

Distribution: Laying the Groundwork Identity or Branding

by Laura Lodge, Distribution Insight

Having looked at the when and why of distribution in the previous Distribution article, we now move forward to preparing for distribution. Many of these steps make sense whether your company is planning to distribute or not, and they are *critical* elements of maximizing your success in the world of distribution.

Three of these components are your identity or branding, the ability to finance the change in your business, and deciding where you would like for your product to be sold. Let's approach each of these in turn and work through them.

Your identity is the most important factor in distribution success beyond the liquid in the bottle. Sounds simple, doesn't it? It can be, and it can also be incredibly complex and challenging. You need to know who you are as a business and decide how to tell your story.

Once determined, you need to internally ensure that every member of your brewery team lives, breathes, eats, sleeps, and drinks your image and personality. Select people that you can trust to uphold the standards that you set for representing your brewery and believe in your brand and your success. On or off duty, these people will be associated with your business. This is especially true in new territories with a new distributor.

When you make the decision to sell your products outside of your hometown area, the image you create will be the sole representation of your business in this new territory. You no longer can count on your personal connections to create interest and support for your products. They stand alone and will withstand ruthless scrutiny. Your story, your image, your passion, and your personality need to jump off the shelf and connect with your future customers.

Keep in mind that your story and your image need to be positive, universally appealing and easily conveyed, especially with goals of expanding outside of your home area. Using imagery that will be unfamiliar or confusing, language that is not universally acceptable, an attitude or approach that can be a turn-off, considered snobbery or belittling can significantly damage your potential success. However, if done *exceptionally* well, some of these characteristics can serve to be differentiating points. Think carefully.

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Ultimately, the outside packaging should enhance and complement the liquid inside the bottle or can – not detract from it. You want to maximize the chance that people of all ages, backgrounds, and walks of life will try your beer, love it, share with their friends and come back to purchase more.

When you approach a distributor to sell your product line, you will also need to sell them your identity. This includes everything from your logo and tag line to your story, packaging, language used, attitude and thematic approach incorporated, marketing and POS style, the type of people on your team, etc. Everything needs to tie together into one personality that shows your passion for what you do, and this includes the types of beer that you brew and the names of your individual beers.

The distributor knows that their team will be representing you, and needs to feel comfortable that their staff can present a compelling reason for retail buyers (and then consumers) to purchase your product. This is most easily accomplished with unique, interesting, eye-catching packaging that then rewards the purchaser with (consistently) high quality beer inside. Your story and the overall message you convey – your branding - are your bridge from the brewery to your new customers.



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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.