



Targeting the Adventurous Palate

By: Rachelle Nones

Gimlet-loving mystery novelist Raymond Chandler once said, “Alcohol is like love. The first kiss is magic, the second is intimate, the third is routine.”

Routine? Don’t mention that word to the growing segment of craft beverage consumers continually in search of the latest and greatest craft beverage. They enjoy hunting down new and innovative craft beverages and eagerly share their latest discoveries with other taste adventurers.

So, how do you connect with the experimental consumer searching for new craft beer or spirits

tasting adventures? One approach is reinvention. The Central Standard Craft Distillery in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, produces New American Gin, a botanical craft gin designed to appeal to the spirits consumer who ordinarily would never consider purchasing a bottle of gin.

Central Standard Craft Distillery Co-founder Evan Hughes (via Maja Stevanovich, spokesperson) said, “When it comes to marketing, the unique challenge for us is getting people to try it. Unless you are a self-proclaimed gin drinker, it is generally a liquor that people have negative feelings about. This reputation comes from the really heavy London Dry Gin

category that people are most familiar with.”

When Central Standard Craft Distillery crafted its New American Gin recipe, the goal was to formulate a gin that broke the traditional mold. Instead of tasting like “licking a pine tree,” New American Gin’s six botanical ingredients provide a “very floral nose” that appeals to the non-traditional gin drinker.

“We try to visually showcase some of our ingredients when marketing our gin, having these elements front and center helps us create curiosity about what the flavor could in fact be.”

Crossing Over the Line

The Wild Ginger Brewing Company brews beer. Well, not exactly. The Nashville brewery crafts hard sodas like Wild Sit Russ alcoholic citrus soda—perfect for drinking alone or mixed with a favorite spirit. Because hard sodas fall into the malt beverage category, the Wild Ginger Brewing Company’s product line is stocked in the beer category, thereby competing with India pale ales, lagers, and other traditional beer styles. Hard soda is currently a “hot” beverage category, steering consumers away from their typical craft beer purchases.

According to James Grosser, brewer and founder of the Wild Ginger Brewing Company: “In addition to millennials, hard sodas do well with blue-collar drinkers and both men and women. We’ve also seen a lot of crossover with craft beer drinkers, as well as domestic beer drinkers.”

Crafting Collaborations

Crafting a new and exotic craft beer isn’t easy, but it got a lot easier when Stone Brewing, 21st Amendment Brewing, and the Firestone Walker Brewing Company collaborated on El Camino (un) Real, a Black Ale brewed with East Kent Golding, Styrian Golding, fennel seeds, chia seeds, peppercorns, and figs.

The name El Camino (un) Real was selected as a homage to California’s historic El Camino Real trail, a lengthy 600-mile trail on which all three of the collaborating California breweries are situated. The overall look and feel of the ale’s packaging was designed to connect with free spirits about to embark on their next adventure.

When I first spoke to Shaun O’Sullivan, co-founder/brewmaster of the First Amendment Brewery, I told him that although I currently appreciate the earthy, roasted, bitter bite of El Camino (un) Real Black Ale, it wasn’t exactly love at first sip. Sean laughed and said that the strong, dark ale was like a fine wine that only gets better with age.

“The great thing about full-flavored beers such as El Camino (un) Real, with unique ingredients that lend themselves to complex flavor—with age—they will meld together. Flavors that were more sharp and assertive and standing out on their own—over time, they complement each other and play well together.”

Tasting Adventures

Who drinks El Camino (un) Real? Sean identified the typical El Camino consumer as an experimental “beer geek” seeking out interesting new beers.

“These craft beer enthusiasts are thought leader ambassadors and look for and seek out the new and rare beers that are out there, and in turn, pass them along to those drinkers that may not have their noses so close to the windshield.”

To reinforce their branding, the three breweries compiled individual Spotify playlists for El Camino (un) Real drinkers to enjoy. So, I pushed the concept further by asking Sean to pick a song that best exemplifies the El Camino buyer’s persona. He picked “King’s Highway” by Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers.

“It has a driving beat, reminiscent of being on the road with the steady beat of tires on pavement. It also has a California tale woven into its verses. King’s Highway is roughly the El Camino Real’s 600-mile trail.”

Experimental Highs and Lows

It was bound to happen, and then it did. Dad and Dudes Breweria in Aurora, Colorado, received federal approval to infuse cannabis extract into their award-winning India pale ale. Their new and unique creation—George Washington’s Secret Stash IPA—sparked instantaneous media attention because of its edgy, new ingredient.

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However, when the brewery launched a Kickstarter campaign to raise money to pay for their new brew's distribution and other expenses, their campaign raised only \$4,612 of its \$50,000 target goal.

I've consulted on a few Kickstarter campaigns and know that they are challenging to execute. In my opinion, the Dad and Dudes Kickstarter campaign (<http://kck.st/2cr6yWV>) failed because of the manner in which the campaign was executed.

Dude, Where's My Reward?

Dad and Dudes posted only two pledge reward levels on their George Washington's Secret Stash Kickstarter campaign page—a similar "Rebel Founder" reward offering "your name, initials, company name or message, listed on our product for life."

The first pledge level offered a "Rebel Founder" package listing featuring a standard font, at a cost of \$5 per character. The next pledge level requested a donation of \$10 per character in exchange for a "Rebel Founder" package listing that is printed with

a font size twice as large as the standard listing.

From my perspective, the pledge rewards should have been wider in scope. Not every individual or company desires to forge a permanent public connection to a beer containing a cannabis-related ingredient. Secondly, even though the cannabinoids (CBDs) in the beer aren't going to get anyone high, there is always the concern that laws can change regarding the sale of products with cannabis in them. Also, there are still regions where "legal" does not automatically translate into desirable. In very conservative regions of the country, cannabis-infused products are viewed negatively due to their association with full-strength marijuana.

Finally, the brewery's "Rebel Founder" contributor listing is only visible if the brand's package labeling is manually removed, revealing the listing of names printed on the label beneath. For some, scoring a hidden "Rebel Founder" listing that can only be viewed if a consumer peels off the external packaging, is not an enticing funding incentive.

Judging from what I've seen on Kickstarter, offering only two pledge levels rarely works. The

pledges could easily have started at as little as \$5, in exchange for a “Rebel Founder Secret Stash” bumper sticker. The list of possible rewards for \$25, \$50, and \$75, pledge levels is endless: “Secret Stash” key chains, branded beer glasses, limited edition T-shirts, hats, and other “Secret Stash” branded collectables.

Another flaw in the Colorado brewery’s Kickstarter campaign was the dearth of pledge levels in the \$100 to \$500 range. To attract pledges at the \$500 pledge level, the brewery could have offered a private brewery tour along with a personalized “VIP Rebel Founder” swag bag filled with “Secret Stash” collectibles.

With a little more effort and creativity, the Kickstarter campaign could have hit a home run—simply by rewarding early fans with attractive branded merchandise promoting “Secret Stash” to its desired target audience.

A Cautionary Tale

It’s not hard to understand how Dad and Dudes dropped the ball on their Kickstarter campaign. Small breweries don’t have huge staffing budgets and the owners were obviously busy contending with numerous legal and distribution challenges related to launching a groundbreaking alcoholic product.

To date, Dad and Dudes is moving forward with its plans to sell its innovative craft beer nationally. Since cannabis doesn’t change a beer’s taste profile, Dad and Dudes must convince retailers that beer drinkers are thirsting for a cannabis-infused beer that isn’t all that distinctive in terms of taste or potency.

Will a cannabis-infused beer appeal to adventurous craft beer drinkers across the nation? It will be interesting to observe how Dad and Dudes handles future sales and marketing challenges.

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