

Have a lot more to offer than the “Big Box” Stores? The Holidays are just the time to prove it!

Beginning with Oktoberfest and running through New Years, this last quarter of the year marks the height of your beer season, but don't get too content with the promise of short term increases in sales volume, the real opportunity for your store during the holidays rests in your ability to expand your customer base by impressing and retaining new customers.

Showcasing your beer brand selection and product expertise is definitely the best way to differentiate the buying experience customers will find in your store from what

customers won't find when they go to the big warehouse retailers and national chain restaurants.

On premise, first time customers will be stopping in for a holiday pint or for a company function. Off premise, new patrons will be dropping in to look for a unique gift idea or to stock up for a gathering at their home. Motivation aside, this is your chance to flaunt your store, your beer knowledge and your beer selection.

“Simply being able to talk about the beer makes a big difference. Whether it's the

server on premise that is educated about the beer they serve, or if it's shelf talkers or table tents that describes the beer brands available, taking that extra step makes a retailer standout,” according to David Giroux of the Uinta Brewing Company.

Dressed to Impress

How should you prepare for the holidays? MassPack Executive Director Frank Anzalotti was asking the right questions in his column in the May/June issue of *Straight Up*: “Is your staff neat, presentable and knowledgeable; are your aisles wide and uncluttered; are you displaying your most profitable products prominently?”

Despite all of the dark spots in the economy, consumers are still making room for beer, so when you are considering profitability you'll want to prominently display your seasonal beer brands. Consumers will be looking for beer styles that are unique, and the seasonal beer brands that are available at this time of year - Winter Ales, Barley Wines, Imperial and Oatmeal Stouts, and India Pale Ales are all perfect answers to your customer's holiday cravings.

These styles are loaded with personality, and being knowledgeable about the characteristics of these styles and the foods that they pair well with, will put your customers in the holiday spirit as well as get them excited about your store.

“Great beer retailers feature displays of craft beer, rather than displaying loss-leaders ... a great beer retailer realizes that a great quality craft beer at full price is more profitable than a discounted beer with lower demand... they also know that their customers will go elsewhere for the good stuff,” advises Greg Koch Chairman & CEO of Stone Brewing Company.

When preparing for increased store traffic, pay special attention to these three

Prep to Impress Check List

Store & Staff

- Is your team trained and knowledgeable about beer?
- Can your sales staff confidently match a beer to a customer?
- Have you identified and told your team which brands are most profitable for your store?
- Are your isles, dinning area or bar clean and clutter free?
- Have you rotated your stock and check beer dating?
- Are you serving and/or selling beer style appropriate glassware?
- Are your beer cases and kegerators keeping the beer at 45 degrees?
- Is your glassware properly cleaned?
- Have your beer lines/taps been changed and/or cleaned?
- Is your team ready to recommend seasonal beers with seasonal meals?

Selection

- Do you have a beer selection that is unique and extensive?
- Does your selection include brands from local brewers and seasonal beer styles?
- Do you allow customers to mix and match various single 12 oz. bottles?
- Are you stocking dinner bottles (22 oz. and 750 ml)?
- Can you take special orders for brands or 1/6 kegs?

Active Beer Selling Environment

- Are you holding beer tastings or beer dinner events? (A Great Holiday gift)
- Are you carrying beer books and magazines in store?
- On or Off Premise, do you have a beer by styles menu?
- On or Off Premise, do you have a beer and food pairings menu?
- Are you utilizing beer table tents and beer shelf talkers?

areas On or Off Premise, your **Store and Staff**, your beer style **Selection**, and make sure that you have created an **Active Beer Selling Environment**.

The beer glass - enhancing the beer experience

Beer in a glass should be a well enforced beer drinking prerequisite - On or Off Premise. The right beer glass works to enhance aroma and flavor as well as regulates the temperature of the beer. Having the proper beer glass to go with specific beer styles can nicely expand the beer drinking experience and beer awareness.

Off Premise, think about adding glassware to the beer accessories which you sell.

During the holiday, create gift baskets that place seasonal beer styles (for example three 12 oz. bottles, a bottle opener, and three special beer glasses) wrapped and ready as premium priced gift. Encourage customers to take home a set of the correct beer glasses which go with the style of beer they are purchasing. On premise, your customers will be asking to take the glasses home when you start highlighting your best beers and beer styles in style appropriate glassware.

On a recent trip to Raleigh, North Carolina, I visited Tyler's Taproom. This is a great beer bar/restaurant, with an incredible beer menu which features local brews, as well as craft, non-craft domestic and imports. Beyond the selection, Tyler's makes certain that the beer they serve arrives in a glass which is style appropriate.

Beer arriving in style appropriate glasses is not much different from hearing a sizzling fajita or watching flaming cherries jubilee arrive at the next table. Different glassware makes your customers feel like they have ordered something special and that "it's not just a beer". It can also be contagious and often has your other patrons saying "I'll have what their having".

It is rumored that Tyler's actually takes their glassware requirements to an even higher level, and that they refuse to even

serve a brewery's beer unless the company supplies brewery or brand logo glassware; something to consider, and a great way to stand out and sell the best of beer.

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