just nodded. That rep taught me the whole industry in one move: the shelf already knows the answer. Your job is to go look at it before you ask anybody anything.

Principle 3: You are the brand until the shelf can speak

In year one, nobody buys your brand. They buy you. The buyer takes the meeting because you were polite and persistent. The bartender hand-sells your bottle because you remembered her name and her dog's name. The drinker tries it because your post sounded like a person, not a press release.

Nobody buys from a logo. They buy from the person who showed up.

This is why your content has to sound like you, why you pour at the tastings yourself in the early days, and why the founder story is not marketing fluff. It is the product, until velocity takes over the talking.

- Post in first person. 'We are thrilled to announce' is how brands sound when nobody is home.
- Be physically present in your two markets every single week.
- Thank retail loudly and freely, and never pay them. Featuring an account for free is legal and priceless. Paying one is how licenses die.

Principle 4: Just pick up the phone

Somewhere in the last decade, founders started treating the phone like a last resort, something you try after the fourth unanswered email and the third ignored DM. Flip it. The beverage business runs on voices and handshakes. Email is for confirming what a conversation already decided.

Email is where asks go to be ignored.

- Buyer went quiet? Call.
- Distributor rep vague about your reorder? Call.
- Not sure if the tasting is still on Saturday? Call.
- Scared to call? That is the signal it matters. Call.

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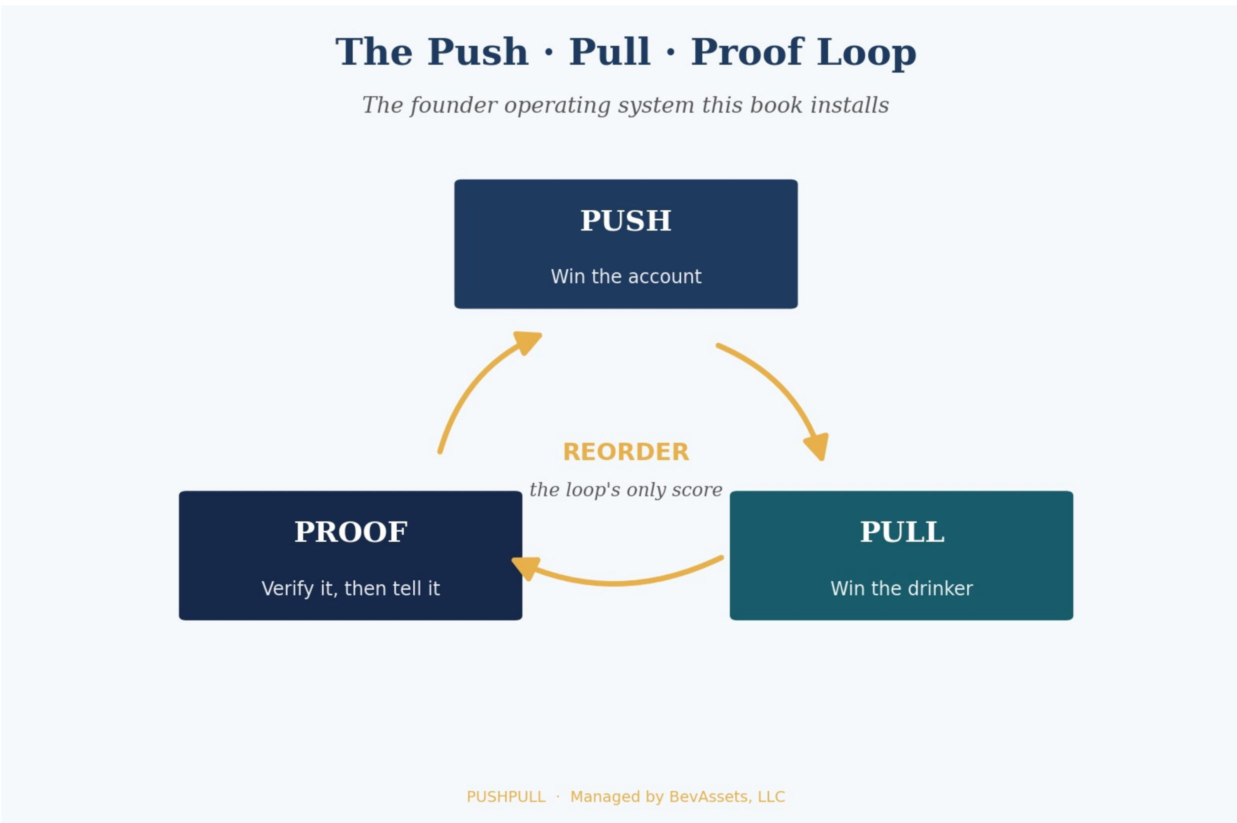
PART II

The Operating System: Push, Pull, Proof

Mindset without a system is a motivational poster. Here is the loop you will run every week for ninety days and, honestly, for the life of the brand. Three parts, each feeding the next.



The loop. The reorder in the middle is the only score that counts.

Chapter 1: The Push, winning the account

The push is trade work: getting a buyer to say yes, getting the bottle on the shelf or the menu, and eventually getting a distributor to carry you with intent. It starts with a target list, and the target list starts with honesty.

Twenty-five accounts across your two markets: the ones where your drinker already stands, not the trophy accounts that impress your friends.

Your pitch is thirty seconds and it is not about you. A buyer hears a hundred founders a month say 'award-winning' and 'passion.' What she almost never hears is a founder who did the homework: what it costs, what she makes on it, who in her neighborhood is already asking for this kind of product, and what you personally will do to move it off her shelf.

> **SCENARIO: THE TUESDAY WALK-IN**
>
> *A founder walks into an independent package store at 2 p.m. on a Tuesday, the quietest hour of the week. She asks for the buyer by name, because she called ahead to learn it. Two minutes: here is the bottle, here is the price and your margin, here is the bar two blocks over that poured it at their industry night last week, and here is what I will do in this neighborhood every week whether you stock me or not. She leaves a sample and a one-page sheet, and she is back in fourteen days. Not to ask again. To show him what she did in those fourteen days.*

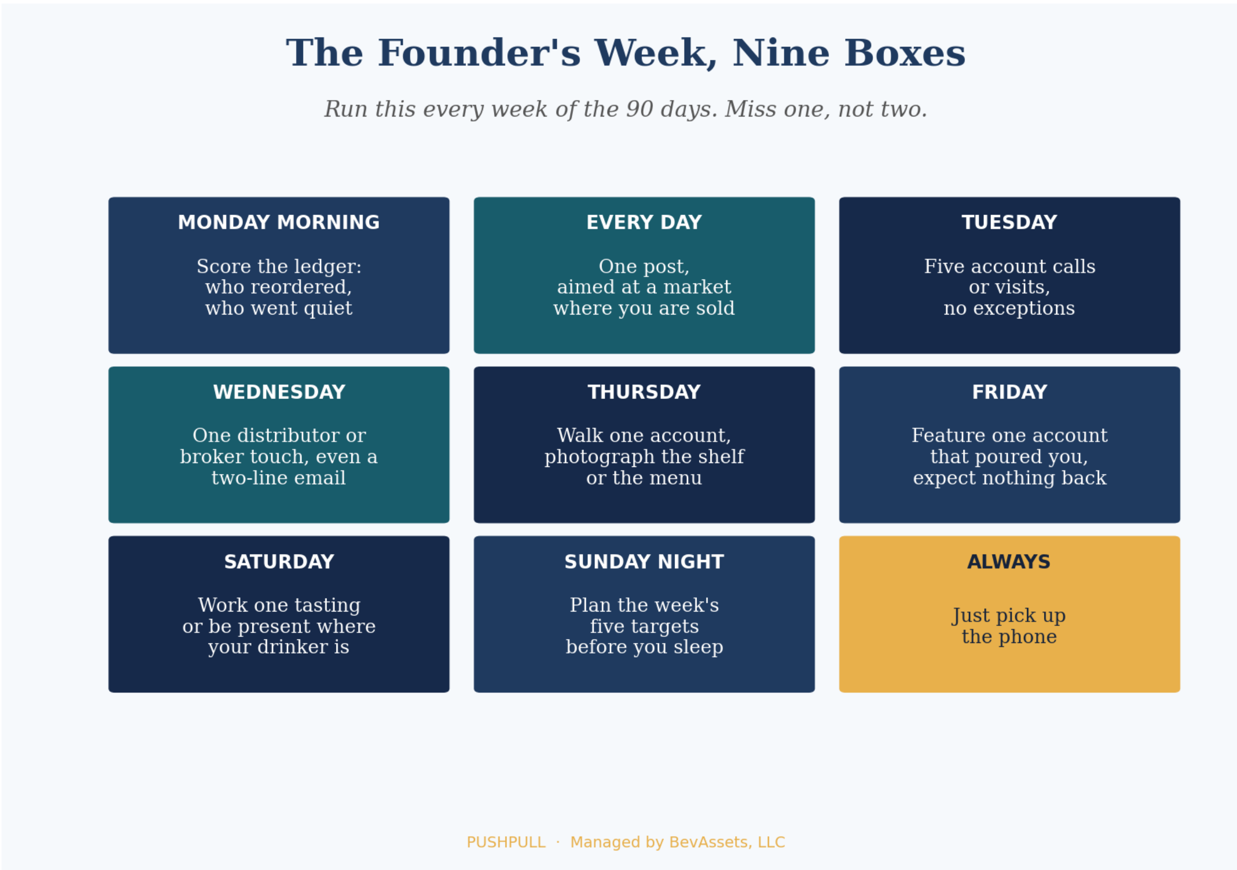
What to carry into every account

- The bottle, cold if it should be cold.
- A one-page sheet: price, margin, case size, your two markets, your phone number.
- One piece of proof: a photo, a repost, a name request story from two blocks away.
- A specific ask: 'two facings on the third shelf' beats 'would you carry us?'

And the distributor: do not chase one in month one. A distributor is a warehouse and a sales force that works brands with momentum. In the early weeks you are building the momentum they will want to buy. The right time to walk in is when your ledger shows reorders they did not help you get.

Chapter 2: The Pull, winning the drinker

The pull is consumer work: making drinkers in your two markets ask for you by name. Notice the geography in that sentence. A thousand likes from strangers in cities where nobody can buy your bottle is applause without a register. Aim everything at the neighborhoods where you are actually sold.



The founder's week. Nine boxes, ninety days. Miss one, never two.

Cadence beats brilliance. One aimed post a day, in your own voice, about real things: the account that just put you on the menu, the serve that works, the delivery run at six in the morning. Feature your accounts constantly and for free, which they love and the law smiles on. Keep every frame compliant: age-gated audience, no health claims, nothing that winks at anyone under twenty-one.

SCENARIO: THE REPOST THAT FILLS A ROOM

> *A founder features a neighborhood bar's Thursday special using his product, tags the bar, asks for nothing. The bar reposts it to nine thousand local followers. Saturday, three people ask for the drink by name. The bartender mentions it to the beverage director on Monday. That is the pull loop working: the founder spent zero dollars and gained the only currency that matters, an ask at the rail.*

Chapter 3: The Proof, verifying it and telling it

Here is the discipline almost no young brand runs, and the one that will set you apart in every professional conversation for the rest of your run: verify your own existence. Walk your accounts. Photograph your shelf and your menu placements, with a date. Keep a ledger of who reordered and who went quiet. Depletion reports arrive late and lie by omission. Your own two eyes in the account are the ground truth.

The Reorder Ledger

Print it. One row per account. The right-hand columns are the business.

ACCOUNT	FIRST ORDER	LAST VISIT	SHELF / MENU PHOTO?	REORDERED?	NEXT MOVE

Ten accounts tracked honestly beat forty tracked in your head.

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The Reorder Ledger. Ten accounts tracked honestly beat forty tracked in your head.

SCENARIO: PROOF WALKS INTO THE MEETING

> *Two founders pitch the same distributor in the same month. One says 'the brand is really gaining traction.' The other opens a folder: twelve accounts, seven reorders in sixty days, dated shelf photos, and a bar manager's text asking for a second case before Friday. Same liquid quality, same price point. Only one of those meetings ends with a follow-up on the calendar, and it is not close.*

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PART III

The Frameworks

Four diagnostics you can run on a Monday morning with coffee and honesty. None takes more than twenty minutes. Each one turns a vague worry into a decision.

Framework 1: The Push/Pull Score

Eight questions, two numbers out of a hundred: how hard you are pushing the trade, and how much pull you have with drinkers. Run it free at pushpullbev.com, no account required, and you will get a punch list of what to fix first. Run it again at day forty-five and day ninety. The direction of the two numbers is your report card for this entire playbook.

Framework 2: The Two-Market Test

Before you commit your ninety days to a pair of markets, make each one pass this test. A market qualifies when you can answer yes to all four.

1. Can I physically be in this market every week without wrecking my life?
2. Can I name ten target accounts here today, from memory?
3. Do I know at least three people here who would pour me a favor: a bartender, a store owner, a rep?
4. Does my kind of drinker already stand in these neighborhoods, or am I hoping to invent them?

Four yeses, twice. If a market you love fails the test, it is not gone forever. It is simply not first.

Framework 3: The Reorder Ledger

One row per account: first order date, last visit, whether you hold a dated shelf or menu photo, whether they have reordered, and the single next move. Score it every Monday morning, and let it boss you around. An account with no visit in three weeks outranks a new prospect. A quiet account after a first order is a phone call today, not a hope for next month. The ledger template is printable from the back of this book and lives in your PUSHPULL member hub.

Framework 4: The 20-Minute Compliance Pass

This industry will forgive a slow start. It will not forgive a compliance mess. Once a month, run the pass: age-gates on every profile and signup, not a dollar or gift flowing to any retailer, no health claims or under-21 appeal in any frame, a visible ad disclosure on anything compensated, state rules checked before any giveaway crosses a line, and every platform's alcohol policy read before you put paid money behind a post. The full self-audit checklist is free in your member hub, and it scores you honestly in twenty minutes.

> **SAM SAYS**
> *“Compliance is not the boring part of the business. It is the part that lets you keep the business.”*

PART IV

The 90-Day Plan

Three blocks of thirty days, each with one intention. Do not skip ahead. The second block only works if the first was honest, and the third only works if the second put miles on the truck.

Ninety days, three intentions. Each block earns the next.

Days 1 to 30: Get Honest

The first month is a mirror month. No new markets, no big spends, no announcements. Just the truth about where you actually stand, built into lists you can work.

5. Run the Push/Pull Score cold. Write both numbers where you will see them daily.
6. Run the Two-Market Test and commit, in writing, to your two markets.

7. Build the 25-account target list by name: fifteen on-premise, ten off-premise, or the mix that fits your product.
8. Open the Reorder Ledger with every account that has ever ordered, however short the list. Short and true beats long and fuzzy.
9. Run the 20-Minute Compliance Pass and fix every red flag before you make another post.
10. Start the daily aimed post. Imperfect and honest, in your voice, every day.

Days 31 to 60: Get in the Truck

The second month is a shoe-leather month. The list exists; now it gets worked. This is the stretch where most founders quietly retreat to their laptops because the street is uncomfortable. The street is the job.

11. Five account touches a week, in person or by phone. A touch is a conversation, not a like.
12. Work every Tuesday walk-in from the scenario in Chapter 1: quiet hour, buyer's name, thirty seconds, one specific ask.
13. Pour at two tastings or events per month inside your markets, and be the one pouring.
14. Feature one account per week in your content, free, tagged, expecting nothing.
15. One distributor or broker touch per week: a rep coffee, a two-line update email, a hello at an industry night. Planting, not pitching.
16. Photograph every placement you see, dated, into the ledger.

Days 61 to 90: Get a Reorder

The third month is a harvest month. Everything narrows to the only number that matters: how many accounts said yes twice.

17. Revisit every account from days 31 to 60. Count facings. Check dust. Ask for nothing until you have looked.

18. Where the product moved, secure the reorder on the spot and ask one earned question: 'Who else around here should carry this?' A buyer's referral opens doors cold calls cannot.
19. Where it did not move, do not beg. Diagnose: wrong shelf, wrong price, no staff taste, no local pull? Fix the cause, not the symptom.
20. Re-run the Push/Pull Score at day 90. Compare, in writing, against day one.
21. Build the proof folder: the ledger, the dated photos, the reorder count, the name-ask stories.
22. If the folder shows real velocity, book the distributor meeting now. Walk in with proof, not adjectives. If it does not show velocity yet, run the loop another ninety days first. That is not failure. That is the discipline that separates brands that last from brands that launched.

TRUTHFULLY

Day Ninety-One

Somewhere around day thirty you will want to quit the routine. Around day fifty someone with a podcast microphone will tell you the real money is in some channel you have not tried. Around day seventy a buyer will be rude to you for no reason at all. Run the loop anyway. Push, pull, proof. The founders who win in this industry are rarely the smartest people in the room. They are the ones still standing in the account in month nine, smiling, with a ledger that tells the truth.

Day ninety-one is not a finish line. It is the same loop, run again, except now you carry proof, and proof changes every conversation you will ever have in this business.

You can do this. I have watched people with less than you have make it. The difference was never talent.

Truthfully,
Sam

Crush it.

THE BACK POCKET

Scripts, Cards, and Take-Withs

Three scripts that earn their keep

The cold walk-in open

'Hi, I'm [name], I make [brand] right here in [market]. I know you hear pitches all day, so I will take thirty seconds. Here is the bottle, here is your margin, and here is what happened at [nearby account] last week. I work this neighborhood every week whether you stock me or not. What would need to be true for you to give me two facings?'

The re-ask after 'not right now'

'Completely fair. Can I come back in thirty days and show you what we did in the neighborhood in the meantime? If it is still a no then, I will stop asking and keep sending you customers anyway.'

The distributor first-meeting email

'[Name], I run [brand] in [two markets]. In the last ninety days: [X] accounts, [Y] reorders, dated shelf photos for every placement, and consumers asking by name at [accounts]. I am not looking for a warehouse. I am looking for a partner for a brand that already moves. Fifteen minutes next week?'

Print these two

Pin This Where You Grab Your Keys

The daily discipline, one card

TODAY I WILL

Call or visit one account before noon.

Post one thing aimed at a market where I am sold.

Thank one person on the retail side, expecting nothing.

Write down who reordered and who went quiet.

And when I do not know what to do next:

JUST PICK UP THE PHONE.

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The daily card. Pin it where you grab your keys.

First 90 Days Founder Bingo

Mark them as they happen. Every founder fills this card eventually.

'We'll take a look'	Rescheduled chain meeting	Label printer dies at midnight	Distributor rep ghosts you	First unsolicited ask by name
Spouse asks 'how much longer?'	Tasting table by the restrooms	Drove 2 hours for a 10-minute meeting	Shelf photo taken in secret	'Not right now'
Someone calls it 'cute little brand'	Reorder from an account you forgot	**FREE: JUST PICK UP THE PHONE**	Competitor's rep badmouths you	Bartender becomes your best salesman
Sample case 'walks off'	First depletion report you understand	Post flops, walk-in asks about it anyway	Buyer only talks margins	'Who's your distributor?'
Case stacked wrong in the front window	You fix a shelf without permission	First check that clears real money	'Send me a one-pager'	The reorder that proves it

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Founder bingo. Every square on this card is survivable. Most are mandatory.

Where the tools live

Your free PUSHPULL membership at pushpullbev.com carries the working versions of everything in this book: the Push/Pull Score, the 30-Day Plan Builder, the post template builders, the compliance kit with the downloadable self-audit, and your saved workspace. When you want more of the method run for you, from guided content to verified field proof in your home market, that conversation starts with one email to sam@bevassets.com. And for the community side, the DRINK UP Podcast and the Beverage Broker Network are free doors into the industry's rooms.

APPENDIX

Glossary: How the Trade Talks

Three-tier system. The legal structure separating producers, distributors, and retailers. You are tier one. In most states you cannot sell straight to tier three.

On-premise / off-premise. On-premise is consumed where sold: bars, restaurants. Off-premise goes home: package stores, grocery.

Depletions. Cases moving out of the distributor's warehouse into accounts. The industry's pulse rate, always a little out of date.

Velocity. How fast your product sells out of a given account. Buyers and distributors care about velocity more than total volume.

Facing. One bottle-width of shelf visibility. Two facings beat one, and eye level beats everything.

Reorder. The account buying a second time. The only compliment that counts.

Tied house. The body of law forbidding value flowing from producers to retailers. The reason you never pay, gift, or comp the retail side.

POS. Point-of-sale material: shelf talkers, table tents, coasters. Useful, legal within limits, never a substitute for presence.

Shelf talker. The small card hanging under your bottle on the shelf, making the case while you are not standing there.

Well pour. The default liquor a bar pours when nobody asks for a brand. Your pull exists to beat it.

Chain vs. independent. Chain accounts buy centrally and slowly, independents decide on the spot. Your first ninety days mostly belong to independents.

Control state. A state where the government itself sells or controls liquor. Different rules, different playbook, check before you ship anything.

Broker. An independent sales agent representing brands to the trade, often the right bridge before a full distributor relationship.

DTC. Direct-to-consumer shipping. Heavily state-regulated for alcohol, full of traps, and covered in its own upcoming playbook.

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