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Starbucks bringing beer and wine to Chicago

City to join Seattle and Portland in early rollout of coffee giant's small-plates 'evening daypart' concept

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Baristas in as many as seven Chicago Starbucks will soon be slinging stronger stuff than just cappuccinos and lattes, as the company begins its national move into the beer and wine market. (Zbigniew Bzdak, Tribune photo / December 6, 2011)

By **Emily Bryson York**, Chicago Tribune reporter
December 6, 2011

Maps
Seattle, WA, USA

Starbucks Coffee Co. plans to open as many as seven stores that sell beer and wine in the Chicago area

by the end of 2012.

The Seattle-based coffee giant has been testing a more community-oriented store concept to boost traffic in the evening for more than two years. These stores offer savory, high-quality, small-plate options like cured meats, and beer and wine, in addition to the usual coffee and tea. Starbucks has also been experimenting with live entertainment, including music, poetry readings or theater, depending on the neighborhood.

"We're really trying to expand the evening daypart," said Starbucks spokesman Alan Hilowitz. "Customers have told us they want to be able to come in and have coffee, or a glass of wine." At the six stores currently open in the Seattle area and Portland, he said, same-store sales after 4:00 p.m. have increased by double-digit percentages.

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Hilowitz declined to provide Starbucks' investment relating to the stores, adding that some will be in new locations, and others in existing locations that will be remodeled. Specific locations have yet to be finalized as the company is working with local officials to obtain the proper licenses and permits.

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Darren Tristano, executive vice president of Technomic, said the move makes sense given the cafe environment, adding that **Burger King** is also experimenting with beer service at its **Whopper** Bar chain.

"Higher price points can be more profitable, but permitting could be more of an issue and a really important factor will be how guests who consume adult beverages interact with guests who don't," he said.

Morningstar analyst R.J. Hottovy said that the concept has tested well enough in Seattle to warrant expansion, and Chicago has often served as a proving ground for Starbucks. It was the second U.S. city after Seattle to host its cafes.

The concept, he said, gives Starbucks access to new customers, particularly "the kind of customer who isn't a coffee drinker."

Starbucks is committed to expanding its local store base and remodeling stores, Hilowitz said. During the fiscal year ended in October, the chain remodeled 40 area stores. By October 2012, Starbucks plans to open six to 10 new stores and remodel another 100. Each remodel employs 30 to 50 construction workers and new stores represent about 15 jobs apiece, he said. Starbucks employs about 5,000 people in the Chicago area, he said.

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