

Using Sensory Analysis to Answer Your Business Questions

by Lindsay Barr, DraughtLab

What motivated you to start a brewery? Making something delicious and joyful for your community? Further developing your creativity and talent through your brands? Or simply to make a few bucks by way of an independent pursuit? Either way, flavor is at the core of your motivation and business objectives and is therefore, an appropriate metric to capture through sensory analysis.

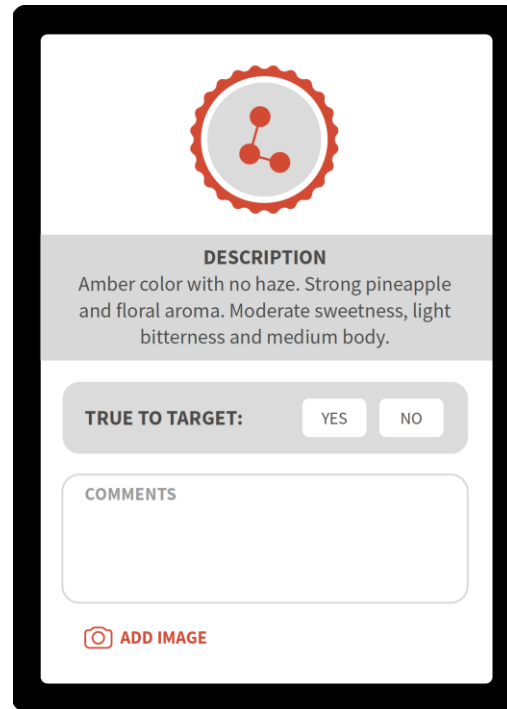
Sensory analysis is the discipline where individual sensory perceptions of sight, touch, taste, smell, and hearing are captured and analyzed to help answer everyday business questions like: “what new beer should I make?”, “is this batch suitable for release?”, “what happens if I change this process parameter or raw material?”.

Rapid Sensory Quality Control

While you may recognize the value of a sensory program, your lack of time, money and expertise can feel like significant barriers-to-entry for building such a program. With these barriers in mind, new approaches were developed that are robust enough to meet your requirements and practical in their implementation. The Rapid Sensory Quality Control approach involves three steps: 1) define your flavor targets, 2) flag samples, 3) determine an action plan.

1. Define Targets – Every quality measurement begins with a clearly defined target and sensory is no different. Take the time to define your flavor targets by utilizing a group of tasters and a common lexicon like the Beer Flavor Map™. Once the tasting data is aggregated, you can use the resulting flavor target to accurately measure your batches against their intended flavor profile.
2. Flag Samples – Your flavor targets serve as the basis for flagging samples in the True to Target test. This test is performed by tasters who evaluate the sensory characteristics of a sample against the target and decide if the sample falls inside, or out of, the acceptable range of variation for the brand. The data collected is the percentage of assessors who indicate the sample is outside the target profile, along with their comments. This information can help you quickly determine if a batch should be released or flagged for investigation.

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3. Determine an Action Plan – Once a sample is flagged, further sensory analysis or process investigation can be performed to help determine the magnitude and nature of the problem. This information can help you become a better brewer by continuously improving your production and recipe development process.

And none of this requires large financial investments. If your company culture is focused on quality, small panels that apply these approachable methods are all you need to gain meaningful information to inform process decisions.

Technology Can Help

In the fast-paced development and production world, decisions must be made quickly and accurately. Technology can bring sensory data to life by providing a single location for panelists to independently enter data and panel leaders the ability to track and trend this data over time. Software tools eliminate the need of creating custom ballots and hand entering stacks of data, thus saving time (and therefore money) while protecting the data's integrity. Companies that recognize opportunities to automate parts of the QC process build confidence in their data and are free to spend time where it's most valuable.

To learn more about the DraughtLab process and technology contact us at info@draughtlab.com or sign up for a free trial through draughtlab.com/software.



Contributing Author

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Lindsay works with businesses to apply tasting data to inform product decisions. She got her start at New Belgium Brewing managing the Sensory and Consumer Research program and published seven new global sensory methods as the chair of the ASBC Sensory Committee. With DraughtLab, she's published numerous industry-standard lexicons, including the Beer Flavor Map™, and is continuing to develop tools that make the world a more delicious place.