

A can-do attitude

With canned products on the increase and the craft beer market growing rapidly, it comes as no surprise that specialist digital developer and UK-based digital inkjet manufacturer **Tonejet** is perfecting advanced technologies to deliver solutions to converters and brewers alike.

We all know, as consumers, that before customer loyalty is established, and before we're willing to put our hands into our pockets, that a brand has to work hard to be seen and resonate with us. This is more acutely felt by new businesses, such as craft breweries with limited funds, but the bigger breweries and beverage manufacturers are not immune to this pressure either.

Because of this, the marketing and sales opportunities enabled by new print technology are driving preferences for digitally printed cans. Cambridge-based Tonejet is stealing a march on competitors in this field with its Beverage Can Digital Decorator Technology delivered via its equipment partners, which provide complete digital printing solutions to converters or brewers wishing to print their own cans.

Craft-brewers have previously been held back from reaping the full marketing potential that could be provided via their product packaging, in particular with the growth of canned beer, due to the lack of flexibility that the can-printing industry offers them. Now, using digital can-printing technology, they can have this flexibility. They will be able to order small to medium can runs from contract can printers, where the design for each can could be different or even individualised for a special brew, or a special event. Craft brewers are choosing to produce different versions of their brews, and crucially, use the larger surface area of a can to further distinguish their brand.

Get out there

Whether sold at an event or on a retail shelf, brand presence is all important. To maximise this, cans provide the opportunity for brewers to use the full container height and the full 360° circumference of the can. This is much larger than a label could provide cost effectively, allowing brewers to not only explore creative branding opportunities, but also include other additional information to tell their story and sell their products.

Although traditionally the container of choice for the mass produced lager market, the can is now widely adopted throughout the US craft-beer industry and all the signs suggest that it will soon sweep across Europe too. In the UK, some of the early adopters to canning craft beer are Brewdog, Camden Town, Fourpure and Beavertown.

Due to the traditional analogue printing process used for decorating cans and the economic crossover point of the suppliers, minimum order quantities of around 150,000 with lead times of several months are a huge barrier to the continued growth of small independent brewers offering cans. This meant that to change a label to accommodate a local music or sporting event, or to can a new limited brew, was simply not possible without planning months in advance and paying for it up front.

Tonejet has been perfecting a new advanced electro-static drop-on-demand digital print system, designed to enable canners and craft brewers to produce short to medium-run can jobs – crucially, at high speed with high-quality print, and at a low cost. These systems are delivered through equipment partners that build printing machines using Tonejet's Digital Print Engine.

The engine

Tonejet's Digital Print Engine uses nozzleless print heads for market leading industrial reliability. Digital can printing technology is now opening up new opportunities for can printers and craft brewers alike, and contributing towards the growth of this exciting worldwide market.

And it isn't just the marketing benefits that are driving preference for cans. For one, cans better retain the freshness and quality of a beer, and unlike bottles, cut out UV light that degrades hops, and changes the taste and nature of the product.

Second, and when compared with bottles, cans are easier and safer for the consumer to store and transport. For craft brewers and the outdoor event market, this is very important. Eradicating the problem of broken glass, event organisers and managers of public places now approve the on-site consumption of beverages in cans, where bottles are rarely allowed.

This benefit alone represents a huge opportunity for the craft brew market, especially when used in conjunction with digital can printing. The low cost of digital can printing now provides the facility for specially brewed and branded products to be produced cost-effectively, and sold at small and large events. For event organisers, this provides additional marketing and revenue opportunities while also increasing the overall consumer/visitor experience.

So digital can printing is certainly resonating in the craft beer market – set to fuel further growth and adoption of this product in the near future. But the use of digital can printing is unlikely to be restricted to just the craft beer market. With thousands of artisan producers of alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks products around the world, the opportunity for digital can printing looks substantial.

What's more, how long will it be before the larger drinks producers look to capitalise on the 'special/craft' trend, and want to produce their own unique short/medium runs too? If they aren't already working on it, surely it won't be long. As a result, the future for users of digital can printing technology looks very healthy. ■

Further information

Tonejet
www.tonejet.com/craft

