

BEERTRENDS



Where do beer experts come from?

BY MICHAEL KUDERKA

With the continued growth of craft beer sales (up 12.4% in volume for 2010), there really isn't a good reason not to make the commitment to hand sell craft beer, especially when you consider the larger margins realized by converting consumers to craft brands.

Offering beer expertise in your store can be as basic as providing beer shelf talkers, and beer menus for every brand you carry, or as simple as investing in sending your staff to earn a Cicerone® Certification as a Certified Beer Server, a Certified Cicerone® or Master Cicerone® through Ray Daniels' Cicerone Certification Program. (www.cicerone.org)

"On our beverage menu, we list that we have a Certified Cicerone on staff and it shows our guests that we are serious about our beer program," illustrated Tinika Green, Certified Cicerone, and Beverage Director at Blue Smoke Restaurant in New York City. "The training has helped me educate our staff and work to create a better beer menu with both staple and rotating brands. Our guests get excited about our beer selections and it keeps them coming back to try new things," said Green.

"We are seeing company-level interest in Cicerone certification and the investment in good beer education among brewers, wholesalers, restaurants and bars. Off premise, we are mostly seeing individual interest in the program," said Ray Daniels, Director, Cicerone Certification Program in Chicago.

Companies who embrace the program generally do a broad training and a certification to get all their people up to the first level of certification (Certified Beer Server). Michael McAvena, the Certified Cicerone at The Publican Restaurant in Chicago, explains "The Publican was already well known for our beer selection, but the investment in beer certification took us to the next level and let us showcase our staff's beer knowledge. Stocking beer is one thing, helping customers discover beer is another, and they enjoy it."

"After I completed the Cicerone level certification," said McAvena "we had our entire staff achieve the server level certification. Aside from significantly increasing our servers' level of beer confidence, the value of the press we have been able to generate for the restaurant because of the staff training has been great for attracting new customers."

How popular is the program?

As of January over 3,000 Certified Beer Servers, 177 Certified Cicerones, and three Master Cicerones had completed their program. Is it expensive? Considering the high quality of the materials and thoroughness of the training a student receives; the fee to become a Certified Beer Server for example is \$69.

"Our store carries 1100 beers," described Annette May, Certified Cicerone and Beer Manager at Merchant's Fine Wine in Dearborn, Michigan, "and because I am a

Certified Cicerone, our customers know that our beer selection is stored correctly, is fresh and rotated, in season, and that I can tell them something about every beer on the shelves, along with being able to recommend a few food pairings."

Concluded May, "Plus, the knowledge that I acquired while achieving my certification helps me handle customers with draft issues, including troubleshooting, when they purchase kegged beer, as well."

Other options

Prior to the Cicerone Certification Program many industry professionals looked to the Beer Judges Certification Program (BJCP) or their state server's permit program to increase their level of beer expertise. Not as broad as the Cicerone Program, the BJCP exam offers specific expertise in beer ingredients, beer styles, beer tasting, and the evaluation of beer.

No matter which training options you choose, providing an individual or the entire team with a higher level of beer education will increase their passion for selling beer. Ultimately, a well trained sales team will attract more beer consumers, and have more people tasting, seeing and finding what is so great about craft beer in your store.

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