

Support Your Local Brewer

BY MICHAEL KUDERKA

Want your beer selection to stand out? Well, don't ignore the opportunities that are close at hand. Instead of scrambling to get your fingers around the latest limited release collaboration beer coming out of California and Scotland, it might be far more profitable, and unique, for you to stock your shop with the full line of brands from that small brewery just a few blocks away.

History: Future's Great Predictor

Consumer interest and support for locally brewed beer has always been intertwined with the history of North America; as early as 1612 Dutch emigrants, Adriaen Block and Hans Christiansen had established the first commercial brewery on Manhattan Island to capitalize on the demand of New Amsterdam's thirsty early settlers ¹.

Historically, the uniqueness of American brews began with local ingredients like corn and pumpkin which started to find their way into early colonial breweries. Much like those early brewers, locally brewed beer often incorporates unique regionally grown fruit, barley and hops, with each ingredient leaving its signature of individuality on the final product.

Even early on, the competition from imports and the popularity of European beer styles prompted our original "local brewers" to reproduce these styles, inserting American grown barley, wheat and hops into time tested European recipes.

In fact our first president may have been one of this young nation's early "beer nuts". Known for his love of the porter beer style, George Washington himself is said to have had locally brewed porter beer from Robert Hare of Philadelphia delivered directly to the presidential mansion for personal consumption and to share with distinguished guests.

Local Beer: The Next Revolution

For about the last eight years, the continued growth of the craft beer segment has offset declines in the total beer market. Surprisingly in 2009, research conducted by the Nielsen Company found that in 13 of the top 20 craft beer markets, local/ state craft brewers were actually outpacing the growth of total craft beer segment.

The good news here is that while many businesses have been quietly surviving this economy, a number of breweries have been bulking up, expanding or upgrading their equipment, capacity and facilities. So, the little brewery down the street might be much bigger than you think, and as a retailer you should be thinking about ways to sell more local beer and more homegrown brewing creativity.

In fact, many brewers have such a following for their brands, that breweries like Boston's Harpoon, Delaware's Dogfish Head, and Pyramid Brewing from Oregon (to name just a few) have released their full production schedule for 2010. Remember to take the time to check your local brewer's website. Having access to product releases upfront gives you more of time to preplan store events and promotions that will allow you to take pre-orders and build up excitement around each release.

And if you think beer drinkers don't care about their local beer; last years' Vermonster story will have you re-considering your assumptions. When Hansen Beverage Company, the makers of Monster Energy drinks, filed a "cease and desist" order basically calling for Rock Art Brewery of Vermont to stop marketing their beer with the Vermonster barleywine name, they thought they were just taking on a small local brewery with few resources to fight their litigation.

Instead, Hansen was overwhelmed as Vermont consumers and retailers boycotted the energy beverage and pulled it from their shelves in support of Rock Art. The heat was turned up further when 16,000 Rock Art Facebook fans, and 69,000 YouTube viewers, told Hansen to basically "stop messing with our beer". Vermonster is here to stay, and it probably didn't hurt Rock Art sales either.

"Nanobreweries": Local Brews

We all have to start somewhere, and believe or not, the next big wave on the horizon is "Nano" brewing, which translates into garage based brewing businesses turning out some amazing and creative short run beers. Across the country, home brewers are taking that next step toward their big brewing dreams by starting extra small and testing their brewing business concept. Similar to Sam Calagione starting Dogfish Head brewpub with a Brew-Magic brewing system, these Nano brewers are using small state-of-art equipment, getting licensed for production and selling unique local beer to local retailers on and off premise.

Thinking Out-of-the-Box?

How innovative is your store at selling beer? We would like to know. If you have promotions that go beyond refilling the cold box, we would like to hear from you and share your "out-of-the-box" thinking with our fellow *Beer Trends* readers.

E-mail me at mkuderka@mcbasset.com with your successful ideas for selling beer, along with your contact information. If we write about your program in our column we will send you a free copy of The 3rd Edition of *The Essential Reference of Domestic Brewers and Their Bottled Brands*.

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Sources: 1. www.beerinfo.com/index.php/pages/beerhistory.html