



# PRIVATE LABEL CASE STUDIES

LESSONS FROM 2026

# PATTERNS REVEAL WHAT WORKS

*Private label wine programs produce uneven results  
— but the differences are rarely random.*

When examined closely, successful programs share common traits. This guide explores the execution patterns behind private label programs that perform well in 2026.

## Focus Beats Breadth

Case studies consistently show that focused portfolios outperform broad ones. Programs anchored by one or a small number of wines benefit from clarity, easier staff training, and stronger customer recognition.

## Systems Over SKUs

The most successful private label programs treat private label as a system — integrating selection, pricing, inventory, and quality into a cohesive strategy.

## Discipline Drives Margin

Successful programs protect pricing integrity. Rather than relying on frequent discounting, they price wines for repeat purchase and use promotions sparingly.

## Execution Is the Differentiator

Private label success in 2026 is less about opportunity and more about execution. Private label wine is no longer a “cheap alternative.” In 2026, it’s a strategic way to control margin, strengthen loyalty, and differentiate with clarity—especially as consumers simplify choices and retailers rationalize portfolios.

Across today’s strongest private label programs, three themes show up repeatedly:

- 1. Clear positioning beats broad assortment**
- 2. Consistency builds repeat purchase behavior**
- 3. Operational discipline turns private label into a long-term asset**

The three case studies that follow show how that plays out in the real market.

# Costco's Kirkland Signature: "Premium Trust at Minimum Markup"

## WHAT THEY DID

Costco built Kirkland Signature into a private label powerhouse by positioning it as high quality at a low markup, reinforcing the value proposition of membership. Grocery Dive reported that Costco's Kirkland Signature private-label beverages helped lift alcohol sales substantially, citing Bloomberg, and noted the brand's "premium rather than discounted" positioning.

## WHY IT WORKED

Kirkland succeeds because it aligns brand promise with customer expectation:

- Quality perception is protected (Kirkland feels "safe" to buy)
- Price/value is consistent (minimal markup reinforces trust)
- The brand becomes a destination, not a compromise

## Lessons for a 2026 private label program

### 1. Position private label as a recommendation, not a discount.

- If your label reads as "cheap," you'll compete only on price. Kirkland's success shows that private label can be framed as smart buying rather than bargain hunting.

### 2. Build repeat purchase by reducing perceived risk.

- Kirkland works because the brand itself signals, "You'll be satisfied." That's the private label advantage when you keep the portfolio focused and consistent.

### 3. Operational clarity supports brand trust.

- Premium positioning requires predictable availability and consistent experience. The more stable the program, the stronger the trust loop.



# Trader Joe's Charles Shaw: "A Value Anchor That Drives Habit"

## WHAT THEY DID

Trader Joe's turned Charles Shaw ("Two-Buck Chuck") into one of the most recognizable private label wine stories in the U.S. Business Insider reported Trader Joe's has sold nearly a billion bottles of Charles Shaw since 2002, underscoring the power of a simple, consistent value proposition.

## WHY IT WORKED

Charles Shaw succeeded by being:

- **Easy to understand**
- **Easy to choose**
- **Easy to repeat**

This model becomes especially relevant in 2026 as consumers simplify decisions and prioritize confidence.

## Lessons for a 2026 private label program

### 1. Build an "anchor wine" that customers don't overthink.

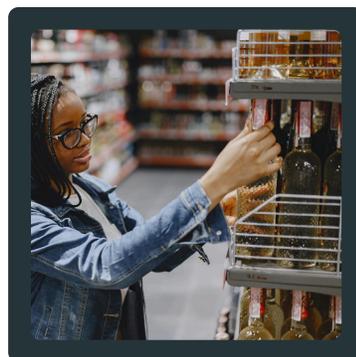
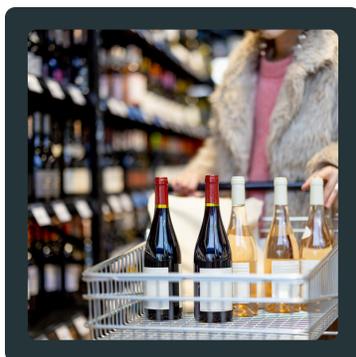
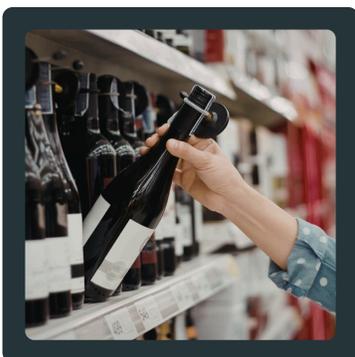
- Whether you're a retailer, hospitality group, or brand owner, an anchor wine can become the default choice that drives predictable velocity.

### 2. Consistency and simplicity beat novelty.

- Charles Shaw didn't need complex storytelling. It delivered an understandable promise again and again; and that repeat behavior built the brand.

### 3. A focused private label can lift the entire program.

- Even if you expand later, one strong "go-to" wine can create the habit loop that makes the rest of the portfolio easier to adopt.



# Target's Collective Good: "Sustainability as Differentiation at Scale"

## WHAT THEY DID

Target launched Collective Good, a private label wine line packaged in paper bottles (Frugal Bottle) as part of a sustainability-led strategy. Food & Wine reported the launch included four wines priced at \$9.99, rolling out to nearly 1,200 stores, with packaging made from 94% recycled materials and claims of up to 84% lower carbon emissions vs. glass.

## WHY IT WORKED

Collective Good is a modern private label play because it differentiates on something beyond price:

- **A strong shelf story (paper bottle stands out)**
- **A values-driven proposition (sustainability)**
- **A "talkable" feature that staff and customers can repeat easily**

## Lessons for a 2026 private label program

### 1. Differentiation can come from packaging and values, not just varietal.

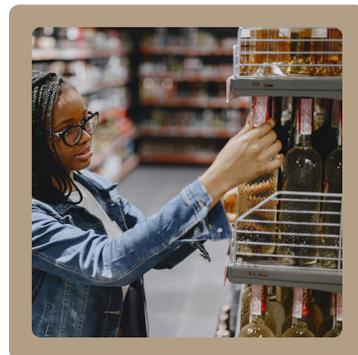
- In 2026, "why this exists" matters. Sustainability is one compelling answer when executed clearly and credibly.

### 2. Consistency and simplicity beat novelty.

- If your customer or staff can't explain it quickly, it won't spread. Collective Good's packaging makes the story easy to tell.

### 3. A focused private label can lift the entire program.

- A tight portfolio makes it easier to train teams, set expectations, and build early velocity.



# WHAT THESE WINNERS HAVE IN COMMON

Across premium, value, and sustainability-led examples, the pattern is consistent:

## 1) Focused portfolios outperform sprawling ones

Customers want fewer decisions. Private label works when it reduces choice overload.

## 2) Trust signals matter more than ever

A private label is only as strong as the confidence it conveys—through clarity, consistency, and execution.

## 3) Repeat purchase is the real KPI

A private label program is successful when customers come back without hesitation.

## Applying These Lessons to Your Program

If you're exploring private label wine in 2026, here are the best next steps:

### Step 1: Choose your positioning lane

- Premium-value trust (Kirkland model)
- Value anchor / habit builder (Charles Shaw model)
- Differentiation via story/values (Collective Good model)

### Step 2: Keep the portfolio right-sized

Start with a small set of wines that are:

- Broadly appealing
- Easy to explain
- Easy to reorder

### Step 3: Build for operational repeatability

Great private label programs don't just launch. They replenish smoothly.



**Private label is one of the most practical ways to build control and differentiation in 2026. The goal isn't to create "more wine." The goal is to create a small set of wines that customers trust, choose, and repeat.**