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DISCUS Chief on Tapping into Broader Audience to Advocate for Industry Issues

The Distilled Spirits Council has been pretty busy in the last year from bringing on new chief Chris Swonger to dealing with tariffs and advocating for the Craft Beverage Modernization and Tax Reform Act (CBMTRA) to working more closely with Responsibility.org.

Last month the Distilled Spirits Council jointly launched a new platform to support spirits industry initiatives in partnership with the American Distilling Institute and TIPS, called Spirits United [see [WSD 08-19-2018](#)].

Your editor recently got Chris on the horn to discuss Spirits United further as well as what else is on DISCUS' full plate.

“We’re really excited about it,” Chris tells WSD about Spirits United. The plan is “to invest a lot of time and effort and really build [the platform] out.”

When asked how Spirits United came about, Chris said that coming back to the spirits industry after ten years, he really noticed “one of the neat things about this industry is there is so much pride and excitement about the products from the broader spirits community.”

“What we want to do with the platform is leverage and harness that pride” to advocate for the industry’s interests.

“We’re going to be really honed in and focused on building up Spirits United where we can really tap in and leverage the voice of the industry,” he says, including bartenders and consumers.

Indeed, bartenders are “an important audience,” says Chris. “They are ambassadors for the industry. They help build great brands. We want to make sure that their voices are heard as well.”

The plan is to target issues at the federal and state level including CBMTRA, Sunday sales, tastings and tariffs. Speaking of which...

The CBMTRA now has 276 sponsors in the House and 68 in the Senate, according to Chris. “It enjoys broad bipartisan support, but we’re going to push this all the way through until we get it across the finish line.”

Moreover, the group is also “working really hard to make DISCUS a more inviting trade association for the spirits community to engage.” For instance, earlier this year they launched the Craft Advisory Council to represent craft distillers in state, federal and local policy issues [see [WSD 05-23-2019](#)].

It’s “about bringing the industry together” to advocate for it as a whole.