

Raising the beer bar

As prices increase, the need for licensees to serve a good quality pint every time has never been greater. But no amount of fancy cellar kit will do any good if staff aren't using it properly. **Phil Mellows** reports

As the cost of beer and duty soars, pubs are left with a dilemma. Should they absorb the increases or pass them on to their customers? Ultimately the latter is unavoidable. The price of a pint has to go up. But how will drinkers react?

That depends, of course, on whether they feel they are still get-

ting value for money. And that, in turn, depends on the quality of your operation – in particular the quality of your beer.

Over the years brewers have invested huge amounts of money to ensure the consistency of the beer leaving their gates. But draught beer is one of those rare products where the only true guarantee of quality lies in the hands of the retailer – pub-

licans and their staff.

Advances have been made, too, in the technologies and the equipment that can help pubs serve a perfect pint. But in the last couple of years the emphasis has shifted from the kit to the people working it. Any amount of fancy gear is no good unless you and your staff understand beer and the disciplines and procedures necessary to make it something your ►



48 Dispense & cellar standards

customers are prepared to pay the price you're asking.

So at InnServe, the largest drinks dispense service in UK with more than 75,000 accounts, the focus has turned very much to training.

"Quality of dispense and the presentation of beer in the glass are in the publican's area of control and we are keen to raise the importance of cellar and hygiene standards," says InnServe's Steve Lakin.

"Given the cost of the liquid, the more professional the care, the higher the yields and the greater the customer retention.

"That's why, as well as ourselves, the major brewers – Carlsberg, Heineken, Molson Coors and Anheuser-Busch InBev – are all running quality training initiatives at the moment."

Lakin is concerned that pubs struggling to save cash are letting

Beer quality: getting the dispense right can boost customer loyalty



standards slip, especially when it comes to line-cleaning, not only a less than enticing chore, but a process in which some of that valuable beer goes to waste.

Licensees are also tempted to turn off expensive-to-run cellar-cooling equipment and to neglect the importance of glassware, failing to maintain glasswashers and to regularly renovate the glasses themselves.

"In financially straitened times everyone is looking to get more for less," he concedes.

"I can understand that. But another way is to add value to the customer experience, develop staff satisfaction and protect profits through good cellar management and the pub employee training programmes that go with it. ▶

Drawing a fine line

Line-cleaning, or rather the lack of it, is perhaps the most intractable problem when it comes to improving beer quality in the pub. Failure to clean lines properly once a week not only contaminates the beer, but causes fobbing and wastage. Licensees who try to cut costs by extending the line-cleaning period are conducting an exercise in false economy.

Automatic line-cleaning systems have for many years promised to come to the rescue, but so far they have only achieved a marginal impact.

The latest, called CellarBright, aims to change that. Managing director Hance McGhie concedes that previous efforts "have not performed – but technology moves on, and this is a totally different set-up".

Once you've disconnected the line and connected it to the

system – nothing is totally automatic – the push of a single button starts the cleaning cycle. Unlike other systems, CellarBright works with a pulsing motion and precisely controls the dosage of cleaning fluid.

After between five and seven minutes the machine stops and you reconnect the line and pull through in the usual way until the beer appears. And if you're not on the premises, there's the capacity to remotely monitor the process.

CellarBright's biggest selling point, though, is that it claims to reduce wastage by at least 75%, saving a pub hundreds or even thousands of pounds a month. It's this, McGhie believes, that can encourage licensees to clean lines as regularly as they should.

Feedback from pubs already using the system has been

positive and scientific tests by former Bass beer-quality boffin David Quain confirm that it works.

One thing CellarBright won't do, however, is remove the need for that weekly clean. "Pubs that leave it longer than seven days still risk affecting the quality of the beer," says McGhie.



CellarBright: claims to cut wastage by 75%

Monitor moments



Online systems: allow cellars to be monitored remotely

For all the controversies surrounding beer monitoring, the latest technology from Brulines is making a positive contribution to quality.

The i-draught system now includes a web-based 'traffic light' rating system that allows licensees to keep an online check on all the key elements of their cellar management, including temperature control, line-cleaning, beer throughputs and yield figures at the tap and the till.

Behind that, a new support package offers pubs training and consultation on i-draught and the web application, a help desk and online resources, such as help guides, developed with beer

quality accreditation body Cask Marque.

As a result it's possible for pubs to use monitoring technology to:

- improve yields by addressing staff pouring techniques and practices
- link every pint served to till data
- control font numbers
- choose the correct products to market
- ensure correct dispense temperature
- enforce a line-cleaning regime
- manage pouring speeds, temperature from cellar to glass and effective line-cleaning
- quickly identify issues with remotes, coolers and pythons
- diagnose problems remotely.

50 Dispense & cellar standards

“Highly trained staff can have a direct impact on the quality of draught beers and on minimising any wastage.

“Research has shown that good quality drinks dispense and cellar-management training can improve yields by some 3% and sales by 7%. So there are significant financial rewards to be gained from investment in staff education.”

Lakin, however, fears that many of the basic skills have been lost, and it was to address that problem that two years ago Innserve launched its own InnSitu beer quality training course.

As the name suggests, InnSitu takes cellar and dispense training right into actual pubs, typically coaching small groups of licensees and their staff at the same time in three-hour bites.

Approaching 2,000 people have so far taken a course and Punch



Cellar management: some of the basic skills appear to have been lost

Up-chill battle

Not so long ago the big debate in cellar management was around beer temperature.

Extra-cold lagers were driving the market and many pubs introduced under-bar flash chillers or ‘pods’ to draw down temperatures just before the beer hit the pumps, while groups such as JD Wetherspoon invested heavily in glycol-based cooling below stairs.

After much experimentation, though, much of the trade has now reverted to souped-up versions of traditional ice-bath technology.

“Glycol was proving too expensive as a solution,” explains Steve Lakin of InnServe. “So we developed ways of serving beers at glycol temperatures through ice-bath-based systems, using technical enhancements and improved insulation.”

Under-bar pods, always an irritation for licensees because of the space they take up and the way they cool the beer but heat the staff, are also being replaced by cellar-based solutions.

Part of that is maintaining the correct ambient temperature in the cellar, and Scottish & Newcastle Pub Company (S&NPC) is splashing out on energy-efficient kit that’s more expensive, but, it hopes, will save money in the long run.

Over the past 12 months new cellar-cooling units, supplied by Hubbard and Blizzard, have been installed in 71 of the company’s leased pubs. They are reckoned to be 20% more efficient than existing equipment, and S&NPC is backing up its investment with twice-yearly maintenance calls costing lessees £250 a year.



Behind the bar: space is limited for cooling units

Creating a safe house

Every now and then, not too frequently thankfully, there’s an accident in a pub cellar and the trade is reminded of an ever-present danger involved in draught beer – dispense gases. So, here’s a quick safety checklist from gas supplier BOC Sureserve.

■ Use a reputable supplier.

Choose your dispense gas supplier from the BBPA guide *Carbon Dioxide in Cellars*.

■ Complete a confined-spaces risk assessment. This is a legal requirement.

You can either self assess – there’s a guide in BOC Sureserve’s risk assessment pack – or get an expert to do it for you.

■ Don’t overstock. Too many cylinders will cramp space in the cellar and if not properly secured are a trip hazard. Using blending equipment will help as you will only need two types of gas –

CO₂ and 70:30 mixed gas.

■ Never tamper with a gas cylinder. But do ensure all connections and joints are gas tight and do not leak.

■ Never connect gas cylinders to a keg directly. Always use a suitable regulator to ensure the keg is at the correct pressure.

■ Never throw or drop gas cylinders.

You risk damaging the valve and causing a leak that can cause CO₂ poisoning or asphyxiation.

■ Store cylinders correctly. If full they should be kept in an upright position, securely fastened to the wall. Empties can be laid down and chocked.

Wherever possible store them in a ventilated area.

■ Train your staff. Ensure staff who change gas cylinders are trained in safe storage and handling and to spot signs of a leak – such as condensation or loss of pressure.



Taverns has, for instance, been using it to bring the skills of new lessees up to basic standards.

The programme comprises what Lakin calls a 'shopping list' of modules that people can choose from to suit their needs and the level that they're at.

Line-cleaning frequently comes at the top of the list, "and that's quite frightening, really," he says. "Licensees should have been trained in such a vital and basic skill before they take on a pub, but that's where the industry, for some reason, is falling down."

Cellar and dispense training is often carried out by hosts themselves, but that's not good enough, according to Lakin. InnSitu sends experienced beer quality experts to the pub so licensees don't have to release staff and the training can be done in familiar surroundings on the actual equipment they are going to use.

"Working on and putting into practice simple, but effective, systems

can have a profound effect on wastage, draught-beer quality and profit levels," he says.

"It can often be as simple and straightforward as the introduction of best practice routines for elements such as line-cleaning.

"Such actions also have a direct impact on customer satisfaction – in that the beer they imagined is the beer they get. And that provides a positive reason to remain loyal to the outlet. Again, this is a primary element in the success and profitability of any publican's businesses.

"The final piece of the jigsaw is staff satisfaction," Lakin adds. "Properly trained employees have an enhanced sense of their value to the business and that limits staff turnover and retains experience within the pub.

"And happy, well-trained and valued staff can have a further impact on customer satisfaction and loyalty. They, and the beer, set the tone of the customer experience."

Revolutionary dispense

Revolutions have been going off all over the place lately – even on the bar, where Greene King's Cask Revolution dispense system



has been producing some impressive results.

Nearly 1,600 pubs are now serving Greene King IPA through the font, which gives customers a choice of having their beer 'smooth and creamy' with a thick, northern-style head, or 'clean and crisp' with southern lacey head.

And as well as offering a choice, the pump's illuminated clip helps it stand out on the bar and removes some of the mystery surrounding cask beer by raising the tap so you can see what's happening.

Figures suggest pubs that install Cask Revolution can increase sales by up to 11% and introduce more people to cask.

Outdoor eventing

More pubs are looking to add a profit stream by catering at outdoor events, and Universal Dispense Systems (UDS) has introduced a free-standing mobile beer cart to help them do it.

It will dispense up to six pre-chilled kegs an hour, running from a 16 amp electrical supply by mains or generator.

"The beer keg adaptors and gas valve are attached to the unit so all you need is a bottle of gas,



the keg and an electrical supply and you have your draught beer solution," says UDS sales director Neil Tanner.

CellarBright

for clean beer & clear profit!

Benefits

1. Quality of beer maintained and improved
2. Reduce line cleaning wastage by at least 75%
3. Labour saving
4. Energy saving
5. No disruption
6. It's Green
7. Ability to monitor the frequency of line cleaning by line managers
8. Health & Safety and Hygiene

Why choose a Cellarbright System?

It is fully automated

Simple, quick & easy to use - 5 to 7 minutes to clean a line

Improves the quality of the beer.

It enables the sale of at least 75% of the beer that is normally wasted

Optional Remote Monitoring and reporting

Independently tested by a Professor in Brewing

Suitable for all dispense equipment, free flow, metered and beer engines

New patent pending technology gives outstanding cleaning performance

15% Discount!

Environmental Benefits

For every 100 pints wasted per week equates to 795kg of CO2 per year *

That's equivalent to driving 4000 miles in a typical family diesel car **

Reduces consumption of cleaning chemical by up to 30%

Reduces water consumption during the cleaning process by up to 35%

* Source: British Beer & Pub Association

** Source: Ford UK (Focus 1.6TDCi ECOnetic)

For a FREE no obligation survey and quotation

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