

Challengers to Watch 2023: Glenmorangie

By [Hugh Derrick](#), issued by [eatbigfish](#)

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The world remains uncertain, and businesses must adapt to new and unpredictable economic, geopolitical and environmental realities. Against this backdrop, it's important to pay attention to the new (and renewed) challengers emerging and primed to disrupt categories in 2023. These companies are finding opportunities in the uncertainty, breaking with expectations, and not just meeting the needs of a fast-changing world but shaping its future.

In the 10th instalment of our annual 'Challengers to Watch' feature, we identify 20 rising companies from around the world and explore the broader trends, opportunities and threats to the status quo they represent.

Our roundup covers an expansive range of categories, markets and geographies, but all these companies share a firm rejection of 'best practice' and an understanding of the imperative to make their own rules.

Glenmorangie – for being the Willy Wonka of whisky

Let's start with a confession. This Challenger to Watch 2023 is one of eatbigfish's clients. In fact, they're one of my clients and one of my favourite projects of my (rather considerable) time here. This story is about how a somewhat stagnant and conventional malt whisky - [one among many Glens](#) - has reversed its fortunes.



It's important to state that change rarely happens overnight, but the trajectory and speed of turnaround have been impressive. Since 2019, a mature brand that was losing market share has adopted a challenger mindset, growing volume roughly 20%, and value and profit by even more. As a result, Glenmorangie is growing faster than the category and is stealing share from its competitive set and, at the same time, it is winning more top awards for its whiskies.

This is not a story of wild disruption and brand anarchy – but more an example of how a brand can progress itself and the category through good use of consumer insight, challenging conventions and executing boldly and creatively while amplifying the truths of the brand and those who make it.

The consumer research that kicked this project off in 2018 not only delivered invaluable insight but, critically, it acted as an objective reference point for all the stakeholders. Glenmorangie's malaise was partly due to the wide range of different internal opinions about the brand's future direction. Creating alignment could not have been achieved without an up-to-date

piece of research that provided new objectivity and enabled those involved to develop a shared and up-to-date understanding of premium spirits drinkers.

The research provided a few key insights. First, when, where and how people drank whisky was changing dynamically: with young people experiencing a wide range of brown spirits in cocktails and in higher energy environments, whisky was no longer seen as the preserve of an older drinker. As a result, it could lose some of its ageing tropes.



And, while premium spirits drinkers seek craft and authenticity in the drinks they buy, they don't want to be bored to death about ingredients or patronised by experts. Single malt was one of those categories that nurtured the myth that 'unless you know, you can't appreciate...'. It is awash with 'knowledge bullies' who use expertise to keep people out. Here was an opportunity to offer something less patriarchal and conventional.

These insights about consumers having a more open attitude to whiskies and craving a simpler, less staid approach, were music to the ears of Glenmorangie's celebrated Master Distiller, [Dr Bill Lumsden](#) – a central character in this project. When asked what you need to know to drink Glenmorangie, Bill simply replied, 'There's nothing to explain, it's simply delicious'.

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Dr Bill – and his whisky creation team – think in metaphors, analogies, and stories when they create new whiskies. Their sense of playful imagination was infectious throughout the workshops that led to the new strategy and became codified in the final articulation of the positioning.

So, the recipe for success that has fueled Glenmorangie in the last three years includes – challenging the idea that you can only appreciate single malt if you understand single malt, and instead, creating a vivid, colourful, and inviting brand world that is the natural home for products that reflect the imagination of the people that make them.



This is a playful world of anagram cocktails (I love a [Ginger Lemon](#), some prefer the [Orange Mingle](#)), and collaborations with [Cronut makers](#). It is a powerful visual world brought to life in the films and visuals of [Miles Aldridge](#). And overall, it all adds up to something 'kind of delicious and wonderful'.

So, why a Challenger to Watch in 2023?

They say that a rocket uses half its fuel to go the first mile on its way to the moon – it's that hard to get going. Glenmorangie has gone the first mile – perhaps – but now it faces different invisible forces. A difficult economic environment, some changes to the team, other players mimicking Glenmorangie's colourful style and a fight for attention under the gaze of a demanding parent – LVMH – drawn towards a new brand success [model](#). 2023 is the difficult second album.

I'll be buying it. Will you?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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