

Getting Draft Back

by Ben Weston, Hoptown Handles

The country is beginning to see some semblance of normalcy since the COVID-19 vaccines have begun to roll out and case counts go down. Restaurants are beginning to allow sit down dining in limited capacity along with bars and taprooms being allowed to let patrons sit down for a few drinks. As this reopening continues, make sure your brewery is ready to recapture (and possibly enhance) that once lost source of revenue and exposure. Here are few tips on how to successfully bring draft back.

Have a Plan

Start by determining your broad goals for regaining and expanding your market. Then figure out what the small steps are that you'll need to take in order to achieve each of your goals. WRITE THEM DOWN! Having goals in your head is great, but once you write them down, they become real and easier to communicate to others. Make sure someone is accountable for each of these action items so that things don't get missed or forgotten.

Revisit Your Marketing and Promotion Strategies

- Events - Now's the time to get creative. Come up with different ways to draw people out of their homes and into a taproom. Just make sure that you know your local and regional restrictions before jumping back into events.
- [Merch](#) - Money is tight right now, but there may be some inexpensive merch items that you can use to get your brand out there. Traditional items like [coasters and glassware](#) are a great start. You can also start using high visibility items like neon signs or tacker signs to draw people into establishments. Don't forget that [hats, beanies, shirts, etc.](#) are great ways to turn your customers into walking advertisements.
- [Tap Handles](#) - Order your tap handles now, so that when you need them, you don't have to wait. If money is tight and you don't want to buy tons of super premium handles, try a [standard \(stock\) handle](#) that can get to you quickly and at a reasonable cost. Overseas manufacturers are notorious for long and inaccurate lead times, so don't put yourself in a position where you'll run out of tap handles. Many draft locations won't put your beverage on if you don't have a handle to go with it.

Leverage Your Sales Reps and Customer Service

Everyone has been hurting for the last year or more. Remember that, and do what you can to help people that need it. It will pay dividends down the line when you get a customer for life. A long term draft account is far more valuable than a couple of one-off draft accounts, so put your energy into making those long term accounts incredibly happy.

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Self Distribution

In states that allow it, self distro is a great way to maximize your margins while you recover. Yes, you'll have to work harder to get those kegs out to your accounts yourselves, but it may pay off with those larger margins. Be sure you know how many barrels you can legally self-distribute and whether you can do so under your distribution contracts. Another great reason to self distribute is that you have complete control over who is representing your brand. This can lead to your accounts becoming bigger advocates.

Work With Distributors

Talk to your distributors and make sure they have a plan for reactivating draft and make sure they are including your brand in that plan. Lean on their experience and expertise and see what you can do to support them in making placing your beer easier. Be sure to be clear and up front about your needs and stay in regular contact. Ensure that your in-house sales reps are ready to support your distributor and make their job easier.

Think about ways you can incentivize distributor reps to sell your brand over others. Can you provide free merch, cash incentives, or other items to get them to say your name first? If you have a heavily hyped beer, can you tack on a mandate that the retailer purchase one of your other kegs in order to get the hyped up beer?

Work With Other Breweries

Now is the time to promote the entire craft beverage industry. Remember that a rising tide lifts all boats. With many people struggling to find and retain work, they will turn to less expensive macro beer. Remind them why craft beer is better beer.

Collaboration beers can be a great way to get your brand out to locations where your fellow collaborator has a foothold, but you don't.

Avoid Burnout

Remember that you're playing the long game. You want to set your brewery up to succeed in the long term, so don't kill yourself in those first few weeks and not be able to maintain the energy into the future. Make sure your goals are achievable and reasonable and delegate the things that you can.



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