



Beer business expansion is now in session

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Expanding your beer business and increasing profitability, is all about moving your customers from high volume lower margin brands, to the lower volume brands with higher margins.

Although it may seem that appealing to beer extremists is the best way to boost your craft beer business, it's not true. Customers caught up in finding brands that push the ABV (alcohol by volume) boundaries, and hopheads fixated with experiencing the most massive amounts of IBUs (International Bitterness Units), are fringe consumer segments. The mainstream beer customer is where you need to focus the majority of your attention.

Session beers, in contrast to extreme beers, provide a tamer craft beer experience with a much broader appeal. The opportunity offered by "sessionable" brands is that they can be found in just about any style, have a balanced flavor, and pack a rather light ABV punch.

What is a session beer?

Defining a session beer begins and ends with the ABV. According to the Brewers Association's *Great American Beer Fest* style guidelines, "Any style of beer can be made lower in strength than described in the classic style guidelines" and for session beers the ABV should range between 4.0%-5.1%.

In order to achieve the relatively low levels of ABV and balance, session beers are less complex by design, however this does not mean that they are lacking in

zest. Consumers get to experience a style specific blend of flavors without being overwhelmed by too much bitterness, sweetness, or alcohol. In addition to the broader appeal, customers generally consume more beer, which is obviously a positive for business.

Where did these session beers come from?

Like many things beer, there is a little history and culture behind the term "session" beer. Attributed to the British, session drinking is tied to the concept of consuming a quantity of beer during a social "session" or set period of time, without becoming drunk.

Some sources suggest that the term "session" traces back to World War I when the British government enforced two allowable drinking periods for production workers, one at lunchtime and one in the evening. Typically during these government sanctioned four hour "sessions," workers wanted to be able to have enough beer to relax, without consuming so much that they became "legless" or risked not being able to return to work.

During this time the British also introduced taxes based on ABV which effectively imposed restrictions on the strength of the beer being produced. After the War the taxes remained in place and the ABVs remained low. Whereas six, seven and even eight percent ABV beers are very common for the Craft brands produced in the States, these beers would

be much too strong to be considered "sessionable," even by today's standards.

Good for business?

Go to any successful brew pub and you will see the session approach at work. Brew pubs promote a full range of beer. There will be one or two extreme beers in the lineup for sure; however the majority of the beer menu is commonly populated with styles between 4.5% and 5.2% ABVs.

Offering lower strengths of alcohol and range of styles invites customers to stay around to sample and enjoy a number of rounds of beer, and should bring many consumers above the two beer average per round, that is a common average US consumption per session statistic. Using tools like "Beer Flights" on premise, lets you promote the variety of beer available in your menu, and make money on the samples as well.

Many beer styles make great session beer offerings, and can broaden your beer menu. Styles like Blonde ales, ESBs, Red and Amber ales, Pilsners, Wheat beers, California Common ales, Pale ales, Porters, and Stouts are all "sessionable" and are a great place to start. Consider featuring one or two brewers' full line as a flight special. You will be surprised at how easy this approach increases the number of consumers you have drinking beer, and how much fun it is for your customers to taste and talk about the different flavors they are experiencing.