



Homebrewers, gift baskets; beer selling opportunities

BY MICHAEL KUDERKA

Since the world decided not to end in December of 2012, we decided to jump right into 2013 by sharing some motivating out-of-the-box thinking. Two big ideas that we didn't have time to highlight last year were educational beer gift baskets and store sponsored homebrewing contests.

Although neither of these tactics seems like something the average beer retailer would take on, that's exactly why these ideas are out-of-the-box and why they will make your store standout. Having seen both approaches in action, each does a superb job of moving beer and working to establish a store as a beer destination.

The beer gift basket

Style Trends beer shelf talkers are used in beer aisles and cold boxes to brand, organize, and educate customers. A few creative people are now using the *Style Trends* shelf talkers to adorn beer gift baskets (*pictured above*). There are a few different approaches for using the baskets, boxes, or buckets. Stores can have the containers pre-filled or they can give customers more flexibility by having various container sizes available for customers to fill on their own.

In the examples we have seen, the shelf talkers are applied directly to the beer bottles so the basket recipient gets the fun of a great beer selection and an in-depth appreciation for each beer they receive. Each shelf tag has the beer name, the brewery name, a beer description, the ABV (alcohol by volume), IBU (hoppiness), SRM (color), a flavor rating and food pairing suggestion.

Your store might choose to limit the gift basket beer to certain brands and bottle sizes, and then pre-print the shelf talkers that go with each of these brands. Another approach might be to have the consumers' select beer shelf talkers and send them to the printer, and then your staff cuts them out and places them on the bottles. Remember, gift baskets can range on average from \$35 to \$150, so the time and effort for making a giftable six or eight pack is well rewarded.

Aside from the traditional occasions (New Years, Oktoberfest, Christmas), baskets are being purchased for birthdays and fundraisers as well. So, these educational gift baskets have the potential of being a year-round revenue generator.

The homebrew showdown

This idea was not sent in, however, being a beer consumer, as well as a homebrewer, this contest pulled me in and had me frequenting both the local New Jersey beer store, Oak Tree Wine & Spirits in South Plainfield, and checking the local newspaper, *The Star-Ledger*, almost every day.

This absolutely brilliant PR campaign gave everyone involved a ton of press. The contest was sponsored / judged by the above mentioned liquor store and newspaper, as well as two homebrew suppliers and two local craft breweries. Entries could be dropped off at the liquor store and the newspaper, and there were no entry fees.

Following the template from "The Jersey Homebrew Showdown," the competition was fairly simple to implement and the rules were easy to follow. The contest was open to all beer styles and the one major requirement was that entrants were residents of New Jersey. Participants needed to submit two bottles of each beer and were only allowed to enter three different brews in the contest.

The "Showdown" also asked that the bottle sizes submitted were 12 or 16 ounces, and that each was marked with the contestants name, address, home or cell number, an e-mail address, the style of beer, and a general list of ingredients. Bottles were not returned.

This contest attracted 171 entries and had 10 style category winners. The prize was the simple pride of the winners having their names appear in the paper. It was talked about on numerous blogs and local newsletters.

Getting new customers in the store and coming back for more is always a key objective. I personally made three visits to drop off entries and buy more beer at Oak Tree Wine & Spirits, all within a four week period. With each visit I was increasingly impressed by Oak Tree's beer selection. So, the contest worked to increase volume and gain new customers – definitely a win/win.

Are You Thinking Out-of-the-Box?

E-mail me at mkuderka@mcbasset.com with your ideas. If we write about your program in our column we will send you a free copy of *The Third Edition of The Essential Reference of Domestic Brewers and Their Bottled Brands*.