

# Trust Your Instinct

## WHEN BUYING BEER

BY MICHAEL KUDERKA

With a majority of your customers' craft beer purchase decisions being made on the floor of your store, it isn't surprising that a brewer's packaging can highly influence a consumer's beer selection. In fact, an individual brand shelf-presence has become almost as important as the quality of the beer in the bottle or can.

Where familiarity with an established brewer's branding can make it easy for consumers to find and try a brewery's new products, unique branding can quickly establish a new brewery and accelerate demand. As retailers, all of this needs to be kept in mind as shelf space gets tight and new beer brands are becoming available at a record pace.

### Something new: the stopping power of simplicity

Where Stone Brewing relied on the brashness of Arrogant Bastard to stand-out in the craft beer world, and Flying Dog Brewing adopted the unmistakable illustrations of Ralph Steadman, Maine Beer Company(MBC) has harnessed an underutilized business approach to move product and make their brands stand-out: simplicity.

"Co-owner David Kleban designs all of our labels," said Colleen Croteau, Director of Business Operations at MBC, "he likes the simplistic and clean look, and he also likes to include the story behind each beer on the back of our labels".

Established in 2009 by homebrewing brothers David and Daniel Kleban, MBC has quietly and very effectively expanded in the Northeast. A terrific example of simplistic stopping power, MBC labeling at first glance looks like the result of doo-

dling with a fine tip marker on the back of a napkin. It is the clean openness of MBC labels that grabs your attention and the quality of the beer that will bring consumers back.

### Like Ben and Jerry's, but in a bottle

"My Brother and I started homebrewing in a small garage in Portland," describes the label of MBC's popular Peeper Ale. "We wanted to make some really good beer so we could drink it of course. One winter, after many days of brewing, our fingers numb (the garage was not heated), we decided we should begin to share. So, we moved into a bigger garage (our new brewery with heat) and here it is. Cheers!"

MBC's approach reminds me of a little ice cream outfit named Ben & Jerry's.

If you remember the first Ben & Jerry's ice cream commercials, the two entrepreneurs spent the first 15 seconds of their ad eating their ice cream, the next 10 seconds pausing from their indulgence to say "try our ice cream, it's good," and the final 5 seconds continuing to feast.

With names like Zoe, Mo, Weez and Mean Old Tom, and labels that pay tribute to family, friends and life in Maine, MBC brands feel as small town America, as Freeport, Maine where the company is based.

### The bottom line

As a beer retailer, it is all about rapidly turning your inventory and maximizing the profitability of your space. Now more than ever, you need to see the product



before taking on a brand.

Every new beer is not the same and with all the new beer available, just being "something new" is no longer

enough. So, although you might not personally be a "Beer Guy", and we hear that from many retailers, you can be selective in the brands you choose. Rely on your instincts as a seasoned retailer, and take the time to access the stopping power of the label and the selling power of the brand.

There still are some real gems to be found. Try Maine Beer, it's good.

### 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 Style Trends readers.

E-mail me at [mkuderka@mcbasset.com](mailto: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 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition of The Essential Reference of Domestic Brewers and Their Bottled Brands.

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