

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, Mr. 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. The old school of thought was to keep the mega-brands upfront and on tap. 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, Dortmunder/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.

Pairing Beer and Foods

Matching beer with food could be the ultimate "point-of-purchase" initiative for selling beer. Pairing your best food with your best beer works well to motivate your customers to move up to better beers as well as providing better margins for you, allowing consumers to consider combinations that they may never have discovered on their own.

As of late, pairing beer and food has been getting a lot of press, and the truth is that the carbonation in beer makes it perfect for opening up the palate, allowing your customers to more fully experience the flavor of the great food on your menu.

The pairing beer and food isn't just a tactic for on-premise stores. Off-premise retailers are often located next to a Chinese food, an Italian food and/or Mexican food restaurants. Work with your neighbors and match their best food with your best beer and promote the combinations together for take-out or in BYOB (Bring Your Own Bottle) establishments.

In addition to creating a menu that displays beer and food selections for on-premise stores, hosting a beer dinner is another perfect way to showcase your best beer as well as your best meals.

There are a number of resources available for matching beer with food. Ariston Business Concepts offers a neat tool that matches branded beer with food. This tool is called the BeerWheel and you may e-mail creator Don Apostolos at dapostolos@optonline.net.

Almost every brewer has brand-specific recommendations on their website. The Boston Beer Company has done a particularly good job of matching and cross-referencing great food with its beer brands. You can check these out at www.samueladams.com.

If you are looking for a broader resource, the Brewer's Association has developed a pamphlet that provides a nice background on matching beer with food, and also offers an extremely useful chart that matches a variety of popular beer styles with entrées, cheeses and desserts. You may order copies by going to: www.store.beertown.org.

One last great resource for matching beer with food, or a general beer education, can be found at www.herestobeer.com. Anheuser-Busch cannot get enough credit for the quality and resources on this site.

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*.

Bringing in the New Year With a Fresh Start

I was talking with my niece at a family get-together over the holidays. Her semester had just ended and she was on a three week break. I said, "What a great way to start the holidays. Get through the semester and now you have a carefree break before starting your next semester. Wouldn't it be great if life was more like that?"

I don't remember quite what happened, but the conversation ended there. And thinking back, I don't think she really agreed with me.

Well, so much for my brilliant epiphany.

Real life is full of mixed emotions –

Later on, we continued our conversation.

Okay, I brought it back up.

She said, "I have a lot of mixed emotions." She said it has been a long haul and, though she enjoys school, it's easy to fall into a rut if you don't watch it. Then there's the stress of final projects, presentations and exams. Finishing a semester is an accomplishment. It was like a weight had been lifted off her shoulders. But now she can put that semester behind her. She also pointed out that, while she does enjoy the break, it's not all carefree. She still has to deal with money issues, scheduling problems, financial aid headaches and so forth.

She said that she is excited to start a new semester. You're starting out fresh. It's like the blank sheets of paper in a spiral notebook. But, since this is her last semester, she now has to worry about getting a job in the real world. Then she qualified that statement with, "But this is the real world. It's my real world."

And bartending is our real world –

At that family get-together I had to quick eat my dinner so I could get to work on time. In general, I don't think that friends and family really understand why I can't take a weekend night off to do something with them. People I've known for a long time, but don't see very often, ask if I'm still bartending; as if bartending is a temporary job until I can find a "real" job. And, usually at a most busy stressful time, a customer will comment that bartending seems like a lot of fun.

I'm sure you have mixed emotions about bartending, as well.

So let's see if I can salvage something from my brilliant epiphany or maybe qualify it with my niece's wise perspective.

Even with the mixed emotions, and over that long haul, I hope you can still say that you enjoy bartending as much as when you first started bartending. I hope you consider the past year as an accomplishment; because it is not accomplished. But, we all know the not-so-good things about bartending that will cause those mixed emotions. Can't some of the not-so-good emotions be put behind you; like starting a new semester? I hope you can bring in the New Year feeling excited and, as my niece put it, with blank sheets of paper in a spiral notebook.

And may you also feel a weight lifted off your shoulders.

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