

Scotch and Whisky During Covid-19

Chris Uhde

The past year has been a rollercoaster for the whisky industry. Once Coronavirus hit in 2020, many restaurants and bars closed which left many of my friends and colleagues financially exposed. They are good, hardworking people and it was difficult to watch them struggle. However, because they are good, hardworking people, I am seeing them return to their establishments as a hopeful sign of good things to come.

During the pandemic, I noticed whisky sales shifting from in-person store sales to sales via online orders while the public were hunkering down and staying home. Consequently, a trend developed where consumers just went with the most established brands that they already knew which left some of the newer brands to market struggling to get depletions. I believe this is because there was no one there to sing their praises like you would find during the pre-pandemic shopping style.

One of the most obvious impacts of the pandemic, an impact that has been felt by most of us, is the isolation we have faced. In the whisky industry, it is the coming together and sharing a drink that we all talk about missing the most. I am glad to say that the community triumphed over the isolation in that we did not let the whisky community fade away, instead we all made an effort to be there for one another. It was really great seeing my fellow colleagues come up with new and innovative ways to keep the community and industry alive and thriving. We all found a way to make it work. Some folks hosted BYOB virtual happy hours. Whisky clubs started shipping out samples to members and coordinating virtual gatherings so we could still get together and share that drink, albeit virtually. I guess we did this pretty regularly as we all now laugh at the piles of minis we have stacking up in our kitchens.

One unexpected outcome is that I see my co-workers in different regions now more than ever. Before the pandemic we would meet once or twice a year due to the nature of the job which requires traveling around the county. We would talk by phone and e-mail each other, but we did not see each other face to face too often. Virtual meetings have become so normalized and convenient that we now see each other, almost weekly, in team meetings and it has really changed the business.

I am so excited for what Scottish Fest 2022 will bring next year. There are so many things that I miss and that I cannot wait to do again like patiently waiting to let the odd piper finish tuning before I run him/her out of the corner they have tried to claim for solo practice in the Whisky Tavern area. Or sneaking away from the Tavern to grab a meat pie from the Daughters of Scotia. I am definitely ready to tell the same bad jokes to everyone that has attended the classes in the Silo building year after year. (No, even with a year off, I still do not have any new material, Ha!) Most of all, I am ready to celebrate Scottish Fest with my fellow volunteer.

Soon, we will all be in the Whisky Tavern and able to raise a glass and toast each other and I look forward to seeing you there. *Sláinte!*