

Building A House Of Brands

An Interview with Luis Gonzalez, Chief Commercial Officer, Middle West Spirits

EDITORS' NOTE Luis Gonzalez was named Chief Commercial Officer of Middle West Spirits following its acquisition of Old Elk Distillery in May 2025, where Gonzalez served as CEO for more than seven years, transforming it from a niche craft operation into a highly awarded, nationally recognized whiskey brand available in all 50 states. In his new role, Gonzalez leads commercial strategy and execution, along with overseeing operations and marketing divisions.



Luis Gonzalez

He also spearheads the continued growth of Middle West Spirits' robust contract distillation program, expanding its reach into international markets and enabling partners around the world to develop custom spirits under their own labels.

COMPANY BRIEF Middle West Spirits (middlewestspirits.com) is an independently owned distillery rooted in Ohio and recognized nationwide for setting new standards in American craft spirits since 2008. The company produces a portfolio of award-winning brands including Middle West Bourbon, Rye, Wheat Whiskey, Bourbon Cream, Old Elk Bourbon Whiskey, OYO Vodka, Vim & Petal Gin, and Lux & Umbra. Middle West uses unique Ohio grains and controls every step of the production process – from seed selection to on-site grain processing, distilling, aging, blending and bottling – all in its Columbus, Ohio distilleries. Middle West Spirits has earned more than 200 awards, including top honors from the ASCOT Awards, PR%F Awards, Beverage Tasting Institute, Heartland Whiskey Competition and more. Guests can enjoy the full Middle West experience at the Courtland Avenue Distillery, Service Bar Restaurant and Bottle Shop in Columbus, Ohio to purchase Middle West's signature products.

Will you discuss your career journey?

I began my career selling cell phones in a mall kiosk in Louisiana, where I discovered my interest in technology and wireless communications. I was subsequently hired into a management role at Verizon, focusing on building my own customer base and leading teams. My next position was at one of the largest device manufacturers in the industry focusing on sales and marketing. After a few years, I took on a role

at OtterBox (maker of the internationally acclaimed cell phone cases) when they were at an early stage. My position there lasted for almost six years, and I was responsible for helping to grow the business from the Gulf Coast region to eventually nationwide while focusing on global cross functional initiatives. In 2017, I joined Old Elk Distillery, which was owned by the same company that owned OtterBox, and served as CEO for eight years, scaling the company into one of the fastest growing whiskey brands in the

U.S. In 2025, Old Elk was acquired by Middle West Spirits, which brought me on as chief commercial officer. In this role, I have the great opportunity to bring my diverse experiences to support the growth of our house of brands and join the amazing team that was already in place. My career has been shaped by seizing opportunities, hard work, and collaborating with exceptional team members along the way.



A few of the many spirits produced by Middle West Spirits



Will you provide an overview of Middle West Spirits?

Middle West Spirits was founded in 2006 in Columbus, Ohio, with its first distillery and a focus on contract manufacturing. As the whiskey market grew, our contract business expanded, and in 2023 we opened a more robust facility that is now among the top 10 Crop-to-Cask whiskey and spirits producers in North America. We are privately held and produce a full range of spirits, including whiskey, vodka, and gin, while also sourcing products for partners in categories such as tequila and rum. Our operations provide a full-service platform, covering distillation, blending, bottling, and research and development. Our own portfolio includes award-winning brands such as Middle West, OYO, Lux Umbra, Vim Pedal, Old Elk and WhiskeySmith, supporting our strategy of building a house of brands.

How do you focus your efforts as chief commercial officer?

In my role at Middle West Spirits, my objective is to amplify the story of this remarkable company while building the processes, continued discipline, and commercial strategy required to support our next phase of growth. Listening to



the voice of the customer remains fundamental to how we operate, and we approach it with deliberate intention. Our strong partnerships will continue to shape the future of this business, and my responsibility is to strengthen those relationships and translate them into sustainable growth – for Middle West Spirits and for the broader alcohol beverage industry.

Where do you see the greatest opportunities for growth?

I see two main areas for our growth. The first is expanding Middle West Spirits' own portfolio brands, both domestically and



internationally, through growing product offerings, age statements, and broader distribution. The second area is supporting contract partners, many of whom come to us looking to launch new brands or expand existing portfolios. Additionally, serving as a reliable operational partner for other brands, including distillation, bottling, and logistics, continues to provide strong opportunities for growth and reinforces our role as a full-service platform in the industry.

Will you provide an overview of Middle West Spirits' state-of-the-art facilities?

In terms of our facilities, we operate two state-of-the-art distilleries. The first features a 24-inch column still and several pot stills for small-batch production and clear spirits. Our larger facility is 78,000 square feet on a 14-acre campus, equipped with a 60-inch column still and 50,000-gallon fermentation tanks. Fully automated and supported by extensive quality control measures, these facilities ensure consistency and efficiency. It has positioned us among the largest independent distillers in the United States and provides our partners with a comprehensive, reliable platform from concept through bottling.

What impact does Middle West Spirits' acquisition of Old Elk mean for the future of the brand?

The acquisition provides Old Elk with an anchored home for production and a vertically integrated foundation. For Middle West Spirits, it represents our first acquisition as part of a broader strategy to build a house of brands. Moving forward, we will continue to evaluate opportunities to add complementary brands to our portfolio. This approach supports our long-term goal of becoming a global beverage company. Our areas of interest include tequila, whiskey, ready-to-drink beverages, and non-alcoholic options.



What has made the spirits industry so special for you?

The spirits industry is special because it allows me to be a steward of a good time, bringing people together and creating opportunities for connection. It also provides the chance to listen to the voice of the customer and win the hearts and minds of a diverse set of consumers. Being able to support brands, foster relationships, develop internal teams and contribute to the growth of the industry is both professionally and personally rewarding. ●

