



TOPIC: ENGINEERING, OPERATIONS, CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT, QUALITY

# 10 ESSENTIAL BREWERY CONSIDERATIONS BEFORE THE PEAK SEASON

🕒 9 min read

*Practical considerations to ensure your brewery operates efficiently and avoids costly downtime during peak season.*

The brewing industry is cyclical, with demand typically surging during warmer months and key holiday periods. Successfully navigating these peaks requires more than simply increasing output; it depends on how well a brewery prepares its operations to perform reliably under sustained pressure. From brewing and packaging to utilities and support systems, readiness during peak season is critical to avoiding costly downtime, protecting quality, and maintaining operational stability.

Preparing for peak season requires more than a single checklist; it demands alignment across people, processes, and assets throughout the entire operation. In this article, we outline ten essential operational considerations that breweries should review in advance of their busiest production periods. These considerations span workforce readiness, preventive maintenance, utilities, packaging, production planning, and capital strategy. Addressing these areas proactively helps reduce operational risk, minimize unplanned interruptions, and ensure consistent performance when demand is at its highest.

## **1. Brewery Personnel**

Effective personnel management is a foundational, and often underestimated, element of peak-season readiness. Reviewing peak production plans alongside vacation schedules well in advance allows breweries to confirm coverage for essential roles and allocate sufficient time for recruitment, onboarding, and training. Clear expectations and defined work practices help teams operate safely and consistently as production intensity increases.

Training programs should reinforce safety, productivity, and quality standards across both permanent and seasonal staff. Where feasible, cross-training employees across multiple departments increases flexibility and resilience during demand surges or unplanned absences, allowing teams to shift roles while maintaining throughput and operational stability.

“There is nothing more important than a well-trained workforce to maintain production quality and efficiency. Do not underestimate the amount of time required to recruit and train your seasonal workforce,” says Russell Tabata, Senior Technical Advisor for First Key Consulting. Training anchored in clearly defined Standard Operating Procedures supports disciplined execution and reliable performance during the most demanding production periods.

## **2. Maintenance Planning and Execution**

Proactive maintenance planning is essential to sustaining reliable brewery operations during peak production periods. Ahead of the busy season, maintenance schedules should be reviewed and updated to ensure all major preventive maintenance tasks and overhauls are completed before production ramps up. Addressing known equipment and system issues early significantly reduces the risk of unplanned failures during critical brewing windows.

Maintenance effectiveness can be further strengthened through data-driven tools and targeted risk mitigation. Implementing a computerized maintenance management system (CMMS) improves visibility into equipment history, enables better scheduling, and supports proactive decision-making. Predictive maintenance techniques, such as vibration, oil, and thermal analysis, provide additional insight into equipment health, while maintaining a critical spare parts inventory helps minimize downtime when issues do occur. As peak season approaches, particular attention should be given to critical quality and production support systems, including deaerated water, CO<sub>2</sub>, CIP, and utilities. “Most peak-season failures don’t come from complex problems; they come from known issues that weren’t addressed early enough,” says Rod Waite, Director of Engineering for First Key Consulting.

### **3. Inventory and Materials Management**

Maintaining adequate inventory levels is essential to sustaining operations during peak production periods. Before the busy season, breweries should assess stock levels, usage rates, and supplier lead times for high-consumption and long-lead materials, particularly critical items such as packaging components, maintenance spares, and laboratory supplies. This review helps ensure materials are available to support increased production demand without disruption.

A strong inventory strategy should also extend beyond internal planning to include supplier coordination. Establishing reliable supplier relationships and contingency options reduces the risk of shortages during periods of high demand. Proactive inventory and supplier management help breweries maintain production continuity and avoid delays that can quickly cascade into lost output during peak season.

### **4. Automation and Electrical Systems**

Automation and electrical systems are critical to sustaining performance during peak production periods. Ahead of the busy season, breweries should take a systematic approach to reviewing and safeguarding control systems. This includes verifying that all PLC programs are current, fully backed up, and readily accessible. Losing a control system or program during peak production can result in extended downtime if accurate backups are not available for rapid recovery.

Electrical system reliability should also be confirmed through proactive inspections, with particular focus on panel condition, load management, and the identification of potential hot spots that could trigger unexpected shutdowns. Where feasible, adding remote monitoring for critical automation, fermentation, and utility systems can further strengthen readiness. Real-time visibility into key process parameters enables faster response to emerging issues and supports more stable, predictable operations throughout peak season.

### **5. Utilities Management**

Utilities system reliability is foundational to brewery performance during peak production periods. Prior to the busy season, all utility systems should be thoroughly inspected to confirm they are operating efficiently and capable of sustaining peak loads. Special attention should be given to known failure points and efficiency losses, particularly for systems expected to run at or near maximum capacity. "If a utility system goes down during peak season, the brewery doesn't slow down; it stops," says Tim Wolf, Senior Advisor for First Key Consulting.

Utility readiness can be further strengthened through real-time monitoring and targeted risk reviews. Implementing continuous monitoring with alarms for critical utilities, such as water treatment, refrigeration, steam, CO<sub>2</sub>, and wastewater, enables rapid response to developing issues. Focus should also be placed on non-redundant utility equipment and capacity-constrained systems, as failures in these areas can halt production or limit output. Proactively inspecting, repairing, and validating these assets helps ensure uninterrupted utility supply to core production processes and supports consistent, high-quality brewing throughout peak season.

## **6. Packaging Equipment Readiness**

Preparing packaging lines for peak season starts with documenting detailed machine setups and maintaining reliable backup files. All conversion points should be clearly visualized and aligned with current Standard Operating Procedures to support consistent execution, particularly when onboarding new or temporary staff. Clear setup documentation reduces variability and helps teams maintain control during high-volume production periods.

Packaging performance should be closely monitored using Overall Equipment Effectiveness (OEE) metrics to identify bottlenecks and prioritize improvement efforts. In addition, a focused review of filling and seaming equipment is essential to ensure package integrity at sustained high speeds. Together, these measures help protect quality, improve line efficiency, and support reliable output when packaging demand is at its highest.

## **7. Production Planning, Conversions, and Changeovers**

Strong alignment between sales forecasting and production planning is essential to maintaining stable operations during peak season. Regular coordination between these functions helps minimize last-minute schedule changes that strain resources and disrupt output. Continuously updating forecasts, production plans, and delivery expectations allows breweries to better anticipate demand, balance capacity, and avoid both out-of-stocks and excess inventory as peak season evolves.

Beyond planning accuracy, breweries should evaluate production sequencing to reduce the total number of conversions and changeovers required. Fewer changeovers translate directly into increased available capacity and more predictable execution. Where changeovers are unavoidable, detailed T-minus checklists with defined time targets help standardize execution and minimize downtime. Applying Single-Minute Exchange of Die (SMED) principles, by shifting tasks from internal to external wherever possible, can further reduce setup time and improve overall line efficiency [1]. “SKU proliferation is now part of the new reality of the brewing industry. Successful operations are those that can execute point-to-point conversions and return to full speed with no quality compromise in the shortest possible time,” says Russell Tabata, Senior Advisor for First Key Consulting.

## **8. Visualization**

Effective visual management systems help breweries maintain control as production demands increase. Preparing for peak season starts with upgrading to digital dashboards that display real-time production metrics and key performance indicators (KPIs). Clear, easy-to-read visuals enable operators and leaders to quickly identify issues, respond decisively, and minimize downtime while sustaining high throughput during the busiest periods.

Visual systems can be further strengthened by integrating predictive maintenance alerts for critical assets. Providing early warning of developing equipment or process issues allows teams to intervene before problems escalate, supporting more stable operations and reducing unplanned interruptions during peak production windows.

## 9. Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)

Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) are essential for maintaining quality, safety, and efficiency as production volumes increase. “When volume goes up, consistency only comes from clarity,” notes Kayla Johnson, Senior Advisor for First Key Consulting. Clear, well-structured SOPs provide a common operational baseline that helps teams execute reliably, particularly during peak periods when staffing levels or experience may vary.

To strengthen SOP effectiveness, breweries should prioritize visual and digital enhancements. Incorporating high-quality photos or short videos into SOPs improves clarity and reduces execution errors, especially for complex or infrequently performed tasks. Regular auditing of SOPs, using direct input from operators, ensures procedures reflect current best practices. Digital SOP platforms further enhance accessibility, training effectiveness, and version control, allowing teams to maintain consistent execution across shifts and departments during the busiest production windows.

## 10. Capital Expenditure (CapEx) Planning

When planning major capital projects, it is important to understand how project timelines will impact the manpower typically allocated to production lines. Potential conflicts with peak production periods and key personnel availability should be identified early and adjusted where possible to avoid disrupting operations during the busiest months. Evaluating return on investment (ROI) should extend beyond initial cost and include both short- and long-term impacts on capacity, efficiency, and operational risk. Breweries should also consider sustainability-focused CapEx opportunities, such as energy, water, or efficiency upgrades, which can deliver long-term cost savings while improving environmental performance and supporting brand value.

### Summary

Preparing the brewery for the busy season is a multifaceted process that requires attention to detail across every aspect of the operation. From personnel management and preventive maintenance to packaging efficiency and utilities optimization, each element plays a critical role in ensuring the brewery can meet increased demand without sacrificing safety, quality, or efficiency. By following these ten guidelines and thoughtfully adapting them to the realities of your specific operation, breweries can reduce risk, improve reliability, and position themselves for success during peak production periods. Ultimately, the key to a successful busy season lies in thorough preparation and proactive management. With proper planning and disciplined execution, you can tap into success and keep your brewery flowing smoothly all year round.

At the same time, preparing for peak season is not just about knowing what to do; it's about executing with the right expertise, tools, and structure in place. First Key Consulting partners with breweries to translate operational best practices into practical, site-specific improvements that drive reliability, efficiency, and quality. Whether preparing for seasonal demand, addressing recurring downtime, or planning for future growth, having the right support can make the difference between reacting to challenges and staying ahead of them.

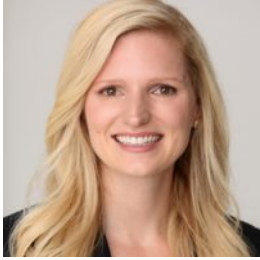
To learn more about preparing your brewery for peak season please contact us

**References:**

<https://www.leanproduction.com/smed/>

---

AUTHORS



**Kayla Johnson**  
Senior Advisor,  
Engineering Services



**Russell Tabata**  
Senior Advisor,  
Technical Services

---

RELATED CONSULTING SERVICES

**Operations** >

**Engineering** >

**Related Insights**



## Autonomous Maintenance: The Power of Autonomy in Keeping Things Running Smoothly

To reduce downtime and extend the life of the equipment, breweries need to make their maintenance function proactive instead of reactive. This, in turn, will reduce their annual expenses and parts inventories without compromising safety or quality.

[Read More](#)

TOPIC:  
ENGINEERING,  
OPERATIONS

## Do Your Brewery Operations Reflect Your Brand?

A brewery's brand goes well beyond a sharp logo or catchy tagline. It's the story of why a brewery is in business. Everything should reflect that story. That starts with the beer. Sustainable success will only come by consistently producing a high-quality product.

[Read More](#)

TOPIC:  
OPERATIONS,  
TAPROOMS /  
BREW PUBS,  
MARKETING &  
SALES

## Focus on Brewery Wastewater Can Save Time, Money and Disruption

Water is a significant component of the brewing process. It makes up more than 90 percent of most beers and is used extensively in brewery cleaning and maintenance processes.

[Read More](#)

TOPIC:  
ENGINEERING,  
OPERATIONS,  
ENVIRONMENT,  
NEW BREWERY &  
EXPANSIONS

