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BUDWEISER'S 'FREEDOM' SUMMER CANS COULD HEAT UP SALES—AND TENSIONS

The beer brand's annual star-spangled package could spark summer sales, but some see the message as more provocative than patriotic



By [Jon Springer](#). Published on May 06, 2022.



Credit: Budweiser

Budweiser's forthcoming release of patriotic packaging for the summer season could set off fireworks in more ways than one.

This year's special edition places the word "Freedom" on the logo where "Budweiser" would normally reside, recalling a wildly successful 2016 edition that used the word "America" in the same way. The brand says the package is intended to celebrate unity, but some industry experts are interpreting the message quite differently: In today's fraught political environment, they said, the word "freedom" has become loaded with uncomfortable subtext, recalling everything from mask controversies to the Roe v. Wade Supreme Court leak, and become a symbol instead of struggle and division.

"Freedom is a loaded word, with many connotations, both positive and negative—especially in today's cultural context," said Denise Lee Yohn, a brand marketing expert and author. "Case in point: The potential reversal of Roe v. Wade ruling and the topic of a woman's freedom to choose is very top of mind right now."



Designed by DraftLine, Anheuser-Busch InBev's in-house agency, the Freedom cans are emblazoned with patriotic symbolism including stars and stripes and a bald eagle. The phrase "Let it Ring" appears in the same spot that "King of Beers" does on Budweiser's traditional package, and Budweiser's brand manifesto is replaced with a cheer for the aligned values of the brand, its fans, and the country.

“Here’s to the freedom that unites all Americans. It is the foundation that our country’s strength is built upon. To commemorate this, we have replaced our iconic Budweiser name with Freedom so we can all toast to the value we hold so dear. This Bud’s for freedom. This Bud’s for you,” the cans read.

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Budweiser is American-made beer but is owned by Belgium concern Anheuser-Busch InBev. It has released patriotic-themed packaging for more than a decade—a practice that beer experts say helps highlight its product as consumers shop between Memorial Day and Independence Day, traditionally the beer category’s biggest selling season. Bud’s new package in this sense will let freedom ring—and cash registers too.

“What it does more importantly than anything, is ensure the brand will snag some eye-popping displays this summer. And eye-popping displays sell more beer,” said Jenn Litz, executive editor at Beer Business Daily, a beer industry trade publication.

According to Litz, the Freedom can also aligns with an effort underway by Budweiser to leverage a “bold” and “confident” brand voice, citing remarks made by Daniel Blake, the company’s VP of marketing for Budweiser and value, recently at SAMCOM, A-B InBev’s annual brand show for wholesalers. “Obviously,” Litz added, “the move to brand Bud packs with the word ‘Freedom’ plays to Bud’s uber-patriotic DNA.”

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Beer historian and author Maureen Ogle took a cynical view of the branding, believing it was calculated to deliver emotional inspiration for a particular customer, and striking harder than the “America” branding of 2016, which also arrived amid some controversy.

“Especially in the past few years, gimmicks like this appeal to a particular slice of the market. I’d describe that generally as ‘blue collar leaning right and thinks craft beers are for elites,’” Ogle said. “Obviously that is a big generalization, but A-B wouldn’t do this unless they knew there was a payoff.

“Is ‘Freedom’ more provocative than ‘America’? At this moment in history, both words are loaded,” Ogle continued. “But I’d say, yeah, ‘Freedom’ strikes me as more loaded because the far right has claimed ownership of the idea of freedom.”

Asked to comment on the degree to which the brand gave thought to the potential that its packaging could be interpreted as provocative, a Budweiser spokesperson responded: “In time for Memorial Day, the Freedom cans are a follow-up to the Budweiser ‘America’ cans first released in 2016 with the intent to celebrate what unites us all.”

That it arrives amid a national uproar over the leaked Supreme Court decision—a controversy that some marketers feel brands will be drawn into—is coincidental, the spokesperson added.

“The launch of these cans is timed to the annual release schedule of our yearly patriotic cans, and the production of this specific can has been in the works for months,” the spokesperson said.

Budweiser said it was once again working with Folds of Honor, an organization supporting educational scholarships for spouses and children of fallen and disabled U.S. military members. For every case of Freedom cans sold between May 16 and July 4, Budweiser will donate to Folds of Honor, pledging a donation of up to \$150,000.

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Rebrands & Redesigns

Jon Springer

Jon Springer is a Senior Reporter for Ad Age, covering food and CPG marketing. He formerly covered the food retail industry for Winsight and Supermarket News, and is a former sports and



features writer for The Cecil Whig, a daily newspaper in Elkton, Md.

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