

DRINKS UNCOVERED

Insights, trends and inspiration for
beverages



Welcome to Drinks Uncovered. Here, we provide an in-depth overview of the latest trends and innovative solutions to help you stay ahead in a dynamic and ever-evolving market. First a quick overview:

The Journey of a Drink

- From packaging and producers to retailers and shoppers

Zero sugar and non-alcohol for consumers

Consumers are looking for convenience, less time spent in-store, and products that align with healthier lifestyles. As a result, zero-sugar soft drinks now lead the category, while no- and low-alcohol alternatives are growing at record speed.

Companies' responses

Companies face increasing pressure to meet ambitious sustainability targets. Many focus on primary packaging but often overlook the impact of secondary and tertiary solutions which also contribute significantly to waste and carbon emissions.

Retailer's journey to sustainability

Retailers are balancing sustainability goals with commercial realities and brand selection is an ongoing challenge, with new industry guidelines adding both support and complexity.

How we can help you

At DS Smith, we work across the value chain – helping companies reduce emissions, meet customer demands, and support retailers in achieving their sustainability ambitions.



Drinks Uncovered

The drinks category is changing fast
– **Get updated right here**

To stay competitive, it's important to stay up to date with what's happening in the market, so you can ensure your products and packaging are ready to meet new demands for recyclability, reduced materials, and strong shelf appeal.

In the following pages of Drinks Uncovered, we have compiled the most relevant recent trends for those interested in the drinks industry.



Read our
insights on the
next pages



What Nordic consumers demand from the Beverage Market

The Nordic beverage markets are undergoing a major transformation, driven by rising health consciousness and increasing demand for healthier, low/no-sugar, alcohol-free, and premium options with functional benefits.

See trends in the drinks categories at the next page



Trends in the different drink categories

Overall Trends

As consumer preferences shift towards health, wellness, premiumization, and reduced or non-alcoholic options, the Nordic beverage landscape is undergoing a transformation. Traditional soft drinks and alcoholic beverages are declining, while categories such as energy drinks, functional beverages, low/no-sugar products, and non-alcoholic alternatives are experiencing substantial growth.

Health and Wellness

Nordic consumers are increasingly favoring healthier beverage options like low/no sugar drinks, natural ingredients, non-alcoholic and functional products with benefits over traditional soft drinks.

Low Sugar

Health-conscious Nordic consumers are shifting towards low/no-sugar beverages, favoring functional and reduced-sugar options over traditional carbonated drinks and juices.

Energy & Sports drinks

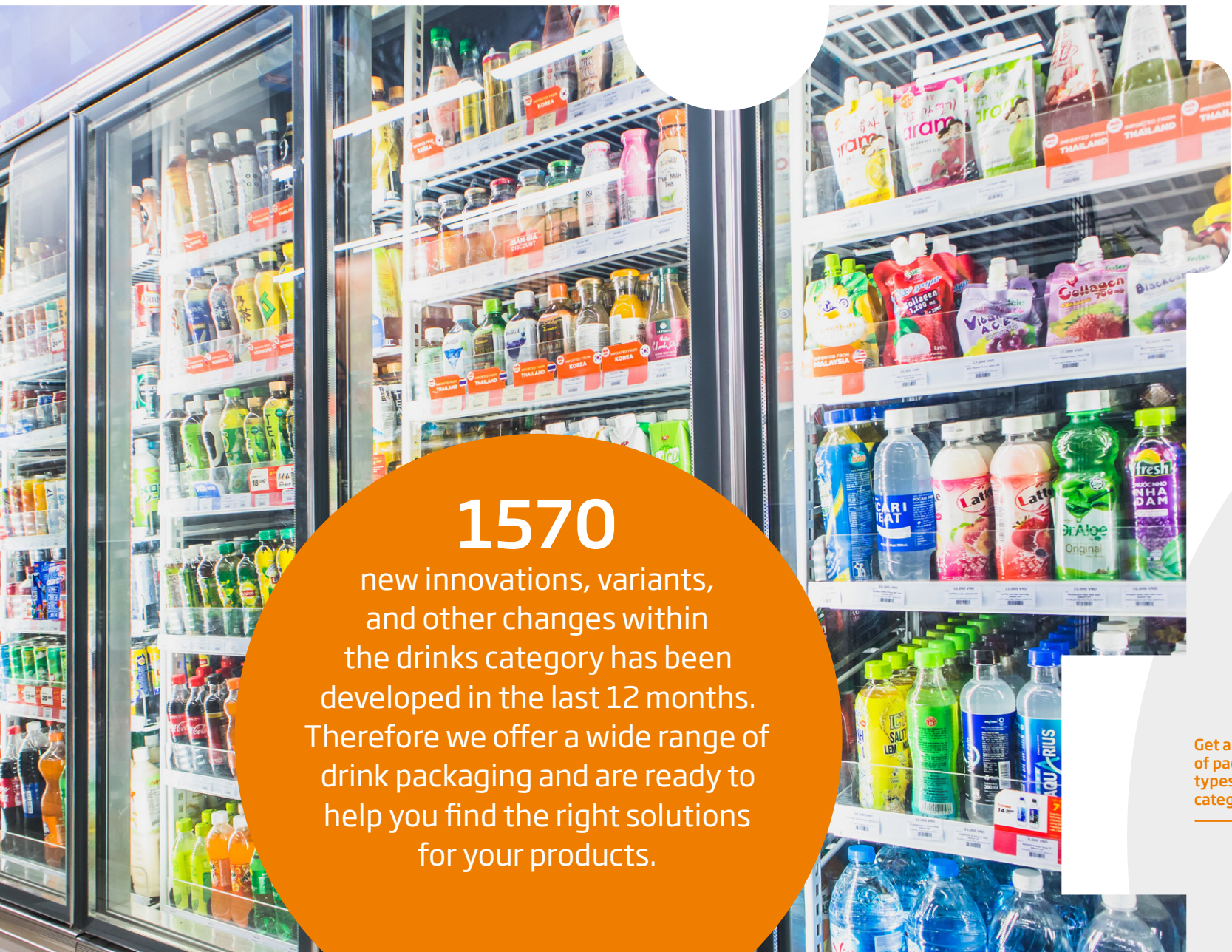
The Nordics saw a surge in demand for reduced-sugar energy and sports drinks in 2024, with strong off-trade volume sales growth across Sweden, Denmark and Finland driven by leading brands, affordable private labels, increased retail presence and lower average prices.

No/Low Alcohol

The Nordic markets are seeing strong growth in no/low-alcohol and premium beverages, with projected increases in online non-alcoholic drink sales and rapidly rising non-alcoholic beer sales.

Drinks is the most innovative category in food and drinks category

Companies are attracting new customers by utilizing more of the sustainable packaging formats in primary packaging (PET to cans) and using more sustainability claims on the primary packaging.



1570

new innovations, variants, and other changes within the drinks category has been developed in the last 12 months. Therefore we offer a wide range of drink packaging and are ready to help you find the right solutions for your products.

Get an overview of packaging types by category here.





The more established drinks categories are reacting to the latest consumer trends.

1

Juice

Regarding claims in the Juice category upcycled ingredients and additive free claims both have grown by more than **150%** in the past year. At the same time, they are reducing the PET use and replace it with more sustainable alternatives such as multi-layered board and cartons.

2


Carbonates

Carbonates are also reacting to the latest consumer trends. Regarding claims social media and sugar free claims are both up by **150%** compared to previous year. Bottles are used less and their alternatives and more sustainable option cans are up by **180%** compared to previous year.

3

No/Low Alcohol

In the No/Low Alcohol category as well, the sustainable and environmentally friendly packaging are the leading claims. Bottles and glasses here as well are decreasing so is glass and companies are listening to the latest trends and replacing bottles and glasses to cans which are up by **50%** in the past year.

A clear plastic PET bottle of water stands next to a pair of blue and white running shoes on a gravel path. The background is a blurred outdoor scene with warm, golden light. An orange circular graphic contains text in the upper right corner.

Companies within the Energy and Sports drinks segment seem to be behind with their packaging types & materials, still predominantly using PET bottles and stand-up pouches. They seem to be started in the traditional way without innovations yet.

Find an overview
of the category
at the next page →

The energy and sport drinks segment lags behind...

... Compared to more traditional drinks categories.
These relatively new categories are not so innovative yet

Energy & Sports drinks

Although energy and sports drinks are a booming category they have been slower to adapt to sustainable packaging trends compared to the more established categories e.g. Juices, Carbonates, No/Low Alcohol.



This is an example from a sports drink in a can as a primary packaging and flexible plastic based secondary packaging.



In the category of energy drinks and other functional drinks we see a lot of plastic based primary packaging.

VS



In the juice category we see solutions based on carton as primary packaging.

Energy and sports drinks are a booming category. But they have been slower to adapt to sustainable packaging trends. Pouches and bottles are still dominant types. Flexible stand up pouches are up by **300%** compared to last year (2023 May-2024 May).

The more sustainable version cans are not growing as much as they are in other more established categories e.g. Juices, Carbonates, No/Low Alcohol.

However, these categories are keeping up with the claims and are answering to consumer trends with No/Low/Reduced calorie claim being the top growing. On new products, this claim is up by **400%** compared to previous May 2023-May 2024 year.

SOURCE: Mintel, 2025

82% of FMCG companies are not currently on track to meet their decarbonization targets*

A significant gap between companies' stated plastic reduction commitments and the actions taken to meet them.



FMCG companies are struggling to meet their sustainability targets, leaving room for improvement. DS Smith can help address these challenges.

See 6 challenges at the next page

6 challenges for companies



In 2024, beverage companies emitted **1.5 billion** tonnes of CO2 equivalent, accounting for **3.8%** of global emissions.



Many companies set ambitious sustainability goals without fully considering the technical feasibility and challenges involved.



Growing interest in holistic life cycle assessments over just recyclability.



There is a major overshoot of carbon budgets for beverage packaging materials (glass **+200%**, PET **+150%**, aluminium **+50%**).
2023/2024 May compared to 2024/2025 May.



Recommendations include investing in technology, developing reuse systems, enhancing recycling, and reducing overall demand for these packaging materials.



There is a need for the revised PPWR to take aggressive actions on material reduction, reuse targets, potential bans on problematic single-use formats.

***SOURCE:**

The ESG Report 2025; The Institute for energy research, 2024; Ellen Macarthur Foundation 2024; Packaging Europe 2023; Zero Waste Europe 2023. McKinsey, 2023.



Beverage companies must adopt a holistic supply chain approach to sustainability going beyond just primary packaging to fully address environmental impact, meet stakeholder expectations, identify optimization opportunities, and gain a competitive edge.



Why beverage companies' require a whole supply chain approach?

Take a view on the supply chain possibilities at next page

At **DS Smith**, we develop your secondary packaging solutions with a focus on every stage of your supply chain. We ensure that your products are delivered in the most efficient way possible from production and distribution to retail and all the way to the end customer.



Not only primary packaging:

Looking at only the primary packaging gives an incomplete picture. Secondary & Tertiary packaging also have an environmental footprint in terms of material used, energy consumed in manufacturing, transportation impact etc.

Take a view on the whole supply chain:

By taking a holistic view on supply chain, beverage companies can identify opportunities to optimize packaging design, material use, logistics etc.

Stakeholder expectations:

Customers, regulators, investors and other stakeholders increasingly expect companies to address sustainability comprehensively, not just for a single product component. A supply chain approach demonstrates accountability.

Competitive advantage:

Taking a leadership position on sustainable supply chain practices can differentiate beverage companies and provide a competitive edge as consumer and market demands evolve.

SOURCE: The ESG Report 2025; The Institute for energy research, 2024; Ellen Macarthur Foundation 2024; Packaging Europe 2023; Zero Waste Europe 2023

Make attention in the stores

Consumers spend on average just 0.1 to 0.4 seconds fixating on soft drinks and sodas on shelf *

A magnifying glass is held over a shelf of soft drinks in a store. The lens of the magnifying glass is focused on a specific section of the shelf, showing various brands of soda cans and bottles. The background is blurred, showing other shelves and products in the store.

With shoppers spending less time in-store, capturing attention through clear messaging and stand-out branding is more important than ever

Learn more about shoppers in stores at the next page



How do you make sure your drinks stand out on the shelves?

Less time in store

According to the US Census Bureau (2017), the amount of time spent shopping has decreased by one-fifth over the past 13 years. In 2024, foot traffic declined by 2.2% compared to 2023. On average, consumers now spend 20% less time shopping each week.

► This indicates a clear trend: consumers have been spending less time in stores in recent years.

Product recognition

30% of consumers say they choose to shop in-store specifically because they are more likely to discover new products.

► This suggests that product discovery and brand recognition are key reasons why some consumers continue to visit physical stores, despite spending less time there overall.

Effective POS

Winning at the moment of purchase is becoming even more critical in light of the narrowing and consolidation we have observed.

► This highlights the importance of effectively marketing and communicating products to consumers at the point of purchase especially when they have limited time in-store.

*SOURCE: Deloitte, Clear Channel, Nielsen, Just Style



Innovation that inspires

Welcome to a whole new way of
thinking about beverage packaging.

We've gone back to basics and developed a range of new solutions for cans, bottles, and cartons. Our starting point is simple: they must be **easy to handle** for you, your customers, your logistics partners, and ultimately, the end consumer in-store. Drinks packaging need to be **resilient**. It should **boost visibility, branding, and sales**. And they must **reduce material** use and be **recyclable**.

Explore our possibilities
on the following pages.





DS Smith SafeTray

Less material, high stability

Safe Tray ensures that cans and bottles stay secure and stable on pallets during transport and are ready to be placed directly on the shelf. The design reduces material usage without compromising on safety. That means a functional solution with a lower carbon footprint. You can use Safe Tray with existing solutions so there are no needs for any special adjustments.

- Minimal material and use 100% recyclable
- Improved palletisation for more efficient transport
- Reduced risk of damage and waste





DS Smith Lift Up

Minimal material, easy
to carry home



Lift Up keeps your large bottles together with a simple solution made from 100% recyclable, paper based material. The design is easy to handle from production and all the way to the consumer carrying it home.

It also catches your customers' attention with branding opportunities, whether the bottles are placed on a shelf or a pallet. Designed to run on high-speed Krones lines.

- Clean and minimalistic design
- Comfortable to carry and easy to open
- Reduced CO2 emissions with 100% recyclable material

DS Smith Light Wrap

Optimized design, improved customer experience

Light Wrap is an innovative new way to ensure that your liquid cartons arrive in perfect condition at the store. The solution helps protect your products and keeps your brand looking sharp. It reduces damage and waste while presenting your brand with improved quality exterior printing. The solution has been developed for multiple variants of liquid cartons.



- Controlled compression of liquid cartons
- Improved palletisation with reduced carbon emissions
- Minimised damage, less waste and spillage





- Easy to transport and quick to assemble
- Designed to make attention
- Durable and easy to return it as recyclable cardboard after use

DS Smith One Sheet Ellipse

Maximum exposure, easy to handle

One Sheet Ellipse is an eye-catching display with an innovative design easy to assemble directly in the store. It's easy to handle thanks to a simple locking mechanism that requires no extra glue or rubber bands. The unique drop-shaped pattern draws attention and helps attract customers to your products. Made entirely from 100% recyclable corrugated cardboard.



DS Smith POS SOLUTIONS

- Grabs attention and drives sales
- Easy to set up
- Made from recyclable materials

Designed to help our customers
sell more in-store

Do you want to generate attention and boost sales in the highly competitive retail environment? We offer a wide range of POS-solutions designed to help you do just that. Discover POS-displays tailored to your beverage products. Choose from our many innovative, easy-to-set-up solutions, all made from recyclable materials.



DS Smith Gift packaging & shipping

There are many innovative kinds of packaging when you have to ship beverages and make sure they arrive safely. We have solutions for beer and wine and other beverage products. Gift boxes, shipping cartons, wraps, and more for both large and small deliveries. All options are easy to handle and made from recyclable corrugated cardboard that presents your brand and protects your products.

- For all types of beverage products
- Easy to assemble and ship
- Custom branding options for your solution





Reach out today

Talk to DS Smith today, we'll help you find the solution that's exactly right to meet the demands of both your supply chain and today's demanding consumer.



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