Sidney Frank with wife, Marian Frank, Vice Chairman of Sidney Frank Importing Co., Inc.
Every week, the offices of Sidney Frank Importing Co. receive thousands of emails from consumers. Some inquire about the next flavor of Grey Goose Vodka and offer a recipe idea, others want to know where they can find a 15-year old Jägermeister poster. With a policy of “no email goes unread or unanswered,” the team personally answers each one. “Everyone in this company, from sales representatives in the field to senior executives, knows they have a responsibility to the customer,” says Sidney Frank of the import company’s core philosophy. “It isn’t beneath anyone to make a call to a customer and even make a delivery.”

When Sidney Frank began his career in the beverage alcohol industry, it was with his father-in-law, Lewis Rosenstiel, the chairman of Schenley Distillers, where Frank worked his way to president. He founded Sidney Frank Importing Company in 1972 with “three employees and a green hand truck,” Frank says with a smile. “That hand truck got more miles put on it as my brother, Eugene Frank, our salesman Artie Levenson, and I personally wheeled orders to accounts throughout New York.” They began with shipments of Hudson’s Bay Scotch and Gekkeikan Sake, but volume changed dramatically when the company acquired Jägermeister in 1980.

Just what made Frank so confident in the potential of the German herbal liqueur was a mystery to most, but his determination never swayed in spite of the brand’s slow start. It wasn’t long before Frank found the perfect vehicle for reaching a larger audience: serving Jägermeister ice cold as shots. The team unleashed aggressive promotions, specialty party kits and eventually the Jägermeister-On-Tap Machines, all based on this method of consumption, and turned Jägermeister into a 800,000-case brand. The Jägermeister Music Tour is a recent example of the brand’s continuous market success and innovation; sold-out shows throughout the country maintain Jägermeister’s high profile and keep it one of the top three most popular imported liqueurs, along with Kahlúa and Baileys Irish Cream.

One of the first brands in the company’s portfolio, Gekkeikan Sake was another product with little consumer interest when Sidney Frank acquired distribution rights 30 years ago. Sidney Frank has since watched Gekkeikan’s sales rise 10-15% each year for the last 10 years, due in part to a 5-percent increase in Japanese restaurants in this country in the same time period, and a fast-growing interest in Asian cuisine. But there is more to Gekkeikan’s story than sheer luck. Gekkeikan is one of the few sake brands that has been able to reach beyond Japanese restaurants and the Asian market, thanks to the creative marketing behind it. The brand also has placements in supermarket chains and it is listed in control states.

Frank put the same magic to work for Grey Goose, the ultra-premium French vodka he introduced back in his Schenley Distillers days.
moment; a time when consumers were looking for a better vodka and were willing to spend more for it. A recent Newsweek article about vodkas and the success of Grey Goose quoted one consumer saying “once you've been allowed to drive a Porsche, you can't go back to a Chevette.”

Grey Goose's high quality, documented by countless publications including a glowing review from the Beverage Testing Institute, was indeed an important element in the brand's success, but it was also the result of clever promotional efforts and a well-executed, very sexy $10 million ad campaign that clearly communicated quality. Sidney Frank worked to align Grey Goose with all the right charity events and fundraisers, offering the brand an ideal forum to promote itself, while creating good will in the community. For bars, the company created quality display items, including the highly-successful lighted pedestal. The Sidney Frank team also spends the time to create custom Martini menus for accounts.

Many marvel that Grey Goose still manages to dominate sales in a category that grows more crowded with ultra-premium brands practically daily. Even in the flavored vodka segment, where fiercely competitive line extensions vie for back bar space, Grey Goose Vodka L’Orange and Grey Goose Le Citron are currently the top-selling ultra-premium flavored vodkas on the market. “Inevitably, retailers will stock the brands with the greatest turnover and the highest margins for profit,” says Frank. “We are fortunate that Grey Goose Vodka is the most profitable brand in its category and is the best selling ultra-premium vodka.”

“Mostly, we like to think we've written the book on on-premise promotions,” says Frank. “From the early days when we developed the Jägermeister party kits to today's highly successful Jägermeister Music Tour, we've put a tremendous amount of time, energy, money, and creativity into on-premise promotions. We realize that if we can get right to the consumer at the bar, chances are we'll make a sale.”

And they listen. “We have over 50 sales representatives in the field who constantly visit accounts and attend promotions. In addition, we have nearly 1,000 promotional models. It is their job to talk and listen to consumers, to learn what they are looking for next.”

Sidney Frank prides himself on tremendous follow-through for promotions as well. After every Jägerette promotion, the account owner or manager is asked to fill out a questionnaire about the event, to determine what works and what does not. For those using the Tap Machine, there is a 1-800 hotline for owners 24-hours a day. The bottom line with every one of Sidney Frank's executions is

“...All of us at Sidney Frank Importing Co., Inc. are so very fortunate to work for Sidney Frank, a true legend in our industry.”

-Lee Einsidler, Executive Vice President, Sales & Marketing

Sidney Frank and his Executive Committee:

Seated left to right: Marian Frank, Vice Chairman; Tom Bruno, Senior Vice President, National Sales Manager; Sidney Frank

Standing left to right: Bill Thompson, Vice President, Brand Development; Jean-Marie Heins, Executive Vice President, Marketing & Advertising; Stuart Moselman, Executive Vice President, Administration & Finance; Lee Einsidler, Executive Vice President, Sales & Marketing; Renate Cordts-Auth, Executive Administrator; and John Frank, Executive Vice President.
channeling resources into street-tested promotions that customers genuinely value and help retailers sell more product. "I go back a long way with Sidney and his company, since their beginning," says Herman Hochberg of Queens Wine & Liquors in NYC. "He's an innovator, that's for sure. It's just a pleasure to be able to work with a man and a company that are so creative. Through their marketing, they've taken our industry to new heights, and I look forward to the new programs and products they have in store for us."

Indeed, there is more in store for the market-place. Sidney Frank is in the midst of yet another high-powered launch; this time, in the rum category. "The rum category is heating up, and consumers are beginning to realize what a difference an ultra-premium rum makes," says Frank. "I really believe the liquor industry needs something new and exciting, and I believe Coyopa Rum is it."

The idea for Coyopa came to Frank in a dream; a vision of a bottle that played music and was animated. "Even half asleep, I could tell this would be something fantastic and immediately began to investigate how this could be accomplished," Frank explains. He hired an engineer to design the electronics for the interactive label, and turned to R.L. Seale, a premier rum producer in Barbados to create the high quality rum that would go in the bottle. "Already, people are talking about the bottle," Frank says. "They might think it's crazy at first, or just a gimmick, but once you get a good look at it, you are mesmerized. My Active Label® is a true breakthrough, and that's one reason why Coyopa will be a great success."

Coyopa enters the market with the benefit of many successful product launches before it. "When we introduced Grey Goose Vodka to retailers, we did so in a special introduction pack," Frank says. "It included everything a store owner needed to do their own Grey Goose Vodka kickoff. We are doing the same sort of thing for Coyopa. A retailer can buy an introductory pack that will include everything to properly introduce Coyopa to consumers and let them know just how exciting this new brand is." This is in addition to a tremendous advertising investment that will help pave the brand's way.

"Sidney Frank has the greatest 'Joie de Vie' of any person I have ever known," says Richard Leventhal, president, Fedway Associates, a New Jersey wholesaler. "His zest for life infuses everyone he touches and everything he does." Neil Barnett, general manager, Fedway Associates, continues with Leventhal's view; "Clearly they have two of the most phenomenal products in the history of the industry and their style has never changed with their success. The creative genius of Sidney is matched by the dedication and hard work of Lee Einsidler, Tom Bruno and the entire staff. Any supplier looking to define what partnership is need only to look at the way the Sidney Frank Company conducts business."

With his proven track record, on and off-premise retailers alike can look forward to many exciting promotions, programs, and products from Sidney Frank and his company.