

by Michael Kuderka **BEER TRENDS**

What Does the Future Hold for Beer?

One of the best beer magazines available, and in my opinion one that every beer retailer should subscribe to, is *All About Beer Magazine*, published by Daniel Bradford. When the magazine turned thirty in 2009, it published two special issues: one taking a deep dive into the origins and attributes of popular beer styles (which is a tremendous resource) and another looking back on the many faces of *All About Beer Magazine* over the last three decades. At the end of the thirty-year review, the magazine's regular contributors made predictions about the dramatic changes each expects to see from the beer industry over the next thirty years.

While all of the other contributors to the magazine foresaw the greatest "winds of change" blowing in from the brewer and distributor side of the business, Bradford focused his soothsaying (and I think rightly so) on the beer retailer.

"The most dramatic changes in the next couple of decades will happen at retail, as savvy owners recognize the value of beer diversity and begin treating beer with the respect, attention and expense that it requires. Shorter draft runs, wider temperature choices, branded glassware, expanded shelf space, better lighting, and recommended pairings will become more than the norm as on-premise and off-premise invest in customer satisfaction," Daniel Bradford, *Gazing into a Glass*, Beer:30, 2009, pg.88.

The Future is Now

Shorter draft runs, wider temperature choices, branded glassware, expanded shelf space, better lighting, and having the ability to recommend food pairings for beer, are not changes that retailers should wait thirty years to make. Having this level of commitment to beer would significantly change the business of beer, not to mention increase the consumer's interest.

More and more, retailers are recognizing beer's significant contribution to the bottom line and as a result craft beer is definitely rewarding them for their commitment. Even in the current economy, consumers are flocking to craft brands as a very affordable luxury beverage.

Retailers, who have increased their commitment to craft beer, taking on more SKUs and increasing shelf space for these brands, are actually seeing sales increases for their entire beer category.

Beyond expanding floor and menu space to offer a broader beer selection and serving beer in a smoke free well lit atmosphere, there are a number of other steps retailers can make to fast forward into the future.

Shorter Draft Runs

Minimizing the distance of exposed beer lines between the keg and the tap definitely improves the overall beer experience. Shorter exposed beer lines will reduce foaming, and allows you to better maintain beer temperature.

Taps are your biggest money-makers, so you want to be selective. Today, many retailers are keeping the most profitable brands up front and leaving the often requested mega-brands in bottles. It also doesn't hurt to rotate one or more taps to feature different beers. Seasonal and short-run beers are extremely popular now, and keeping something new and different, ready to pour, will help keep your customers curious and interested in wanting to try them.

Wider Temperature Choices

The "proper" beer temperature is often a matter of individual taste and usually ties back to individual beer styles and beer color. One well commercialized beer temperature misconception links a great beer experience to frosty cold suds. The truth is that serving beer "ice cold" does nothing but mask the flavors of a beer and dull the taste receptors of the tongue. In fact, icy mugs with floating ice chips should be considered one of the top beer serving "no-no's".

In general, lighter beers should be served colder than darker beers, and English-style beers should not be served at room but "cellar" temperatures. Not wanting to make this too complicated, some of the optimal beer serving temperature ranges are:

Very Cold (32-39F): For styles like Pale Lagers, Light Lagers, Malt Liquors, Canadian-style Golden Ales and Cream Ales.

Cold (39-45F): For styles like Hefeweizens, Kölschs, Premium Lagers, Pilsners, American Golden Ales, Weisse Beers, Belgian Wits, Dark Lagers, and Lambics.

Cool (45-54F): For styles like American Pale Ales, Amber Ales, California Commons, Dunkelweizens, Stouts, Porters, Belgian Ales, Dortmund/Helles, Altbiers, and Irish Ales.

Cellar (54-57F): For styles like Bitters, Brown Ales, India Pale Ales, English Pale Ales, English Strong Ales, Old Ales, Saisons, Flemish Sour Ales, Bière de Gardes, Baltic Porters, Abbey Dubbels, Belgian Strong Ales, Bocks, Scottish Ales, Scotch Ales, American Strong Ale, and English Milds.

Warm (57-61F): For styles like Barley Wines, Quadrupels, Imperial Stouts, Imperial/Double IPAs, Doppelbocks, and Eisbocks.

Are You Thinking Out-of-the-Box?

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 Third Edition of The Essential Reference of Domestic Brewers and Their Bottled Brands*.

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