

Tap Handle Quality: Why Durability Matters

by Ben Weston, Hoptown Handles



What's worse than getting a broken tap handle sent back to you for replacement? Tap handles are a giveaway, and a relatively expensive one at that. They're important, sure, it's your front line marketing strategy, but bars aren't paying you for them, and they don't treat them very nicely either. Tap handles get abused. Tossed in a bucket, knocked around, dropped, wrenched on, wiped down hundreds of times. Are your handles going to stand up to this abuse or are they going to give in to the stress and snap like Michael Douglas in "Falling Down"?

If you've ever had a custom product manufactured for you overseas, you won't need much convincing to have your product made right here in the US. If not, let's have a little chat. The least expensive tap handles are manufactured overseas. Usually in China or Taiwan. Maybe you're a relatively new brewery on a budget. So you say: "Hey, they're less expensive, and lots of products are made in China, right?". You're feeling great. You saved a few hundred dollars on your tap handle order. Or did you? Let's do the math.

Let's assume you ordered 150 "cheap" (and usually made overseas) resin handles for about \$22 each. Chances are you'll be replacing at least 25-50% of them due to breakage in the first 6 months (if you're lucky). Let's go with 33% for easy math. That puts you at 200 handles, though you may be forced to place another full order of 150. We'll be nice though, 50 more handles. That's a total cash output of \$4,400 ($200 \times 22 = 4,400$). This of course doesn't include setup fees or overseas shipping that you may have to pay (usually adding up to a few thousand dollars).

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If you were to spend a fraction more for a true quality product, for example, we'll go with \$27 per handle for that same 150 handle order. With our Inbody internal thread system, you'll be breaking taps before you break our tap handles, so you won't have to make that extra order of 50+ tap handles. You would spend a grand total of \$4,050 (150 x \$27). That's a \$350 savings. You won't have to replace any of your handles for many, many years. Oh, we also don't charge any setup fees at all and they are made in and being shipped straight from our shop in Portland, OR.

In addition to durability with regard to breakage, we also use highly durable UV cured inks in our printer that stand up to scratches and scuffs to keep your tap handle in prime condition. Think through all of these kinds of wear and tear points when you spend your hard-earned money on something that will be representing you in the market. And now you'll know to check for extra unexpected costs before you place that order.



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Ben Weston is the founder and Head Honcho at Hoptown Handles, an American manufacturer of high quality, durable custom tap handles. He is also the co-founder and Director of Direction at SeaThirst Creative, a design firm that specializes in working with craft breweries of all sizes.

Author's Note: When I started this company, I had some handles made overseas for my first few clients. When I saw the product that was being sent back to me and then off to my clients, I was thoroughly embarrassed at the quality of the product. They were very heavy, broke easily, and simply didn't look like something that I would want representing my brand. That is when I decided to set up a shop and make all of our client's handles ourselves. I brought in an expert woodworker and tactician, Michael Inbody, and we changed the way tap handle business is done. Now we have total control over the quality of what we send to our clients and we can make a product that I am thoroughly proud of. —Ben