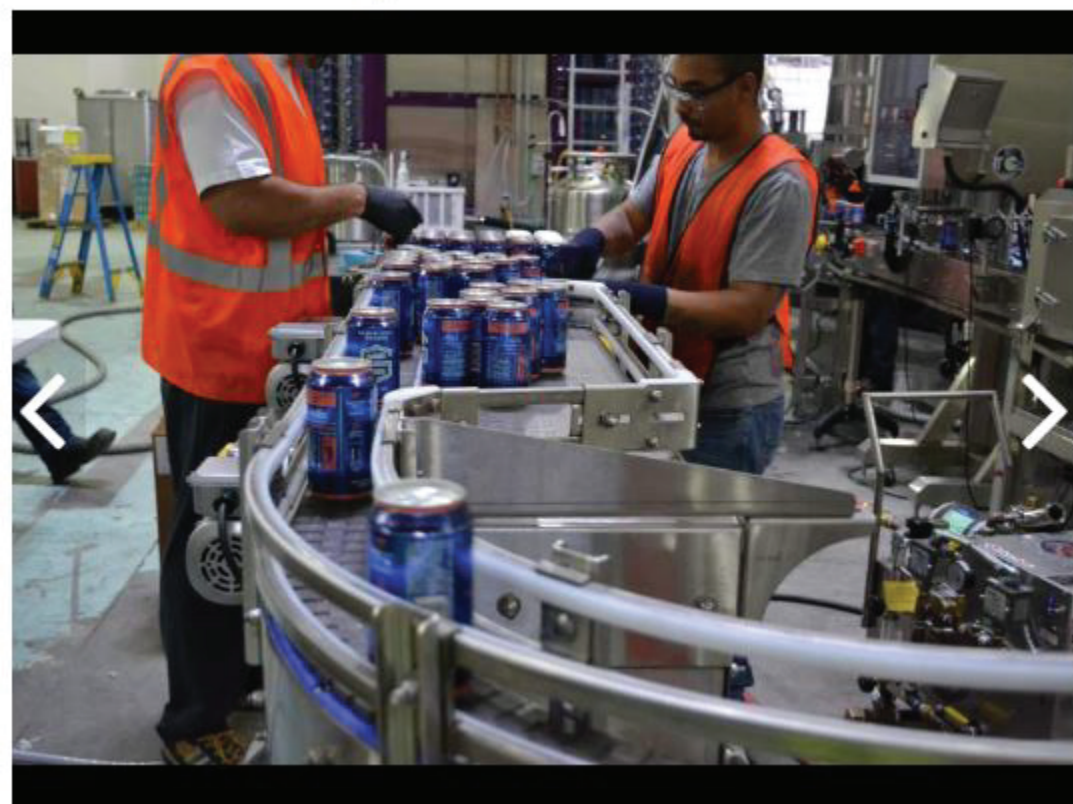


Wine in kegs, cans drives fast growth for Free Flow Wines of Napa



(1 of 9) Putting premium wines in aluminum cans is a fast-growing service for Napa-based Free Flow Wines. (COURTESY OF FREE FLOW WINES) April 26, 2015

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NORTH BAY BUSINESS JOURNAL | August 27, 2018



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Free Flow Wines came back to the Inc. 5000 list of fast-growing U.S. companies for a fourth year in 2018, which will also see the Napa-based company return to its roots in Sonoma County.

Free Flow ranked No. 2,896, based on the magazine's standard for revenue growth. The company took in \$7.1 million last year, up 142 percent 2014–2017. Revenue is on track to grow 50 percent this year, according to Jordan Kivelstadt, CEO and co-founder.

The 9-year-old company expanded from Sonoma to Napa five years ago. Now, it's set to move in January to a building under construction near Sonoma.

"We're upgrading everything we do to enable the next 10 years of growth," Kivelstadt said.

Free Flow has 78 employees and plans to hire 12 more this year. One employee motivator is free growers, but sense of mission is bigger.

"We believe that everyone has to understand how they materially contribute to the bottom line," Kivelstadt said. "Empowering each employee to understand their impact is key. In addition, having a strong sustainability underpinning to the company means that people are proud of the work they do, and want to share it with friends and family."

The goal of cans and kegs is to save more than 100 million bottles from the landfill in the coming years.

Free Flow's production capacity will increase to 1.1 million kegs and 5 million cases of cans per year.

Single-serving aluminum cans is a fast-growing part of the wine business. From 1,000 to 2,000 cases of cans turned out monthly last year, Free Flow was on track to 30,000 cases of wine and wine-related products such as spritzers in July alone.

More than two-thirds of the canning customers are existing kegging clients, and the rest are coming to Free Flow for cans only, Kivelstadt said. The company currently is working with over two dozen brands in cans.

"It's a huge growth engine for us," Kivelstadt said. "It's another sustainable alternative packaging, and there is not really anyone in California focusing on putting high-quality wine in cans."

Funding fast growth is a common challenge for capital-intensive companies like Free Flow, according to Kivelstadt.

"We have been creative in this, but working with equity partners, non-bank lenders, and industry partners to help us finance our growth," he said.

Four of 10 entrepreneurial characteristics Gallup and Inc. surveyed the fast-growth list companies about fit Free Flow well: knowledge, delegation, determination and disruption.

Knowing the wine market well helped Free Flow jump into canning wine.

"We are always looking at alternative packages for wine, and understand the opportunities and risks," Kivelstadt said. "The fact that we already are the trusted packaging partner of over 200 wineries made our entry here a lot easier."

Trailblazing in kegging and now canning wine has made the Free Flow crew "enablers of disruption."

"We provide the industry the ability to create new products, launch new SKUs, and do so with quality and sustainability at the forefront," Kivelstadt said.

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