

Changing Things Up with Seasonal Brands

Craft beer consumers can be a profitable but fickle bunch: as loyal as they are to the beer brands and styles of their favorite brewers, their never-ending quest for something different and “new” can easily side-track them into looking for different outlets to buy beer.

One easy way to satisfy your beer consumer’s unquenchable thirst for the latest in brewery offerings, and keep them coming back for more, is to dedicate floor space to selling seasonal brands.

Aside from having something novel for your customers to discover, the increasing availability and popularity of these seasonal products, over the last three years, makes them a sure bet for increasing sales volume and dollars, as well as attracting new customers to beer.

Information Resources Inc (IRI) tracks industry trends using a data set that includes 15,000+ grocery retailers from around the United States. Looking at the IRI data

below, the power of the seasonal beer trend is unmistakable and particularly impressive when you consider how seasonal brand sales now consistently outpace even incredibly popular beer styles, such pale ales.

Making the Trend Work for Your Store

The short term availability of certain peak ingredients or regional weather conditions originally dictated the brewing of many traditional seasonal beer styles, so there is typically a lot of history tied to these seasonal brews. As you create a seasonal beer section in your store, make this section stand out and promote the history and tradition attached to each style. Consumers will love it.

Not every seasonal product however, will have history to promote. The seasonality of brands can have nothing to do with ingredients or tradition; sometimes the limited availability is due to brewery

capacity and ingenious marketing.

One of my late-winter seasonal favorites is Flying Fish’s Imperial Espresso Porter. As soon as February hits, I start scouting stores and hoarding six packs, because this beer has such a cult following that it sells out within a matter of weeks (every time). So, simply having enough quantity on hand and signage stating “it’s back” or “grab your six pack before we sell out” for seasonal brands like this or Sierra Nevada Harvest Ale series might be all you need to do to realize the success of selling seasonals.

Winter, Spring, Summer, Fall

Very often the styles your customers have a hankering for are closely linked to the seasons: lighter, crisper beer styles in the summer, darker, fuller beer styles in the winter.

Winter Beers: The biggest of beer styles with the fullest flavors seem to arrive during the colder months: Porters, Barley Wines, Oatmeal Stouts and Winter Warmers are complex, smooth, warming brews.

Spring Beers: Bocks, Maibocks, Amber Lagers, and Lambics (which I actually like at this time of year), are styles that tend to be medium to light in body and terrific choices to transition from winter to summer.

Summer Beers: Wheat based beers (American Wheat, Wit, or Hefeweizens), Light Lagers, and Pale Ales are styles that naturally move well and match up nicely with the



foods and activities of the warmer summer months.

Fall Beers: As the weather starts to cool down, Pumpkin Ales, Oktoberfest Beers, IPAs, and Doppelbocks pair well with increasingly crisp and hardy fall days.

More and more brewers are stepping up with unique limited seasonal offerings and you will want to start your seasonal section by highlighting some of 2008's Top 20 seasonal products (IRI data, ranked by dollars):

1. SAMUEL ADAMS SEASONAL
2. SIERRA NEVADA SEASONAL
3. NEW BELGIUM SEASONAL
4. DESCHUTES SEASONAL
5. PYRAMID SEASONAL
6. BELLS SEASONAL
7. REDHOOK SEASONAL
8. ALASKAN SEASONAL
9. WIDMER SEASONAL
10. SARANAC SEASONAL
11. SHIPYARD SEASONAL
12. GREAT LAKES CHRISTMAS ALE
13. FULL SAIL SEASONAL
14. SHINER 96
15. GOOSE ISLAND SEASONAL
16. MAGIC HAT SEASONAL
17. GREAT LAKES SEASONAL
18. KONA SEASONAL
19. SHINER SEASONAL
20. LAGUNITAS SEASONAL

A good base for your seasonals might be the top performing Samuel Adams line of brands. Boston Beer will escalate their stake in the seasonal beer market with 3 different cases of Sam Adams seasonal samplers for 2009.

Beware the SKU

Last point, many brewers have one SKU for all of their seasonal offerings, so be sure that you have the product you think you have on hand and not dated inventory from last quarter.

Are You 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 so we can share your "out-of-the-box" thinking

with your fellow *Beverage Network* readers.

E-mail me at mkuderka@mcbasset.com with your successful ideas for selling beer, along with your contact information, and 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*. Michael Kuderka is the Managing Partner at MC Basset, LLC. The company designs beer selling solutions and training for On and Off Premise retailers. www.thebeerbible.com – Contact Michael at mkuderka@mcbasset.com. © 2009 MC Basset LLC

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