

Your Oyster: Nice Vibe

By Tom Hennessy, Colorado Boy Brewing



Note: You can subscribe to Tom's blog, The Affordable Brewery, [here](#).

I want to talk about probably one of the most important things you can do for your brewery that will impact your sales, but really, won't cost you a dime. It's a lot to go over, so I won't even get into why I call it the oyster, but for this article let's just say it's your breweries "vibe". I don't think there is anything in the brewing business I'm more passionate about.

The Oyster is made up of five things.

1. Music
2. Lighting
3. Temperature
4. Cleanliness
5. Stage Setting

MUSIC

Ok, let's start with music. There are two components to this; volume and type. *Volume* should be, for the most part, your normal speaking volume. Try this experiment in your brewery. When your tasting room is full, slowly lower the volume of your music until you can barely hear it. You will notice peoples voices get lower as well, mainly because they don't want to be heard at the table next to them. This is uncomfortable. In fact this is a good trick if you want to get the "hangers-on" at the end of the night to leave. Now raise the volume loud. People now need to

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raise their voices so they can be heard, which is uncomfortable and headache producing. The volume should be just so you can hear it but it doesn't dominate.

The *type* of music is just as important. Who picks the music in your place? Most people I speak with say it's the bartender. Wrong! You spent your life savings to build your place and you leave the atmosphere up to your bartender? Really? Instead look at the mood you are after and match the music to that. If it's cold and rainy outside, why would you play reggae? No matter what you choose, it's important that you do the choosing. Have fun with this.

LIGHTING

Lighting is similar to music. First rule is no fluorescent lights. You need to be able to control the brightness, and the lights should be warm. Here is the way I look at it. When it is bright outside, then the lights inside should be bright as well, or the place will feel like a dark cave. but, as the sun goes down, so should the lights - to a point. Adjust your lights down to a point that they provide enough for your customers to see, not too dark, but certainly not too light. When you feel it's just perfect, mark your dimmers so you know that sweet spot. Lights that are too bright when it's dark outside can make your tasting room feel cold. Play with this, you will know what feels right.

TEMPERATURE

Have you ever been to the movies or a restaurant in Phoenix in the summer? If you have you probably wish you had brought a sweater. That's because the air conditioning is cranked up, and the reason the air condition is cranked? The staff who is running around is hot. In a busy brewery, your staff moves fast, generating their own heat, and a typical scenario in the tasting room feels uncomfortably cold because the staff is always turning up the air conditioner. The only way you really know what is going on is to look at your customers body language. If they never take off their jackets, or sit with their arms crossed it's too frickin cold. Oh yes, it might be perfect for the bartender, but they are not paying your bills! Start watching your customers and see what I mean.

CLEANLINESS

Yes your pub has to be clean, but this is way more than that. This gets into your systems that keep everything clean and orderly. For example when the 22 year old guy who has had too much to drink puts his fist through the dry wall in the restroom because, well who knows why, how long is that hole going to stay there? It needs to be fixed right away. Or, on a busy Friday

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night when tables turn are they bussed clean and then put back to their set-point? I mean where the chairs are pushed back to the table and whatever you have on the table-top placed back in proper order? These are important things. When you are home and your bed is made, dishes done, and clothes picked up from the floor, it just feels better. Your customers may not be able to verbalize it, but seeing order in your brewery just makes them feel better in this chaotic world.

STAGE SETTING

This is the most important. The stage setting determines what your brewery is about. It should really come down to an elevator speech. If I see you at a brewers convention and ask what kind of brewery you have, you should be able to tell me with a sentence or two. “We are pilots and our brewery has a flying theme”. “We are ex English majors so our brewery looks like a large library.” You get the idea. Once you can articulate this, then it informs what type of music you have, or what type of lighting. Perhaps the uniforms your bartenders are wearing. An airplane wing for the bar top? Sure. Library lamps on the tables? You bet. This is the most fun, but don’t start your brewery until you have figured this out.

There! I got through it all in the shortest I have ever written about it. I could surely write a book on this subject. Once you get the Oyster into your veins you will never look at another business the same way. You will always be judging other people’s oysters, but it will make a huge difference in your place. I guarantee it.



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Tom Hennessy has opened seven breweries of his own and helped open over 100 more with his Colorado Boy Brewery Immersion Course. His video Frankenbrew, from 1995 has become a cult classic in the brewing world. His three brewing books include The Brewery Operations Manual, Colorado Boy SOP, and The Affordable Brewery. Tom lives, brews and writes in his mountain town of Ridgway, Colorado.