

A CHANGE IS A BREWING!

There is a rumbling from the depths of the international beer drinking market, and for a while now, much like my stomach leading up to lunch, this rumbling has been getting louder and louder.

centage of the overall worldwide beer market, along with their cool clothes and trendy beards.

No wonder then that large breweries are now starting to take keen interest in this market too, with some even diversifying

ing more than 1950 individual beers.

And don't worry readers, Europe is catching up quickly too, along with other craft drinks markets also shifting to cans for mixers, ciders and soft drinks.



This is the noise of the craft beer market breaking through the barriers of traditional beer drinking appetites, driving demand for a more local product – beers and real ales made with passion and local ingredients, often delivering unusual flavours and strong personal or local stories.

These beers are produced by a range of people who consider themselves either small to medium sized brewers, artisans or simply hobbyists. While individually they may be small, collectively, they are becoming a significant and growing per-

their offering to capitalise on the trend.

Today, in the USA alone, there are over 3500 individual craft breweries producing in excess of 22 million barrels every year. In 2014, the US craft beer market grew by 17.6%, representing 11% of the country's overall beer market. Compare this to overall US beer growth of only 0.5%, then the evidence is clear – the craft beer market is in good health, with continued predicted growth.

Over 500 American craft breweries now package their products in cans, represent-

But with such growth and increasing competition, how can craft breweries ensure that they stand out from the crowd. In a retail environment, shelf presence is all important. Before customer loyalty is established, a brand has to work hard to be seen and resonate with customers to get the all important first sale. Many are exploring new technologies to enable them to retain their independence, while producing high quality bespoke products – beers brewed with varying ingredients,

in relatively small batches and created for special events. One such technology is direct to can digital printing.

DEMAND AT YOUR FINGER TIPS

Due to the traditional analogue printing process used for decorating cans and the economic crossover point of the suppliers, minimum order quantities of around 100,000 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.

But like many other industry's today, specialist digital developers were working in the background to design digital inkjet technologies to answer these issues. One such company is UK based digital inkjet manufacturer, Tonejet. For the last 10 years, 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.

With sales in North America and Europe, Tonejet's 2-Piece Can & Tube Digital Decorator, uses nozzleless printheads 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 worldwide market.

BEING MORE FLEXIBLE

But the benefits of digital can printing are not just restricted to short to medium run economics. With the number of craft breweries increasing almost daily the competition is fierce and the need to achieve stand out is a must have capability. As such, the marketing and sales opportunities enabled by this technology is driving further preference for digitally printed cans.

As a generation, we have long been

used to using full colour digital inkjet printers in our homes and offices – printing single sheets or multiple copies depending on our needs. Today, craft brewers using digital can printing technology have this same flexibility. They can now order small to medium can runs, where the design for each can could be different or even personalised to an individual. 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.

YOU 'CAN' STAND OUT!

In a retail environment, shelf presence is all important. To maximise this, cans provide the opportunity for brewers to use the full container height and the full 360 degree 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 to 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 signs are showing this will soon sweep across Europe. In the UK, some of the early adaptors to canning beer are Brewdog, Camden Town, Fourpure and Beavertown.

But many traditionalists are still sceptical about real ale in cans, mocking their association with lager and their ability to deliver a high quality, non metallic tasting beverage – despite modern can technology having largely eradicated this problem. But despite this, the benefits of containing beer in cans really do stack up.

KEEPING IT SIMPLE AND LONGER LASTING

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.

Secondly, and when compared to 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 onsite 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.

Simon Edwards, vice president of sales and marketing, Tonejet, commented: 'The craft beer market is an incredibly exciting place to be right now. Thanks to some entrepreneurial brewers and real craft beer artisans, this market has found its way into the hearts of beer lovers worldwide. Digital can printing technology is enabling the availability of many more incredible beers and specially branded products to be brought to market, with the potential to unlock yet more growth from craft beer.'

TONJET'S 2-PIECE CAN & TUBE FEATURES AND BENEFITS

- Direct colour digital deposition.
- Non-contact printhead.
- High image quality.
- Nozzleless reliability.
- Thin ink layer < 0.5 µm.
- Low cost per print.
- Substrate independent.
- Food packaging safe inks.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

- Maximum print width: 200 mm.
- Throughput: 120 to 200 cans per minute.
- Number of print stations: Eight (dual system).
- Number of colours: Four.
- Image quality: 600 x 600 dpi, four tonal levels.
- Typical run lengths: 1000 to 250,000 containers.