

Soda's got a glow-up

What Americans want
from dirty sodas



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What is a dirty soda?

Dirty sodas are non-alcoholic beverages with a base of soda (commonly Coke, Dr Pepper, Sprite or Mountain Dew), mixed with some or all of the following:

- **Creamer** like cold foam, heavy cream or coffee creamer
- **Flavored syrups**, like vanilla, raspberry, coconut, etc.
- **Fruit juices**, commonly citrus
- **A garnish**, like a slice of lemon or lime, maraschino cherries or candy

Dirty soda started out as a [Utah drive-thru staple](#) and has been popular in the area since the 2010s, primarily among Mormons. Then [TikTok and a hit reality show](#) — *The Secret Lives of Mormon Wives* — got hold of it.

Over the last year and a half it has gone from niche treat to one of the most fought-over items on the fast-food menu.



Soda got a makeover — now everyone wants a piece of it

And the big chains have noticed. In March, [Taco Bell](#) made its dirty sodas a permanent fixture nationally. In May, [McDonald's](#) rolled out a whole new line of crafted sodas and refreshers.

Dirty soda servings at quick-service restaurants are up 318% in two years, [according to Circana](#). It's easy to see why: drinks are typically high-margin and they get people through the door in the afternoon when restaurants are usually quiet.

So we wanted to find out what's behind the hype. Who is actually drinking dirty soda? Is dirty soda here to stay? And when people choose one, what are they looking for: cola or citrus, creamy or fruity, simple or loaded?



Key findings

Almost everyone's heard of dirty soda but the habit's still forming. 83% of US adults have heard of dirty soda and 53% have tried it, but only 28% buy it regularly. Just half of those who've tried it (52%) keep buying it, fewer than for any of the other new drinks we asked about.

It's a young adult's drink and men are more into it than you might think. Nearly two thirds of under-36s (63%) have tried dirty soda, compared with 27% of 56-75s. And despite its reputation as a drink for moms, more men than women have tried it (59% vs. 47%).

America's favorite dirty soda tastes like a Creamsicle. 31% of the people who saw Orange Dream with Fanta (just orange soda and cold foam) picked it as their first choice. Shark Attack, Twisted Flamingo and Dirty Dr Pepper tied for second place with 25% each.

Tastes split by age and gender. Under-35s prefer bright colors and bold flavors: Shark Attack (34%) and Dirty Baja Blast (33%) top their list. Orange Dream leads with everyone over 35, while women's favorite is Twisted Flamingo, picked by twice as many women as men (34% vs. 16%).



Key findings

The winning formula is a flavor people know, a light touch of cream and not too many add-ins. Drinks topped with cold foam got 25% of the first-choice votes on average, compared with 15% for heavy, coconut or custard cream. Drinks with one add-in got 24%, while the two with four extra ingredients got 17%.

Loaded drinks get noticed but don't get picked. Cocoberry Cream (lemon-lime soda with coconut, strawberries and sweet cream) was rated the most distinctive of all 13 drinks but came second to last on first-choice votes (14%).

For dirty soda fans, the drink matters more than the food. Nearly a quarter of fans (24%) skipped the food and just got a drink in the past three months vs. 15% of everyone else. Half of fans (50%) would pay \$5 or more for a large customized drink but only 36% of US adults would.

The big names lead on trust but most regions have a local favorite. Starbucks (40%) and McDonald's (39%) are the brands Americans most trust to make a custom drink. But in three of the four regions, a local favorite is close behind: Dunkin' in the Northeast (39%), Dutch Bros in the West (34%), and Chick-fil-A (33%) and Sonic (29%) in the South.



Methodology

We used two of Zappi's research tools to understand what Americans want from dirty soda.

1. Ask Anything: Who's drinking dirty soda and why

We surveyed **2,000 US adults** in September 2026, nationally representative by age, gender and region. We asked how familiar they are with dirty soda and five other new drinks, how their drink spending has changed, what they'd pay for a customized drink, which brands they'd trust to make one and which drink they think more people should try.

2. Screen It: Which dirty sodas win

We tested **13 real dirty sodas from US menus** with 390 adults who'd visited a fast-food restaurant in the past three months. We removed the restaurant names so people judged the drink itself, not the chain behind it. Each person saw five drinks, so every drink was seen by about 150 people.

Gender

Men 50%

Women 50%

Age

18-25 24%

26-35 21%

36-45 23%

46-55 21%

56-75 11%

Region

South 46%

Midwest 20%

Northeast 18%

West 16%

How we picked the winners

1. People compared five drinks and **chose the one they'd be most likely to consider**. A drink's score is the share of people who picked it first. With five drinks to choose from, 20% is average.
2. Then they rated each drink from 1 to 5 on how likely they'd be to **buy it**, how **relevant** it is to them, how **believable**, how **distinctive** it is and whether it's **better** than what's already out there.
3. Finally, they told us what they liked about their favorite and least favorite drinks in their own words.

First-choice votes

The share of people who picked a drink as the one they'd be most likely to consider, out of the five they saw.

Purchase likelihood

How likely people would be to buy the drink.

Relevance

How much the drink feels like it's for them.

Distinctiveness

How different the drink feels from what's already out there.

Advantage

Whether people think the drink is better than what's already available.

Believability

How believable the drink's description is.

Who's driving the dirty soda boom?

Dirty soda has a reputation as a viral treat for suburban moms and TikTok teens.

The data paints a broader picture: nearly everyone has heard of it, adults under 36 drink it the most and men are more into it than you might think. The question is whether those first sips turn into a habit.

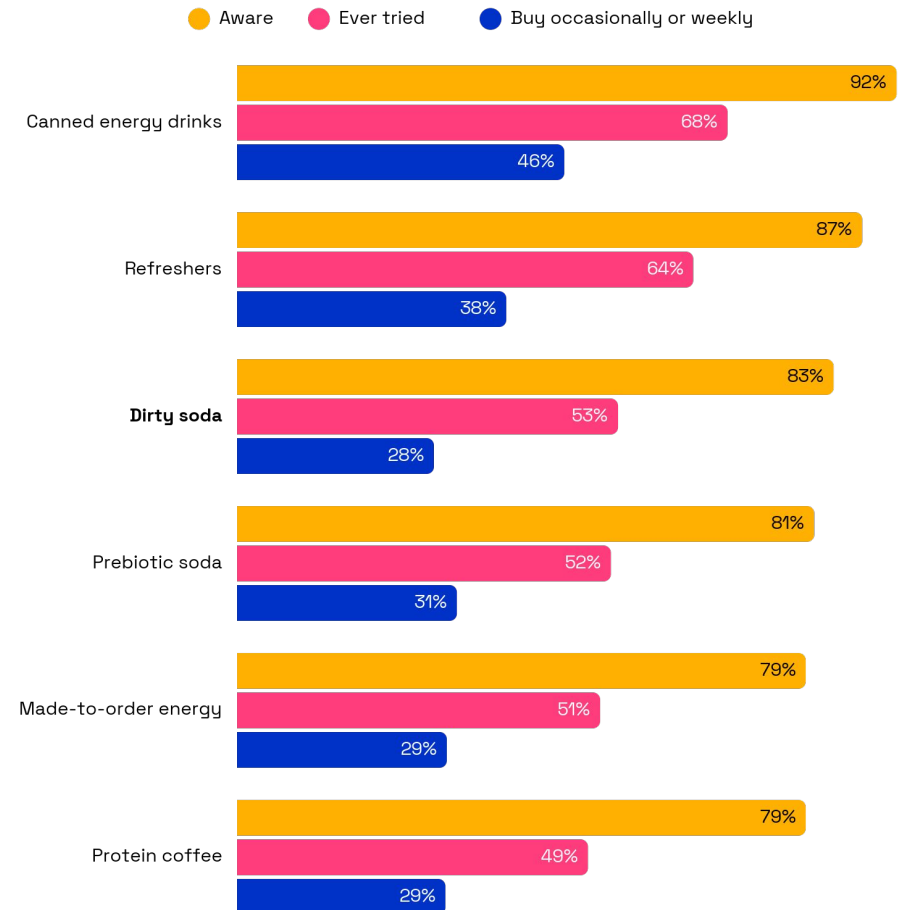


Almost everyone's heard of dirty soda

83% of US adults have heard of dirty soda and more than half (53%) have tried it. That's close to refreshers (87%) and ahead of protein coffee and prebiotic soda (both around 80% awareness).

Turning awareness into habit is harder. 28% buy dirty soda at least occasionally and 8% buy it weekly. That's in line with the other newer formats, but well behind refreshers (38%) and canned energy drinks (46%).

And there's plenty of room to grow: 3 in 10 have heard of it but never tried it.

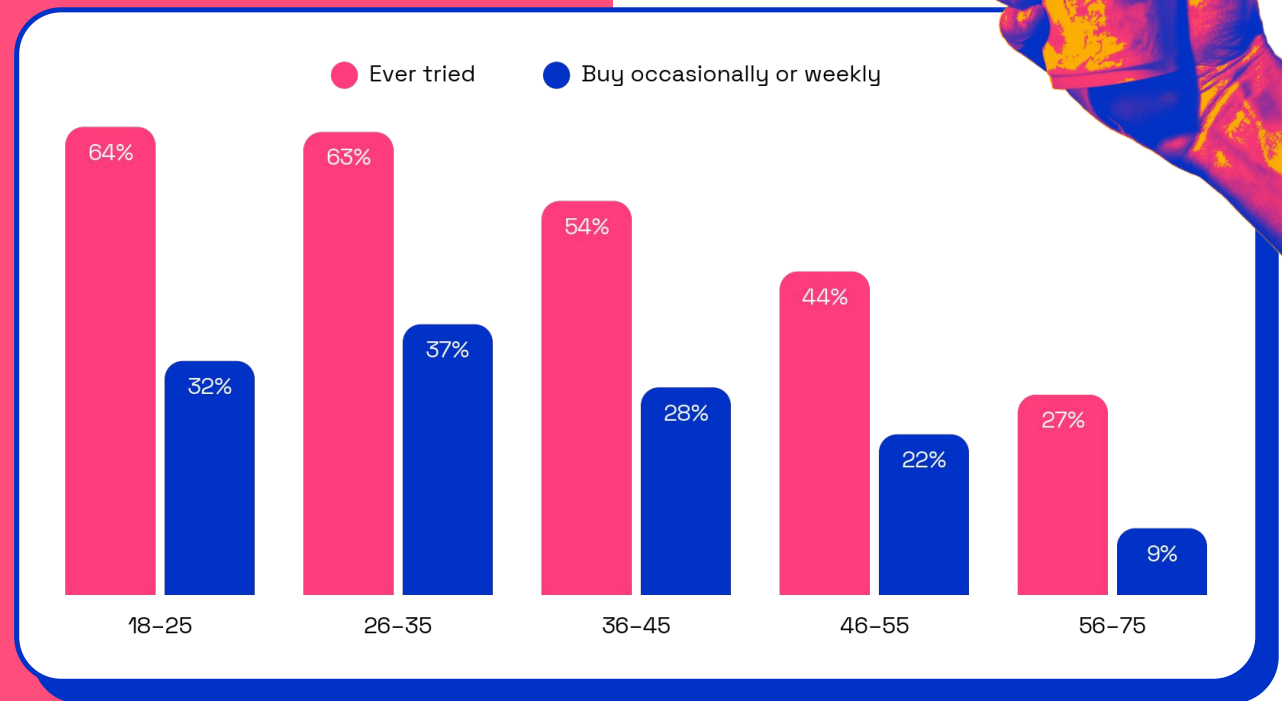


Younger adults drink it most and so do men

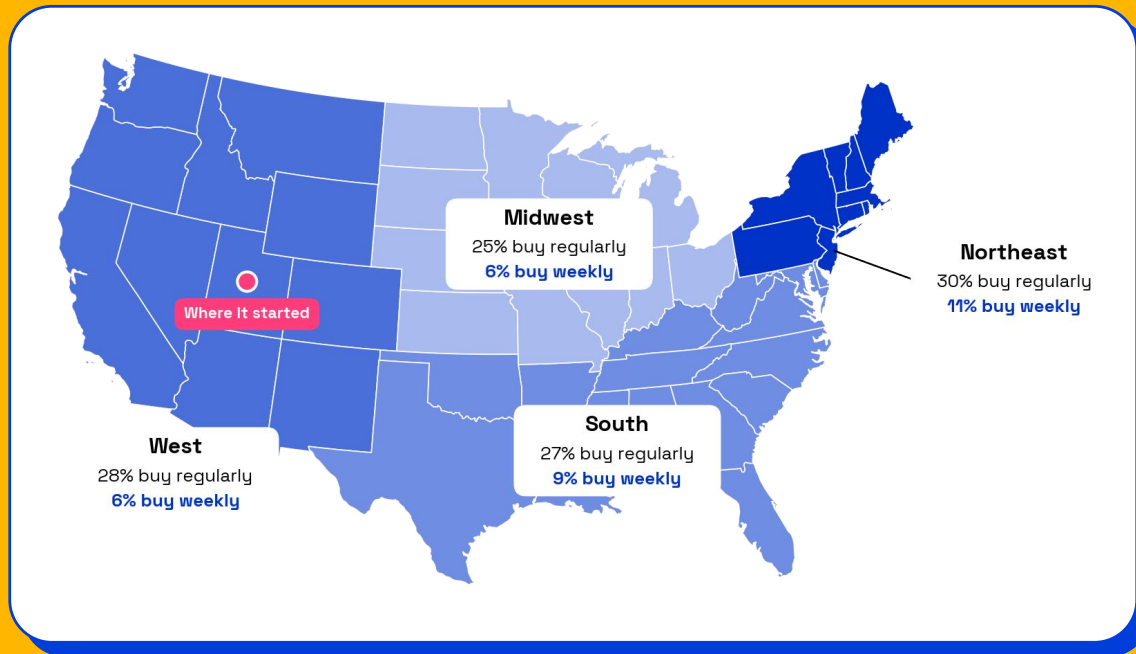
63% of under 36 year-olds have tried dirty soda vs. 27% of 56–75s. They're also much more likely to buy it occasionally or weekly, compared to older people (34% vs. 9% of 56-75s).

Many older consumers just haven't got there yet: 28% of 56–75s have never heard of it.

Here's the twist. Thanks to *The Secret Lives of Mormon Wives*, dirty soda is often seen as a drink for moms, but men are more into it: 59% of men have tried it vs. 47% of women, and 32% buy it regularly compared to 23% of women.



Dirty soda has spread well beyond Utah



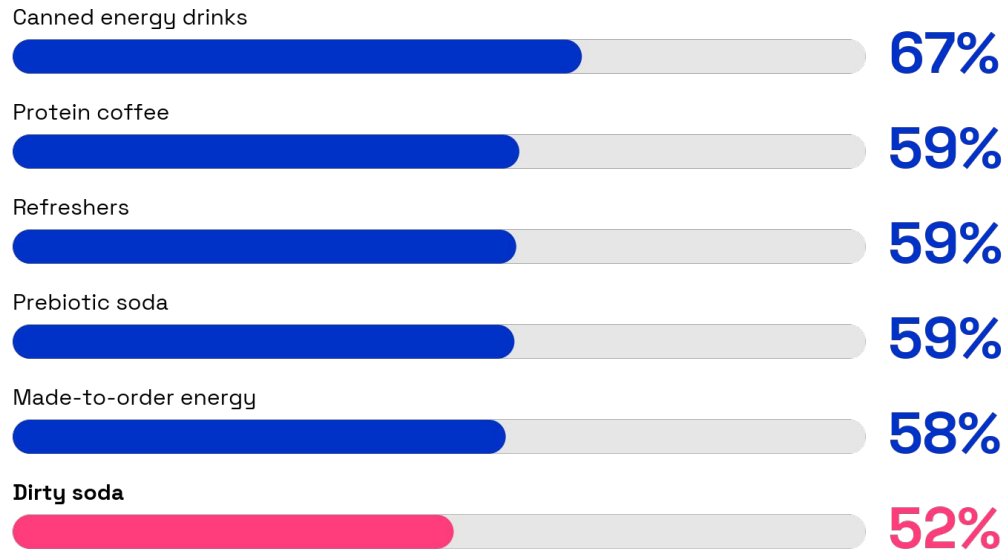
“Regularly” refers to people who said they buy dirty soda occasionally/weekly or more

Dirty soda may have started in Utah, but it’s now **bought across the country**. Around a quarter to a third of adults in every region buy it regularly, from 25% in the Midwest to 30% in the Northeast.

And the most frequent buyers aren’t in the West, where it all began. 11% of Northeasterners buy one every week, nearly double the Midwest and the West (both 6%). The South isn’t far behind at 9%.

The hype is real but the habit is still forming

Share of people who've tried each drink who now buy it regularly



“Regularly” refers to people who said they buy dirty soda occasionally/weekly or more

The industry is betting dirty soda isn't a fad. [Taco Bell](#) has made its dirty sodas permanent and expects \$5 billion in drink sales by 2030. [McDonald's](#) says its new drinks platform is beating expectations, with people spending about 50% more per order when they buy one of the new drinks. [Visits to Swig](#), the chain that started it all, were up 31% year-on-year in February 2026.

But our data shows only around half of the people who've tried dirty soda (52%) buy it regularly. That's the lowest of the six new drink formats we asked about (vs. 67% for canned energy drinks and 59% for refreshers).

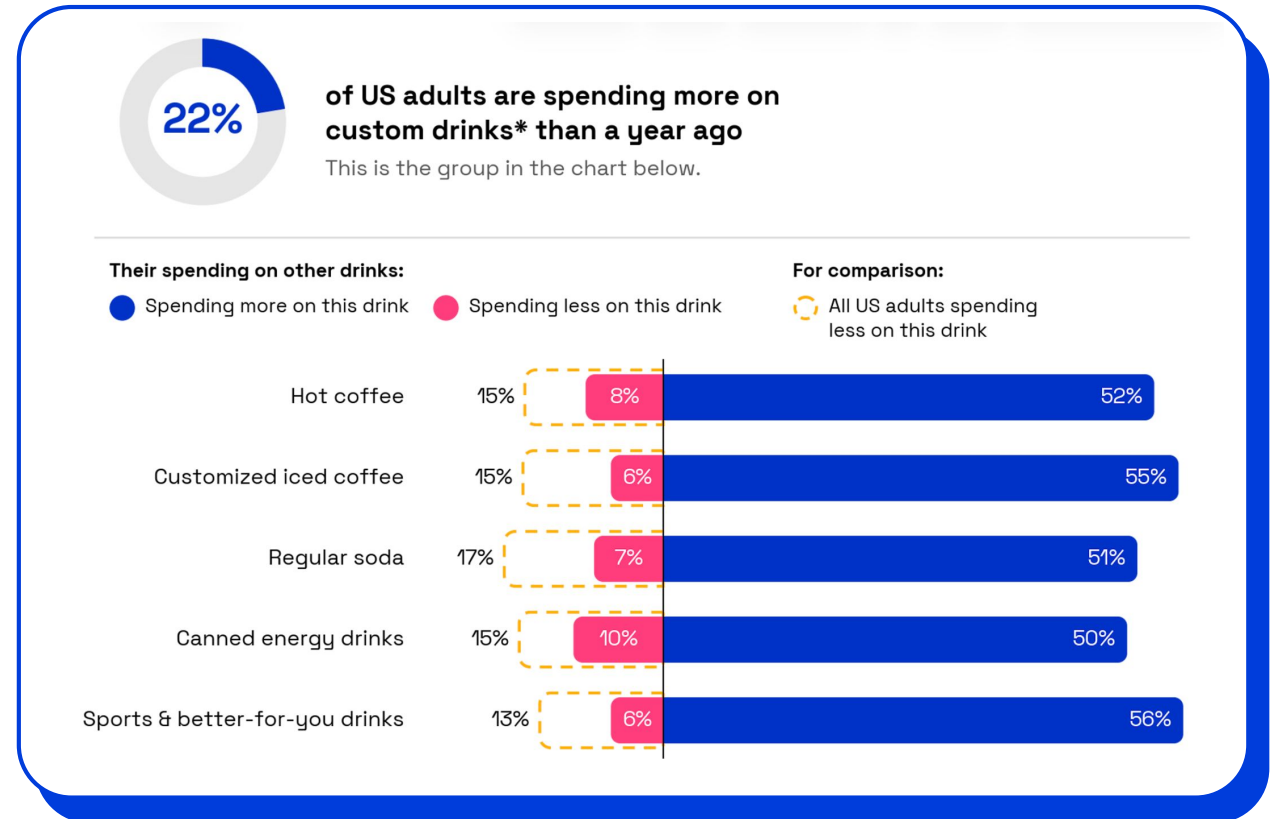
In other words, lots of people are trying it for the novelty, but fewer are making it a habit. That's true even among its biggest fans: just over half of 18–35s who've tried it (54%) buy it regularly, vs. 61% for refreshers and 65% for canned energy drinks.

The new drinks aren't stealing from coffee or soda

Is the money that's going into the new drink formats coming out of the classics, like coffee and regular soda? So far, our data says it isn't.

22% of consumers say they're spending more on customized non-coffee drinks like dirty soda, refreshers and made-to-order energy drinks than a year ago. Very few of this group are cutting back elsewhere: just 7% are spending less on regular soda and 8% on hot coffee, compared to 17% and 15% of all consumers. In fact, more than half of them are spending more on every other type of drink too.

This means **these people aren't really switching — they're drink lovers spending more across the board.** That makes them some of the most valuable customers around as winning their dirty soda order doesn't mean a coffee shop or a soda brand loses out.



*"Customized non-coffee drinks" includes refreshers and made-to-order energy drinks as well as dirty soda.

Meet the winners

We put 13 real dirty sodas from US menus head to head. A Creamsicle-style drink took the top spot overall, a bright blue lemonade ticked every box and one drink surprised us when it came to what people would actually buy.



Dirty Dr Pepper



Classic Dr Pepper with a splash of vanilla, topped with chilled cold foam.

Vanilla Swirl with Coke



Classic Coca-Cola with a splash of vanilla, topped with chilled cold foam.

Orange Dream with Fanta



Classic Fanta Orange topped with chilled cold foam.

Dirty Baja Blast



Tropical lime Mountain Dew with sweet vanilla cream swirled in.

Dirty Lemonade



Classic lemonade with sweet vanilla cream swirled in.

Twisted Flamingo



Crisp lemon-lime soda with cherry vanilla flavor and sweet cream.

Cocoberry Cream



Crisp lemon-lime soda with coconut and vanilla, real strawberries and sweet cream.

Golden Hour Orange



Crisp lemon-lime soda with candied orange flavor, topped with rich custard cream.

Black Tie



Classic Dr Pepper with cherry flavor and heavy cream.

Shark Bite



Classic Coca-Cola with pineapple flavor and coconut cream.

Texas Tab



Classic Dr Pepper with vanilla and coconut cream.

Shark Attack



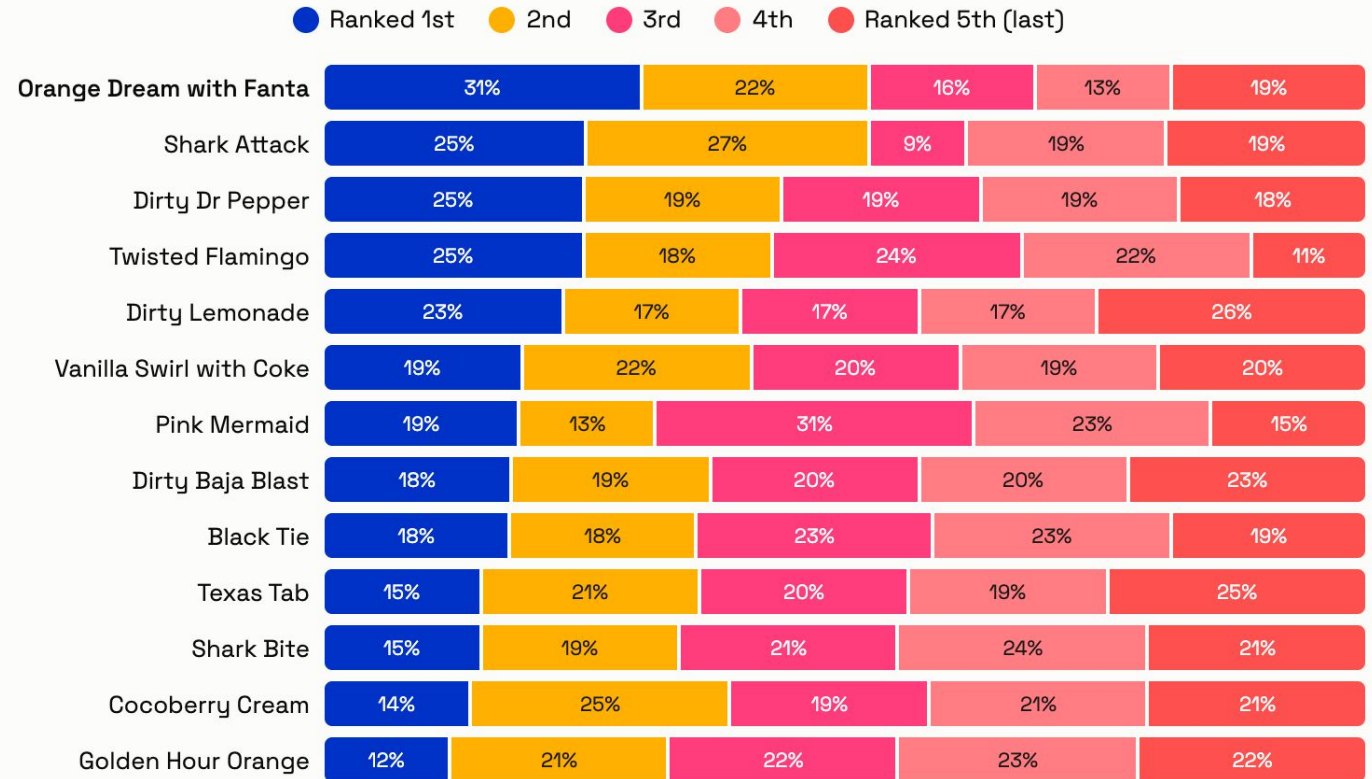
Crisp lemon-lime soda with lemonade and blue raspberry flavor.

Pink Mermaid



Sparkling soda with watermelon, coconut and strawberry flavors and sweet cream.

There's no
one-size-fits-
all dirty soda,
but Orange
Dream comes
closest



America's favorite dirty soda tastes like a Creamsicle

The overall winner is **Orange Dream with Fanta**: orange soda topped with cold foam. It has 31% of the first-choice votes, a clear lead over most of the other drinks.

It takes a dessert people already love and turns it into something new to drink. Several people compared it to a classic orange-and-cream ice pop.

It resonates most with over-55s, with more than a third of them (35%) picking it as their first choice.

“

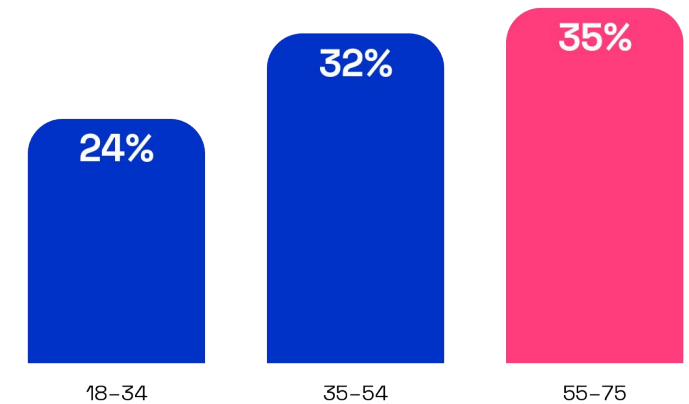
It looks good and sounds like it would be similar to a Creamsicle.



“

This sounds delicious reminds me of the orange cream bars.

Orange Dream's appeal grows with age



Shark Attack is the all-rounder

Behind Orange Dream, three drinks were neck and neck with 25% of the first-choice votes each: Shark Attack, Twisted Flamingo and Dirty Dr Pepper.

But **Shark Attack** ticks every box! It's the only one of the three that scores above average on every measure we looked at, and it **has the highest purchase likelihood of all 13 drinks** (3.8 vs. 3.6 on average). It's a bright blue lemon-lime and blue raspberry drink with a gummy shark on top, and it's the only drink in the test with no cream at all. People loved the look, the familiar flavors and how refreshing it seemed.

Dirty Dr Pepper is the familiar choice. People rated it **the most relevant of the 13 drinks** (3.8 vs. 3.5 on average) because they already love the soda.

“

I like the blue shark, the color and the flavor combo.

			
	Shark Attack	Twisted Flamingo	Dirty Dr Pepper
Distinctiveness	4.0 Average 3.8	3.9 Average 3.8	3.7 Average 3.8
Advantage	4.0 Average 3.8	3.9 Average 3.8	3.8 Average 3.8
Relevance	3.7 Average 3.5	3.6 Average 3.5	3.8 Average 3.5
Believability	4.2 Average 4.0	3.9 Average 4.0	4.1 Average 4.0
Purchase likelihood	3.8 Average 3.6	3.7 Average 3.6	3.7 Average 3.6

Under-35s go for bright and bold drinks

Under-35s have a very different preference to everyone else. Orange Dream, the top drink for both older groups, doesn't make their top three. **Shark Attack (34%) and Dirty Baja Blast (33%) top their list**, both bright, citrusy drinks with a bold color. Dirty Baja Blast splits the generations more than any other drink: a third of 18-34s picked it first, compared with 14% of 35-54s and 11% of 55-75s.

Older groups lean towards the classics. Alongside Orange Dream, **35-54s went for the cola drinks**, Dirty Dr Pepper and Vanilla Swirl with Coke (28% each). Over-55s picked Twisted Flamingo (33%) and Dirty Lemonade (27%).

Top three drinks by age group

18-34

Shark Attack

34%

Dirty Baja Blast

33%

Twisted Flamingo

30%

35-54

Orange Dream with Fanta

32%

Dirty Dr Pepper

28%

Vanilla Swirl with Coke

28%

55-75

Orange Dream with Fanta

35%

Twisted Flamingo

33%

Dirty Lemonade

27%

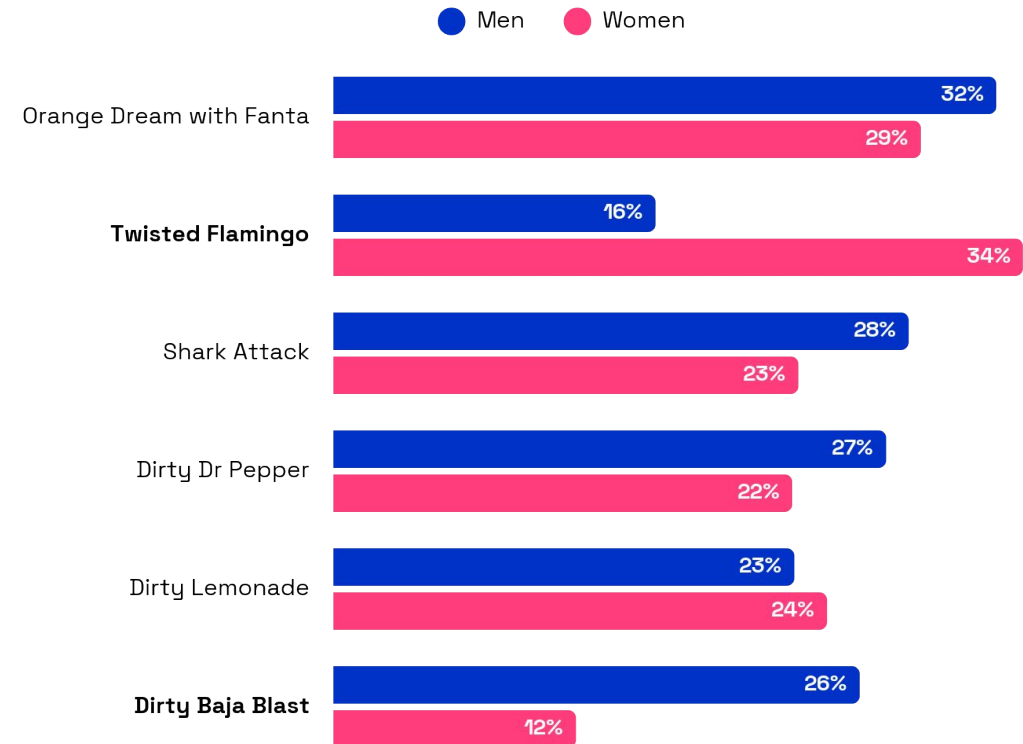
Twisted Flamingo for women, Dirty Baja Blast for men

Orange Dream is a hit with both men (32%) and women (29%).

After that their tastes split. **Twisted Flamingo**, a pink drink with lemon-lime, cherry vanilla and sweet cream, **is women's favorite**: twice as many women picked it first (34% vs. 16% for men).

Men lean towards Dirty Baja Blast, picking it more than twice as often as women (26% vs. 12% for women). It's a soda many of them already love with a splash of sweet vanilla.

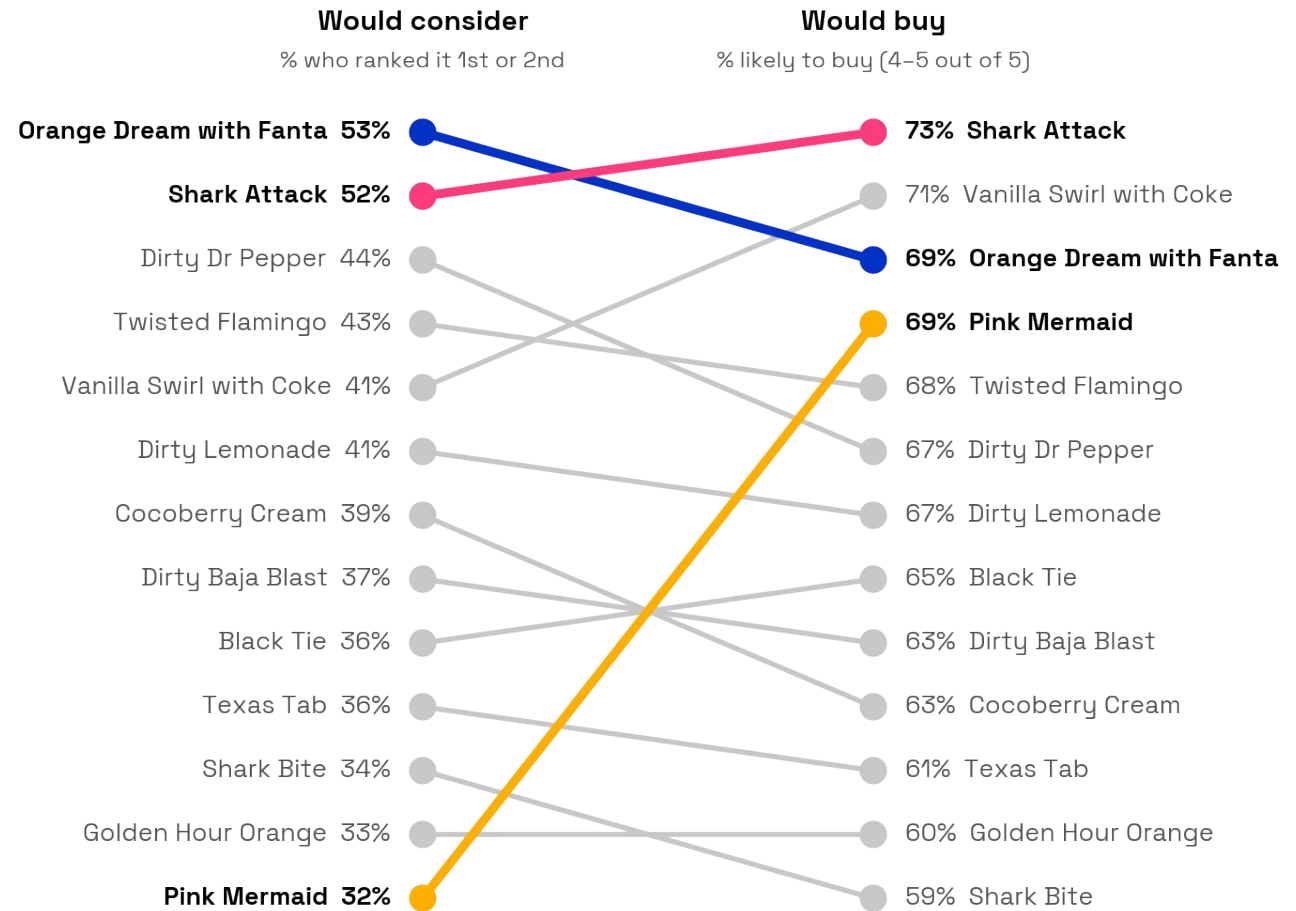
First-choice votes by gender



Preference vs. appeal

We looked at the drinks in two ways. First, we asked people to rank the drinks they saw from favorite to least favorite where only one drink can win. Then we asked how likely they'd be to buy each drink on its own.

When viewed on their own, almost every drink does well. **At least 6 in 10 people said they'd be likely to buy each of the 13 drinks we tested.** But a clear gap opens up when we put them side by side and ask people which one they'd consider.



Pink Mermaid comes last in the lineup, but it's as likely to be bought as Orange Dream

Overall, **Orange Dream** with Fanta and **Shark Attack** were ranked first or second most often, by just over half of the people who saw each one. But as we saw earlier, they win with different crowds: Orange Dream with over-35s, while Shark Attack with under-35s.

Pink Mermaid (sparkling soda with watermelon, coconut and strawberry flavors and sweet cream) is the one to watch. It came last when people compared the drinks (32% ranked it first or second). But when they rated each drink on its own, **it was just as likely to be bought as the overall winner**, Orange Dream with Fanta (69%). People love the look, and it was rarely anyone's least favorite: only 15% ranked it last.

But with four flavors in one cup, it's rarely anyone's top choice. It was most often ranked right in the middle, third out of five.



“

Love the watermelon coconut fusion and the drink has a great color.

“

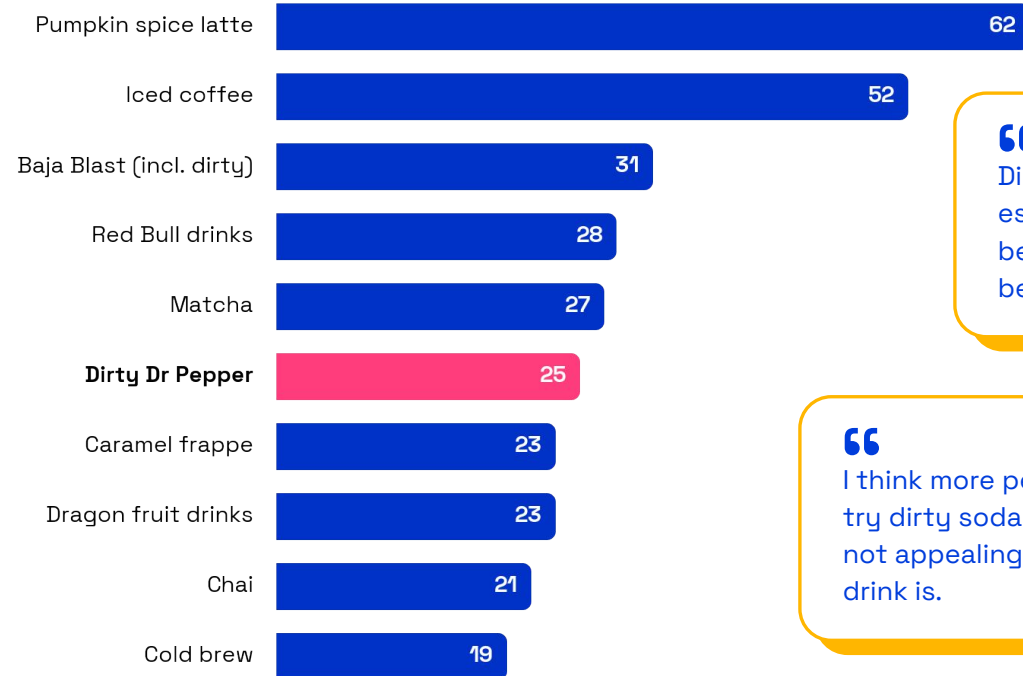
I think it looks like it would taste good, it is a fun color.

The drinks Americans want everyone to try

Our Screen It test shows which dirty sodas win when people compare them side by side. But we also wanted to know which drinks people are recommending. So in our Ask Anything survey, we asked them to name a drink they think more people should try.

In true fall fashion (when this research was conducted), the pumpkin spice latte topped the list, followed by iced coffee. But dirty soda has made the list too. **Dirty Dr Pepper** was named by about as many people as matcha, chai or a caramel frappe. And McDonald's was the brand people mentioned most often alongside "dirty."

The drinks people said others should try (number of people who named each one)

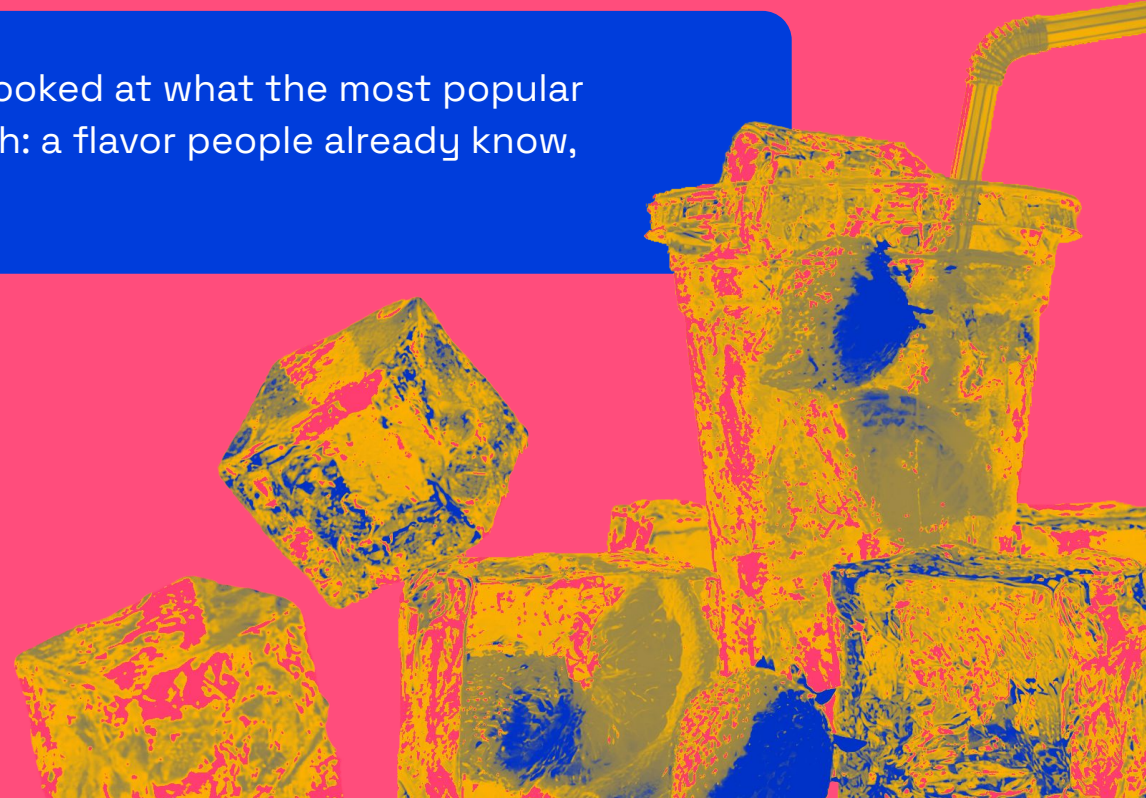


“
Dirty Dr Pepper, and especially a dirty root beer. Tastes like a root beer float.”

“
I think more people should try dirty soda. The name is not appealing, but the drink is.”

What makes a winning dirty soda?

Cola or citrus? Creamy or fruity? Simple or loaded? We looked at what the most popular drinks have in common and a clear formula came through: a flavor people already know, a light touch of cream and not too many add-ins.



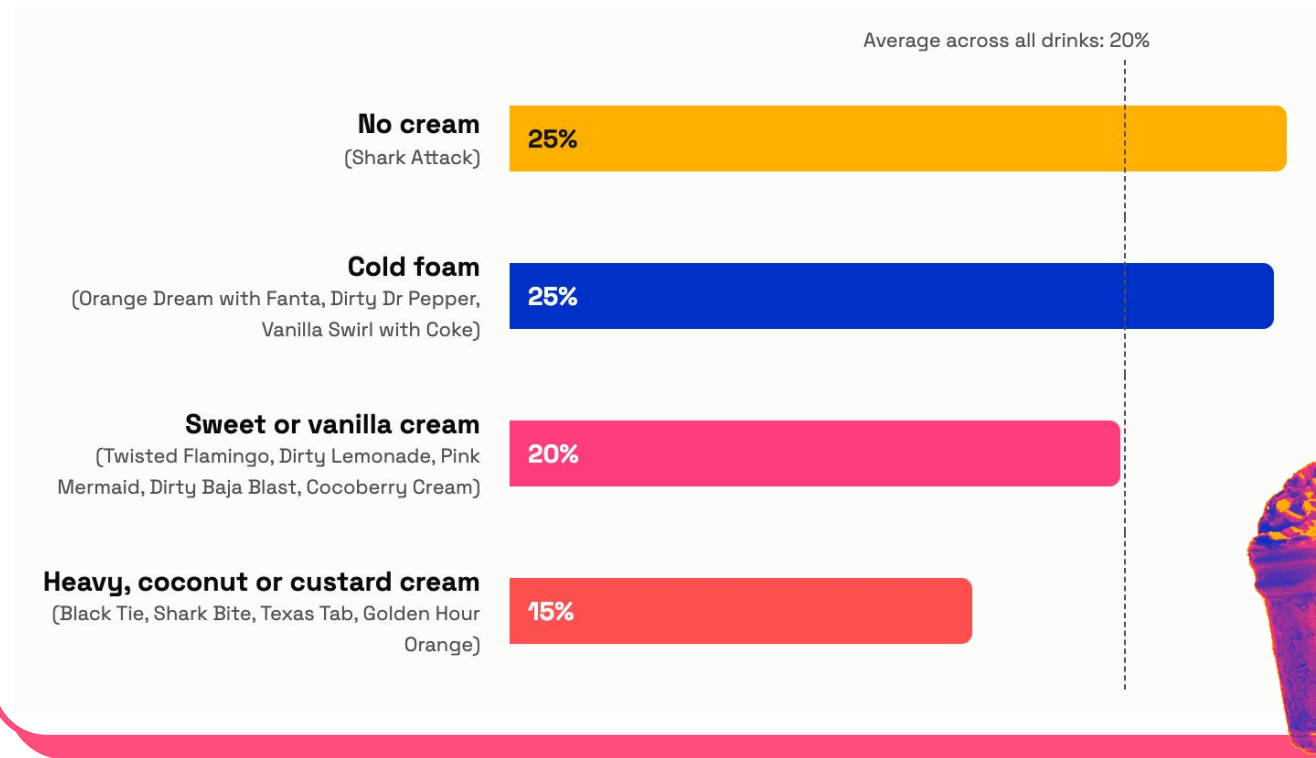
Go light on the cream

Cream defines a dirty soda, but the type of cream matters. The three drinks topped with **cold foam** took an average of 25% of the first-choice votes, compared to 20% for those with sweet or vanilla cream. Drinks made with heavy cream, coconut cream or custard cream came in last, with 15%.

Skipping the cream altogether works too. **Shark Attack**, the only drink with no cream, took 25% of the first-choice votes, in line with the cold foam drinks.

So if you're adding cream, keep it light.

First-choice votes by type of cream



Simple or loaded?

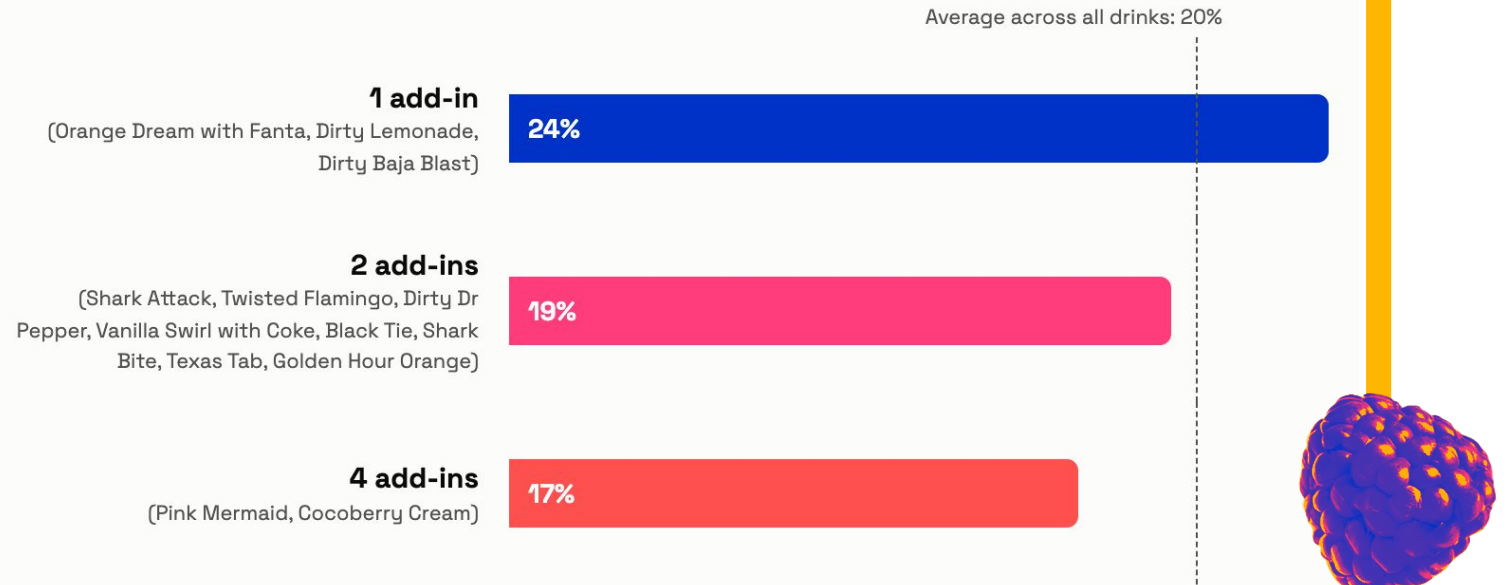
The fewer the add-ins, the better the drinks did.

Drinks with just one add-in got 24% of the first-choice votes on average, compared with 17% for the two most loaded drinks.

Our winner, Orange Dream with Fanta, had only cold foam on top.

Pink Mermaid and Cocoberry Cream had four add-ins each and got only 19% and 14% of the first-choice votes.

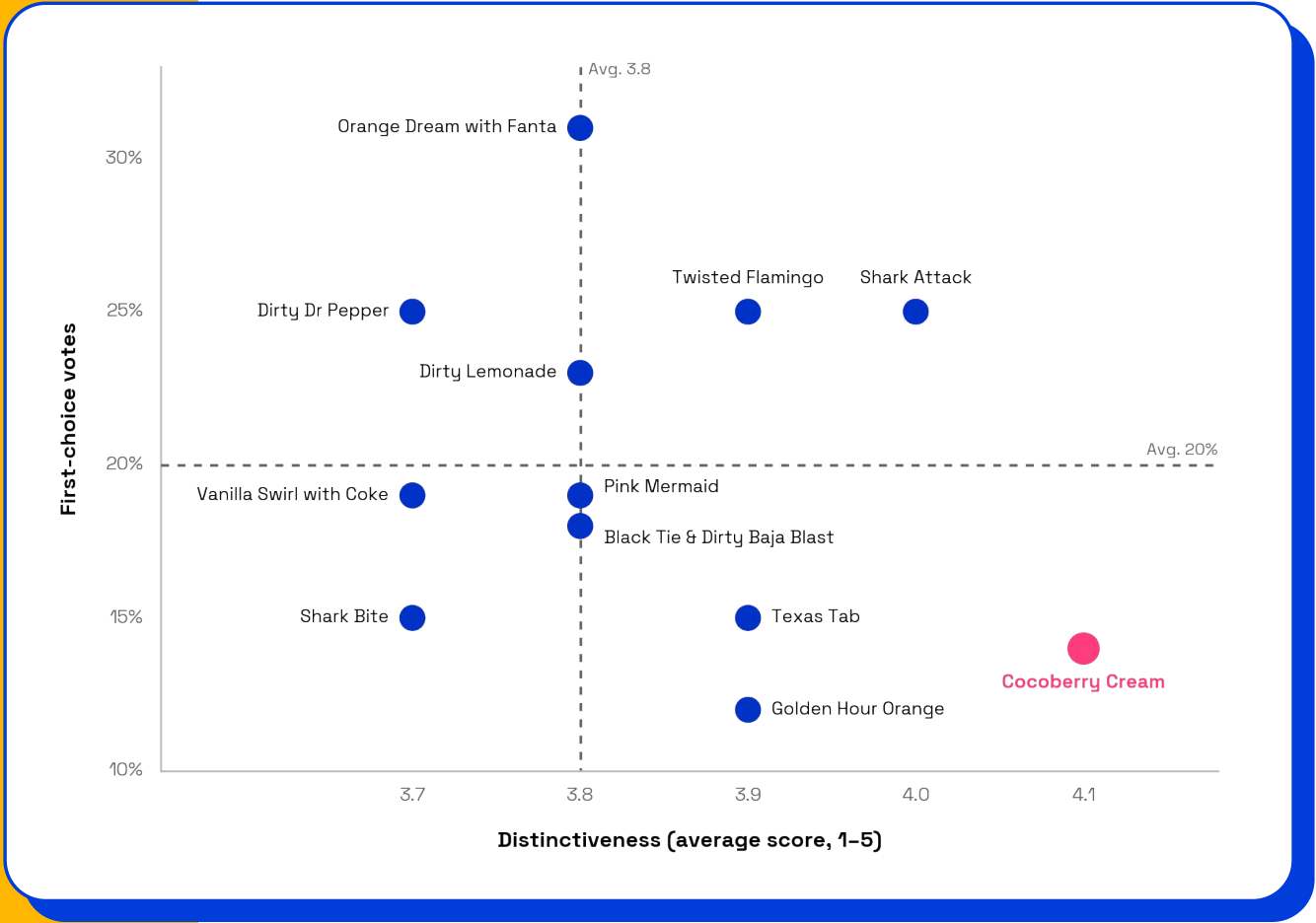
First-choice votes by number of add-ins



Yet **Cocoberry Cream** scored highest on **distinctiveness out of all 13 drinks** (4.1 vs. the 3.8 average). It's the only drink with real fruit in the cup and people say it has unique flavor.

So loaded drinks like this are great for getting your menu noticed, as a limited-time special or something made to share on social.

But for the drinks people order every day, it's best to keep it simple.



Simple helps, but familiar wins

However, simple isn't enough to win. Dirty Lemonade and Dirty Baja Blast also had just one add-in. Dirty Lemonade did well overall (23%) but Dirty Baja Blast landed in the bottom half (18%).

Ultimately, **the winners share a flavor people already know:** Creamsicle, blue raspberry lemonade, vanilla Dr Pepper, cherry vanilla. The drinks at the bottom pair the soda with something unexpected: pineapple with Coke, coconut with Dr Pepper or custard with lemon-lime.

The winning formula for broad appeal isn't just keeping it simple but making sure it tastes like something people already love



Coconut is a niche favorite

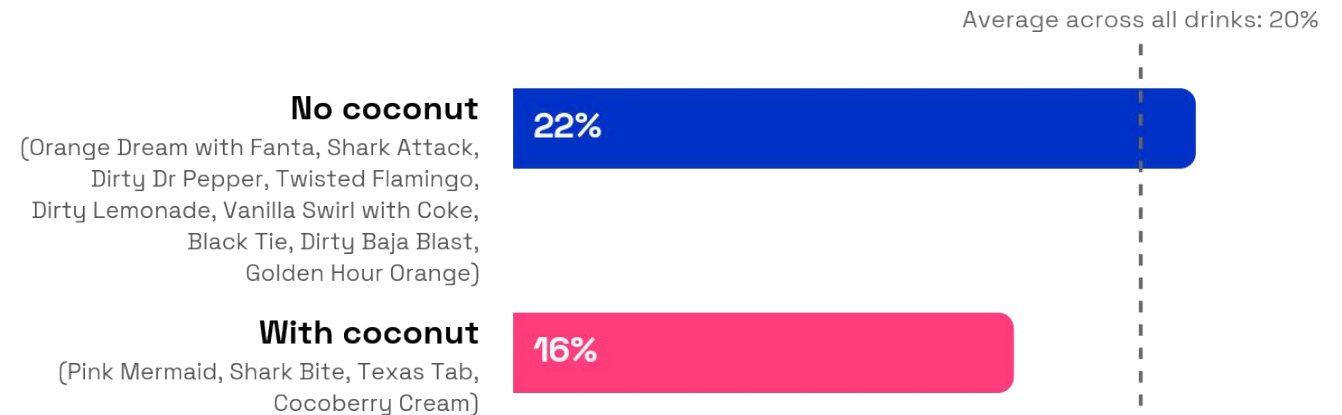


Coconut showed up in four of our 13 drinks, and three of them landed at the bottom of the rank: Shark Bite, Texas Tab and Cocoberry Cream. Drinks with coconut got 16% of the first-choice votes on average, compared with 22% for the drinks without it.

But **coconut does have its fans**, mostly in the 35–54 age group. They picked the coconut drinks almost as often as the rest (19% vs. 20%).

Coconut's fans love the flavor combos like pineapple and coconut and coconut and Dr Pepper.

First-choice votes, with vs. without coconut



Can dirty soda bring people through the door?

Drinks are the fast-food industry's big bet for winning extra visits, especially in the quiet afternoon hours. But can a dirty soda get people through the door on its own? We looked at where people buy their drinks, which brands they trust to make a good one and how much they're willing to pay.

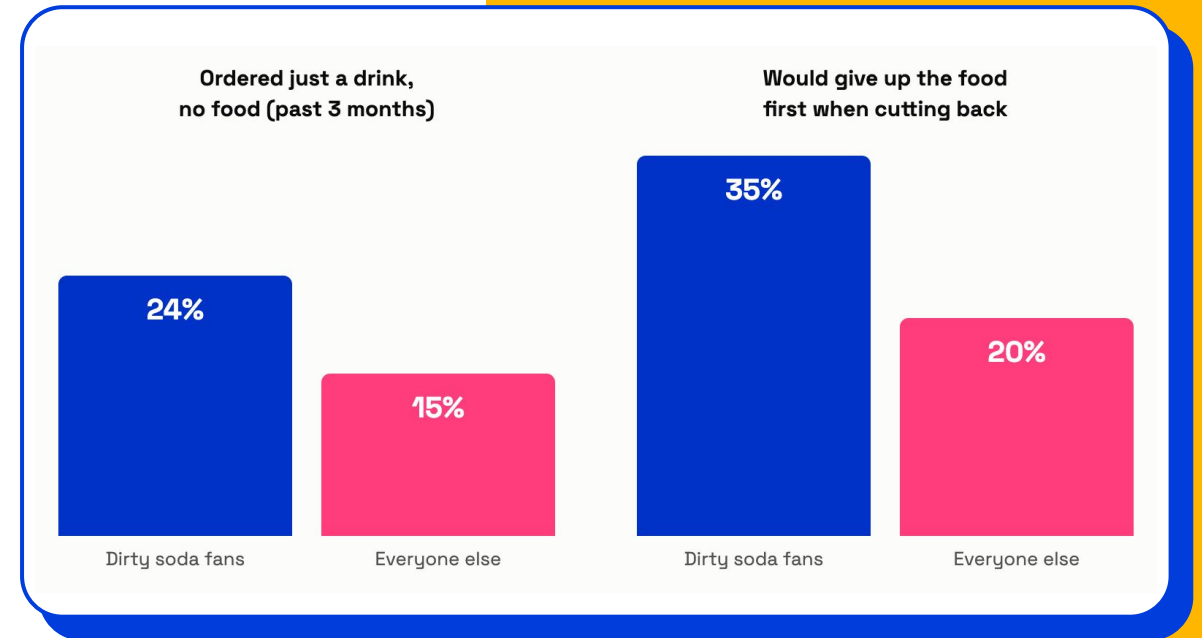


For dirty soda fans, the drink is the reason to visit

Nearly a quarter of dirty soda fans (24%) have skipped the food and ordered just a drink in the past three months, compared with 15% of everyone else.

They're also **more willing to give up the food when money's tight**. 35% of fans would cut the food first on their next visit, compared with 20% of everyone else. Among weekly buyers, it rises to 45%.

For brands, a dirty soda worth coming back for can bring fans in on its own.



Dirty soda fans are people who buy dirty soda occasionally or weekly (28% of US adults).

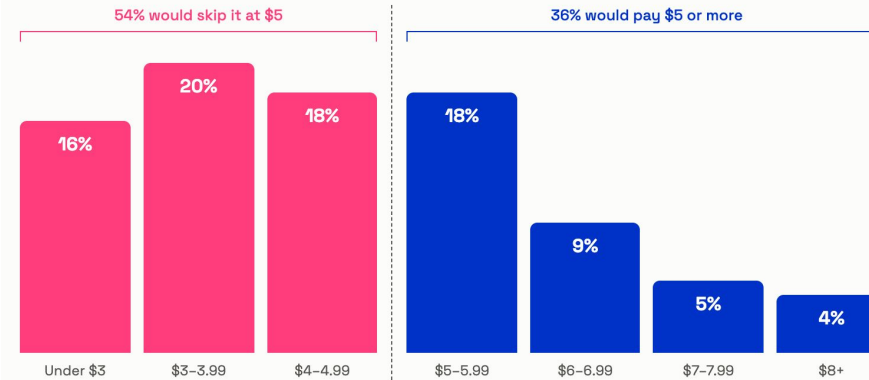
For most people, \$5 is the limit

Dirty soda shops typically charge \$5 or more for a large drink. But only around a third of US adults (36%) would pay that much for a large customized drink. More than half (54%) would skip it once it goes over \$5.

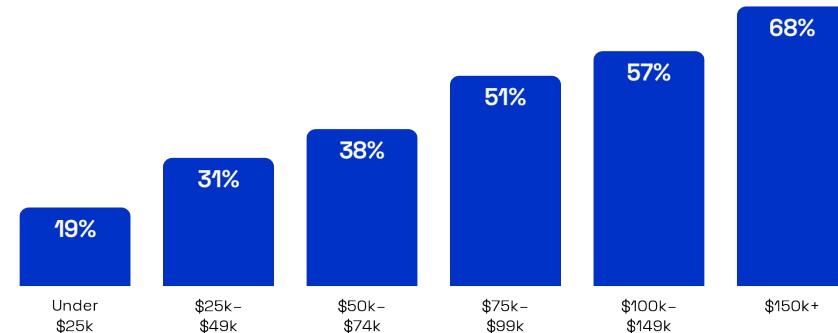
Income makes a big difference. Only 19% of households earning under \$25k would pay \$5 or more, rising to 68% of those earning \$150k or more.

For brands chasing traffic, a drink priced just under \$5 could reach far more people.

The most people would pay for a large customized drink



% who'd pay \$5+, by income

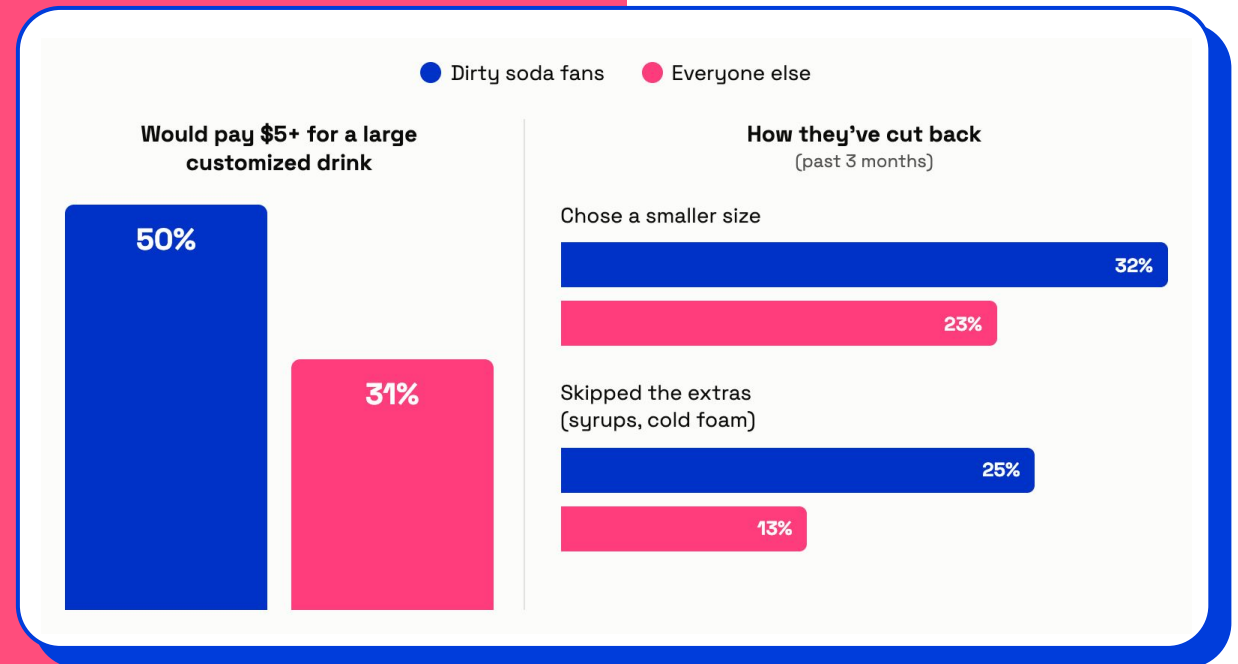


Fans will pay more and cut back by trimming their drink

Half of dirty soda fans (50%) would pay \$5 or more for a large customized drink, compared with 31% of everyone else. Among weekly buyers, 1 in 10 would go as high as \$8.

When money's tight, fans are more likely than others to trim their drink rather than give it up: getting a smaller size (32% vs. 23%) or skipping the extras like syrups and cold foam (25% vs. 13%).

So for brands, the drink itself is worth protecting. Keep a core dirty soda at a good price and **offer smaller sizes and optional extras** so fans can spend less without dropping the drink or going elsewhere.



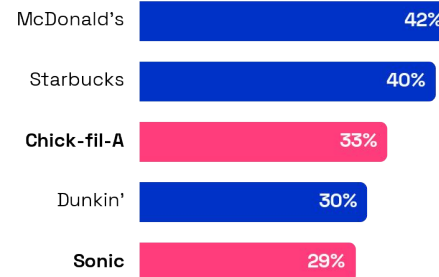
People trust a local favorite as much as the big names

McDonald's and **Starbucks** are among the most trusted brands to make a custom drink in every region. But each region also has its own local favorite that comes close to, or even beats, the big names.

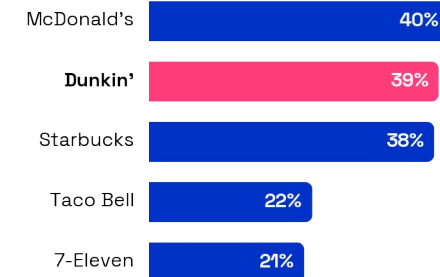
In the Northeast, **Dunkin'** is almost level with McDonald's (39% vs. 40%). In the West, **Starbucks** leads (47%) and **Dutch Bros** is trusted by 34%, roughly three times its level in the Northeast and Midwest. In the South, **Chick-fil-A** (33%) and **Sonic** (29%) are trusted more than in any other region.

Most trusted brands for a custom drink (like a dirty soda or refresher), by region

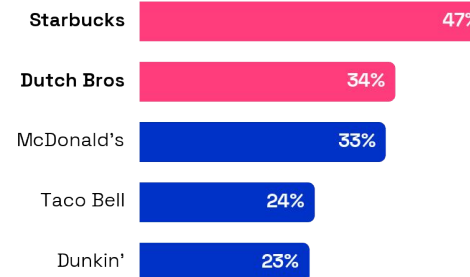
South



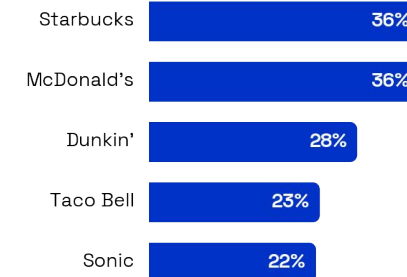
Northeast



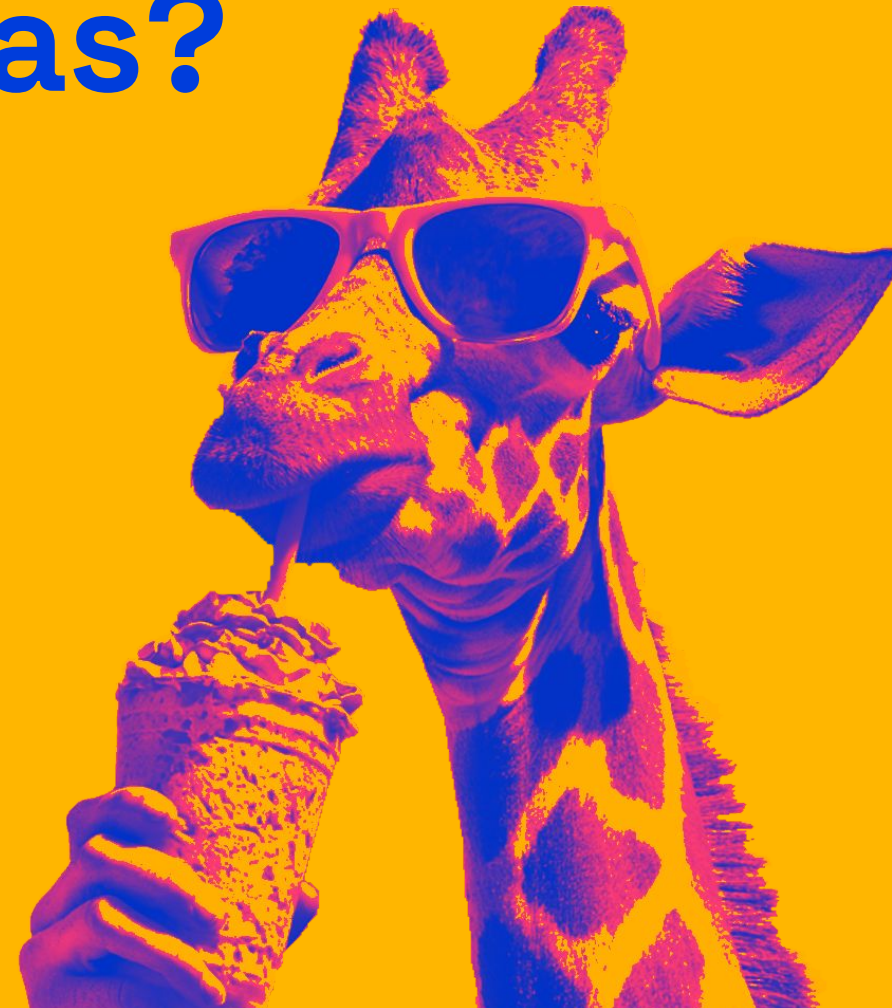
West



Midwest



What should brands do with dirty sodas?



1.

Make the format new, not the flavor.

The winners took flavors people already love, like a Creamsicle, blue raspberry lemonade or a vanilla Dr Pepper, and gave them a new twist. The drinks at the bottom of our ranking paired soda with something unexpected, like pineapple with Coke or custard with lemon-lime. So start with a soda and a flavor your customers already love, and let the cream and toppings bring the novelty.

2.

Simple drinks keep people ordering, loaded drinks win attention.

Drinks with just one extra ingredient were picked more often than those with four. But loaded drinks like Cocoberry Cream are still key: they're the most distinctive, which makes them great for limited-time offers. A rotating special can get people talking and through the door, while a simple core menu keeps them coming back.

3.

Keep dirty soda under \$5 to turn the hype into a habit.

Only half of the people who've tried dirty soda keep buying it and only 36% would pay \$5 or more for a large customized drink, while shops typically charge \$5-6. Fans are more willing to pay but when money's tight, they trim the drink with a smaller size or no extras. Keep a core dirty soda under \$5, with smaller sizes and optional extras so people can spend less without giving it up.

4.

Know who you're making the drink for.

Under-35s want bright and bold drinks, while everyone over 35 picks the Creamsicle. Women go for the pink Twisted Flamingo, while men lean towards Dirty Baja Blast. There's no one-size-fits-all dirty soda so make sure to test the drinks you're launching with the people you want to reach.

5.

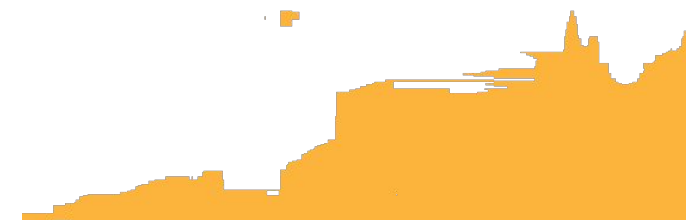
Know your local competition.

McDonald's and Starbucks are the brands people most trust to make a custom drink, but three of the four regions also have a strong local favorite: Dunkin' in the Northeast, Dutch Bros in the West, and Chick-fil-A and Sonic in the South. For national chains, the real competition for the dirty soda order is often the local favorite, so it pays to test new drinks region by region.

6.

Test drinks against each other, not just on their own.

When we asked how likely people were to buy each drink, around 6 in 10 or more said they'd buy every one of the 13 in the study. That makes almost any drink look like a safe bet. But Pink Mermaid, which scored as well as Orange Dream on purchase, came last when people chose their favorite. With so many brands entering the dirty soda race, test your drinks against the competition.



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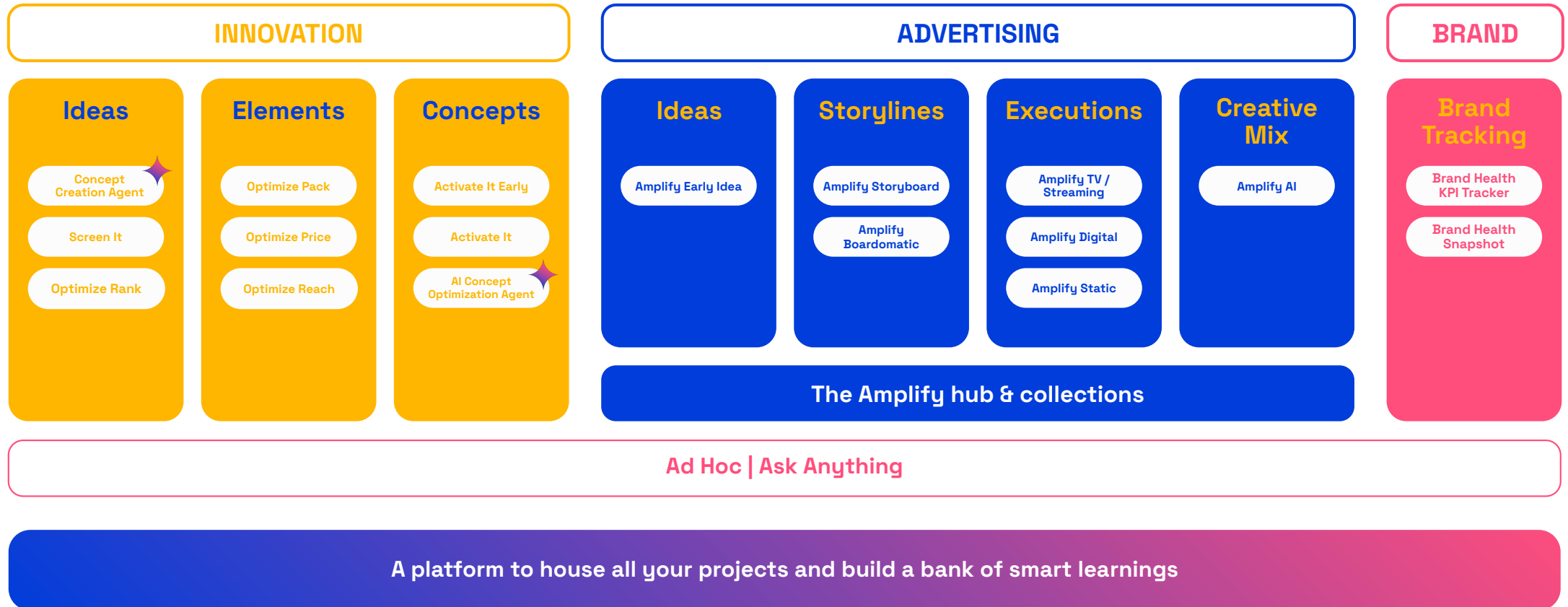
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