



ASSEMBLING YOUR CRAFT BREWERY BUILD TEAM

Many homebrewers, beer lovers and entrepreneurs have envisioned opening a craft brewery or brewpub. The thought of crowds of people sipping on your beers in a unique space can be a great way to make a living.

Without question, building a brewery can be exciting and rewarding. It can also be very challenging. After completing a brewery business plan, selecting the right location, establishing a workable budget, meeting deadlines and dealing with unforeseen risks often complicate the process.

Though it's unlikely that start-up breweries can avoid all of these challenges, they can put themselves in a much better position for success by creating a trusted build team. The build team's purpose is to manage and provide oversight on the many steps it takes to bring a craft brewery or brew pub from initial concept to brewing its first batch.

Generally, the build team can consist of a blend of:

- Owner
- Brewery personnel (brewmaster, general manager, etc.)
- Local engineer(s)/architect(s)
- Brewery consultants
- Equipment suppliers
- Contractors (this could be combined with the local engineers as part of a design-build company)
- Support from other local breweries

Each of the above can be tasked to cover more or less of the scope, depending on their core strengths, the size of the brewery, complex operation and geographical location. It is important that engineers/architects are familiar with local code requirements.

Ultimately the Owner has to make a decision on how to run the project. This decision is normally based on:

- Budget
- Owner's knowledge of brewery operation and construction
- Owner's availability
- Owner's vision of fit and finish of the brewery (bootstrap or top of line)
- Brewery personnel hired (or to be hired)
- Affiliation (if any) with local engineers or contractors

Clearly, there are many start-ups built under the direction of a passionate brewer with a limited budget, who has the patience and knowledge to start up a brewery. On the flip side, many others do not have the time, risk tolerance and/or knowledge. The important thing is to set the project up for success by best using the resources available.

To illustrate the above comments, let's look at a few build team examples:

Team #1

- Owner
- Single source equipment supplier
- Local engineer/architect
- Contractor(s)

In Team #1, the Owner should have an excellent understanding of brewery equipment (including utilities) and be available to work closely with the local engineers and contractors to ensure all details are captured properly.

Team #2

- Owner
- Brewery consultants
- Various equipment suppliers
- Design-build contractor (engineering/architectural + construction), or independent engineers/architects and contractors.

In Team #2, the Owner does not necessarily need to have brewing or construction experience. The brewery consultants would act as the Owner's representative in dealing with equipment suppliers and contractors. Integration drawings, construction supervision and start-up support would also be an important part of the brewery consultant's scope.

Team #3

- Owner
- Brewery hired staff
- Brewery consultants
- Single source equipment supplier
- Design-build contractor (engineering/architectural + construction), or independent engineers/architects and contractors.

On paper, the example shown in Team #3 may appear a little heavy on the overheads. However, for many projects, depending on size and complexity, it is critical to spend the necessary time up front during the selection of the single-source equipment supplier. The procurement process can be troubling for some. Preparation of the specifications, reviewing the technical aspects of the proposals (e.g. all requirements are met and no unnecessary components are included), making sure the competitive bids can be compared apples-to-apples, and ensuring the prices make sense, are all important tasks where a brewery consultant can be helpful. Also, throughout a project it is a good idea to ensure engineers and contractors are aligned with the requirements of the equipment suppliers (and vice versa). The brewery consultants can use their experience to ensure the right details are communicated and fill in the gaps, where necessary.

In the end, "where there is a will and a way" and assuming the budget is sufficient, the brewery will be built. To make it happen, the Owner needs to evaluate the available options and decide on what the build team looks like in order to maintain a comfort level throughout the project.

Rod Waite has over 17 years of experience as an engineering project manager and process design engineer. As Director of Engineering Services at First Key Consulting he has led multi-million dollar capital projects for breweries across North America and has worked with both small- and large-scale breweries and distilleries.
