

Planning Your Taproom Draft System for Success

by Neil Witte, TapStar

When you're planning for your brewery taproom, there are several things to keep in mind. Making the right decisions now can keep you from having headaches later. Here are a number of things to keep in mind for your draft system.

1. Keep the system short.

Long lines can pour great beer too, but short systems have definite advantages. For one, short lines don't waste as much beer. Changing kegs and cleaning lines incur costs from dumped beer and the longer the lines, the more the waste. Shorter lines are also easier to keep clean. There's simply less biomass that forms in short lines and cleaning is generally simpler and more effective. Finally, short lines are easier and cheaper to replace. Some beers can flavor-stain a line and when change out is cheap, there are few worries.

2. Consider pouring from a walk-in cooler.

Kegeators behind the bar can be very enticing when you're in the planning stages. They're often cheaper than a walk-in cooler, for one. And the short lines have lots of advantages, like detailed above. But storage is limited in kegeators. If you're pouring any type of volume, you'll find yourself running back and forth between the bar and your keg storage, loading kegs during your busiest time. And walk-in coolers don't have to be far away. A strategically-placed cooler behind the bar can give all the short-draw advantages of a kegeator without the storage limitations.

3. Design the system for ease of cleaning.

One of the best ways to keep cleaning simple is to have a dedicated keg for each faucet. When you have a single keg feeding multiple faucets, it complicates the cleaning process and can make it less effective.

4. Keep any food in a separate cooler.

Food service coolers are often high-traffic. This can cause the temperature to fluctuate during your busiest times and warm temperatures are the leading cause of foamy beer. Keeping your cooler dedicated to beer only will ensure your beer is cold and pouring clear.

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5. Hire a professional.

Draft systems can get complicated really quickly. It's a delicate balance of temperature, pressure, gas blends, rise and fall, and line restriction. Bringing in a trained draft system professional will ensure your beer pours great every time, right from the start.

Keep these points in mind in your planning process. Doing so will help you showcase the fruit of all your labors. Good luck!



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Neil Witte is a Master Cicerone and 24-year veteran of the beer business, working for 19 years for Boulevard Brewing Co & Duvel USA. He is now the Lead Trainer for the Cicerone Certification Program and runs two businesses - Craft Quality Solutions, his draft beer consultation and install company, and TapStar, a draft beer quality certification program for retailers.