Blog 7 – Packaging

CATEGORY ARCHIVES: PACKAGING

Bottle vs Can for a Craft Brewery

25 Replies

One thing we have long struggled with is the type of packaging we are going to put our finished product in. Speaking with other craft breweries, we are not alone in the uncertainty we face in making this decision. I have summarized the pros and cons of each decision, and I hope at the end of the post, you can give me some feedback on what is the best in your mind. Starting your own brewery is a great thing, but it is important to have a firm sense of what you want, and merge that with the financial and marketplace dynamics you face. In other words, what you started out wanting may not be what you end up with.

Really there are 2 choices that you can put beer into. Either cans or bottles. Before I dissect each of the options, here are some general comments. I had long thought that cans were the clear environmental choice, but a few articles haver pointed me back in the direction of uncertainty. Click here to read one article. So with no clear winner on the environmental side, what about taste. I hear anecdotally that people can taste the plastic in cans. Does this mean they don’t pour the beer out of cans into a glass (yikes). Also there is the image. Is the wider market really ready for high quality craft beer in cans? I know Steamworks and Central City have their beer in cans, and by all accounts do very well, but could you imagine a much smaller player, like 33 Acres or Bridge Brewing putting their beer in cans? Would it make a difference at all to your perception of them.

Cans: Cans are a good option for a brewery for a variety of reasons, but there are some downsides to them, which I have tried tried to summarize below. Essentially, there are 2 options for can sizes 355ml or 500ml. The smaller can is more North American while the larger can has a much more European feel to it.

More transportable and lighter than bottles

Beer keeps better in cans than bottles

Per unit cost is less expensive than bottles

About 66% of all beer sold in BC is sold in cans

Government liquor stores want new listings in cans

Canning lines are more expensive than bottling lines and notoriously more finicky. We have quotes for a canning line at $90,000, and the price can go sky high from there

Minimum orders for cans are about $30,000

You need to figure out what beer you are going to sell and then hope the market likes it, as production time for cans is much longer

Image of someone drinking from a can doesn’t always conjure up quality craft beer

Lead time for can orders is much longer than a bottle label order

A couple different sizes of cans which completely change the look and feel of the marketing

Bottles: On the other hand, bottles are a great option for a new brewery, as the 650ml bottle is the standard size for craft beer, and is well established in the BC marketplace. Not unlike cans, there are both pros and cons to packaging beer in bottles.

About 33% of all beer sold in BC is sold in bottles

A beer bottle doesn’t put off any odd tastes, whether perceived or not

A beer label allows for more colours and detailed artwork

The amount of time needed for artwork and printing is much shorter than producing cans

Bottling lines are less expensive than canning lines, and you can buy change-over parts to switch between bottle sizes

We have quotes for bottling lines at about $60,000 and the price can go way up from there

There is a much wider variety of bottles available to put beer into (all are in ml): 330, 341, 350, 500, 650, 750, 1000

Government liquor stores are trying to get out of bottles, so a listing with BCLS is much harder to obtain

In my opinion, a bottle of beer put out a different image than a can of beer

So you can see how we are conflicted on the decision that we are going to make. We have flip-flopped back and forth from cans to bottles and we have really wrestled with the decision. What would you do? What would you want us to do? The trouble we now have is that we can no longer waffle on this decision. We need to place our order so that we can get our equipment in time for the launch of our brewery.

So vote here, and let me know what you think. I would love to hear from you as well.

if you were starting a Craft Brewery, what packaging would you put your beer into?

Can 355ml

Can 500ml

Bottle 341ml

Bottle 500ml

Bottle 650ml

Bottle 750ml

Vote

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This entry was posted in Business Side of Things, Packaging and tagged 33 Acres, Barrel Aged Beer, bottle of beer, Brewhouse, British Columbia, can of beer, Canada, East Vancouver, How much does it cost, How to start a Craft Brewery, How to write a beer business plan, Investment into Building a Brewery, Local, new breweries opening in BC, New Craft breweries, Parallel 49 Brewing, Sour Beer, Storm Brewing, tasting room Vancouver, Vancouver on April 10, 2014.

Another general update on progress and happenings at the Brewery!

1 Reply

It seems like I have been knee deep in the process of starting a brewery, that I have neglected to update the readers on our progress. From the brewhouse to tanks, and forklifts to logos, there is a lot happening at the brewery, and the level of activity seems to have picked up. In addition to the office and administrative items that have kept us busy for the past 6 months, you can add in the retrofit of our space to things to do.

For starters, Iain Hill has officially left his position at Yaletown Brewing Company to join operations full time. For several months Iain has been burning the midnight oil after a long day at the office, and he now has the ability to focus on starting our brewery, which is amazing on many levels. Finding a brewery (and in my case a business partner and equal) is a huge step in the process of starting a brewery. Its one thing to be a home brewer like many of you. You understand some of the components of brewing beer, and you have experience with the lingo and terminology, but its entirely another thing to be in charge of a commercial brewery. With a qualified partner, the beer we make will be of good enough quality that it will offer us a chance to have success. If you want to follow Iain Hill on twitter, his account can be found here.

We have sent out tenders for our warehouse to electrical and mechanical contractors. This has been a bit of a process for us. When you apply for building permit, you have a sense of where things are going to go, and this is reflected in the drawings your architect prepares for you. However, when it comes to the technical details of these aspects of the brewery, you engage with mechanical and electrical engineers to complete these drawings. Getting the details correct on these drawings is critical to getting accurate quotes from trades people that will be doing the work. If you hand over a set of drawings for tender and they change immensely, you will get dinged for additional expenses throughout the build-out phase. My advice would be to push ahead with these drawings at every opportunity, so that when you get your building permit, you are not at a standstill like we were. We will literally lose a month from our possible start-date as we were not ready the next step.

Doing things in the brewery that don’t need a permit is also something that is very important. We have decided to paint the inside walls of the brewery with a marine grade paint, to keep mould from becoming a problem. Well painting a house is a job, but painting 6 metre high walls in a brewhouse that is 9,000 square feet is a little bigger of a job. This is something that we really should have started earlier as well, but given the delays in getting started with the rest of the work, we will have this finished within the week. Once the walls are painted we can move forward with cutting floors open, and getting our brewery ready for building.

If you ever need advice on buying a forklift, I can tell you that we had a great experience and I would love to share it with you. At the end of the day, when you are spending so much money on everything at a brewery, trying to save money on items like forklifts can go a long way. We managed to save about $5,000 against our budget, and while that will get sucked up quickly elsewhere, the point is you need to save money when and where you can. We had a budget of $10,000 for a forklift, charger, and man cage (for doing work on the ceiling of the brewery). After about 30 hours of work, research and seeing what the options were, we purchased an electric forklift that will hopefully meet all our needs for now and into the future. Sure we might have to spend money on repairs, but we are not going to lose much money on this machine as it already has depreciated to nothing. If you are looking; side shift, electric drive, 40 inch forks, 180 inch lift height, and a smart charger that is compatible with your machine are all must haves.

In terms of the voting on our logo, it looks the voting has ended up at 50-50! After all that, we have a divided opinion on what we should be going ahead with! As such, Iain and I are going to meet and make a decision on what we should move forward with. We look forward to making a decision so that we can move forward with other aspects of our marketing.

Our landing page for the website should be up and running in about a week. I know there has been delays (like everything it seems), but we hope to have an interesting landing page that will continue with giving everyone a sneak peak into starting a brewery and our operations. More to come on that front shortly.

I have found an individual that has helped me with odd jobs at the brewery so far, and I would recommend to anyone else who is looking at starting a brewery, to find someone with some technical background in general labour … what I mean is find someone to help you that can do some electrical, plumbing, painting, heavy lifting, etc. We have found a man to help us, and he has been a saviour for us.

From an equipment standpoint, we have ordered our brewhouse and we are very close to ordering our packaging equipment and conditioning/fermenting tanks. We are trying to determine exactly packaging equipment we want, as the choice we make will help determine our entry point into the market. If you go cans, you come across as more of a middle of the road company. If you go with bigger bottles (650ml) then you come across as more of a craft operation. So we are wrestling with what exactly to do, and I hope we can make a decision in the next week. As for the tanks, we are grinding the suppliers on their price, and hope to get our ideal package within our budget. We think it is better to go a little bit smaller on the tank farm, knowing that you may run out of capacity quickly, than spend all your money on equipment and have very little left over for everything else.

Thats it for now. Should there be anything else you want an update on, as always, let me know and I will include it for my next blog.

This entry was posted in Brewhouse, Business Side of Things, Financial, Marketing, Packaging and tagged brewmaster, craft beer BC, East Vancouver, electrical contractors, Finding brewery help, General Contractor, how to buy a forklift, how to buy brewery equipment, how to find a head brewer, How to name a brewery, How to start a Brewery, mechanical contractors, Simcic and Uhrich Architrtects, Vancouver on March 29, 2014.

What size Bottle would you put your beer into?

2 Replies

If you could only choose 1 size of bottle to put your beer into, which size would you choose? This is a decision that we need to make, and one that I have had a difficult time making a final decision on.

If you were only going to pick one Bottle when you Start a Brewery, what is the best size bottle?

341 ml Bottle

500 ml Bottle

650 ml Bottle

750 ml Bottle

1 L Bottle

Other

Vote

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This entry was posted in Packaging and tagged Beer Bottles, Craft beer, Decisions, Im Starting A Craft Brewery, Starting a brewery, Vancouver on August 22, 2013.