



Consultants: Remember Your Vendors

By Laura Lodge, Customized Craft Beer Programs

One of the hardest things to know when you embark on an extensive project like opening your own business is who to turn to for help. There are a litany of tried and true resources for the DIY person: those who are willing, have the time, and have enough background in enough areas to tackle almost everything themselves. These include the library, the internet; generally ways to find books and articles written by those knowledgeable in the industry to provide the missing pieces – even videos today. The challenge is when you don't have the time or enough background to really utilize these resources. Sometimes you need to hire someone.

When you need a product or a specific service, there are a number of ways to evaluate them on the internet and you can see/ask what other brewers have done in your area (or) what approach those who are making a similar kind of beer or style of brewery/tap room have used. This is the route many people take, and this strategy can be successful, but often everyone in this referral chain ends up with similar issues.

Although it takes more time and can often add to your overall project budget, finding one or two solid, experienced, and reputable vendors can really save the day. Everyone would agree that using the best vendors is an advantage; their products are most often superior, they have vast experience with installation, and their customer service is top notch - otherwise they wouldn't have earned this reputation. Yes, for their product or service you're probably paying a higher price. However, there's more to this than finding good products.

It is almost always true that your top vendors in any arena employ people who have extensive experience in their field, and have, therefore, worked in the industry for some time. They have seen and heard plenty about other suppliers, other products, other customer service, and have met many of the people who supply the products and services that you will need. In short, they know who does a good job, who doesn't, whose products hold up and whose don't, and they know who cares to support their customers over the long term of the life of the business. Sometimes this is about individual people, and other times it will be about the company and physical products themselves, but most often it is some kind of combination of the two. This is the gold mine.

When you are referred by someone with industry experience that others in the field respect and trust, you earn credibility yourself. Everyone involved knows that the expectation is for top notch product, service, and delivery with long term support. In addition, you are building a network of people who respect and trust each other. This is critical to the success of your business. In the best case, each of these vendors will communicate with the other, support each other, and problem-solve together both in the short and long term.

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This is not just true with vendors of materials and specific services. There are full-service project consultants who have a team of people and companies they routinely work with because they also benefit from this expertise and service. And the consultants are often referred by the vendors as well.

So the next time you need a glycol service tech, a new POS system, advice about working with the liquor control in your state, help with taxes, new equipment, to expand your tap room, help writing your business plan or any of a billion other things, turn to one of your established vendors – or ask for referrals from someone who has been in the industry for a long time. This is how we established our Contributor List for Start A Brewery. When we don't know the answer or have the right person/product for the job, we turn to those in the industry that we know have a ton of experience and ask for their recommendation.

Our Contributor List is available to you, too. We will continue to expand our reach in all areas of the industry to find these companies and individuals, tap their knowledge and experience to share in our Resource Groups, our podcasts, our Library, and in as many other areas as possible. This is what Candace and I envisioned when we created Start A Brewery. Better, smarter breweries benefit us all.



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*As the author of *Distribution Insight for the Craft Brewer*, Laura shares her experience with distribution on the Western Slope of Colorado for the benefit of brewers everywhere. A veteran of the craft beer industry, she is also the Owner of Customized Craft Beer Programs, designing events, resort retail programs, and educational programs based on craft beer.*