



TOPIC: MARKETING & SALES, PEOPLE & ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE

# IMPACTFUL WAYS TO REINVENT YOUR BREWPUB OR TAPROOM

🕒 6 min read

A feeling of excitement often accompanies the act of experiencing something new.

Reinvention is defined as “the act of producing something new based on something that already exists.”<sup>1</sup> At the Craft Brewers Conference last year, Brewers Association Chief Economist Bart Watson shared an interesting statistic on the newer brewpubs and taprooms that opened: Brewpubs and taprooms founded before 2018 combined grew only 2% in 2022, while those founded in 2018 or later grew a collective 20%. Watson added that “hospitality business concepts, which most of these businesses are, typically have a shelf life. Breweries are going to have to work to reinvent, to stay competitive.”<sup>2</sup>

What can your brewpub or taproom operation do to reinvent and stay competitive in today's craft beer landscape? Here are a few impactful ideas to help.

**Reassess Your Taproom Experience Through the Eyes of a New Guest.** What will excite a new guest who visits your taproom or brewpub for the first time? With more than 9,500 operating craft breweries in the United States alone<sup>3</sup>, it's now easier than ever to find a brewery to visit. How does the experience at your establishment stand out?

First Key has worked directly with brewpubs and taprooms to assess these elements and other operational procedures – day-to-day administrative procedures, financial/accounting, and people/HR practices – to help improve their overall experience. One of our approaches is to take a look at all the details, and no detail is too small. When entering a taproom, what stands out? Does the taproom appearance reflect your brand? What's on the walls and tables, and does that interior design and all of the other elements align with your brand image? What's the ordering process? Is it easy to order food or drinks, and is there clear signage in place? Is a staff member there to thank a guest for deciding to visit? How do you determine the day-to-day staffing model?

**Re-examine Your Drinks Menu.** While beer remains the focus at most brewpubs and taprooms, today's evolving world of drinks and drink preferences among younger generations requires brewpubs and taprooms to get more creative with their beverage offerings. Continually evaluate your guests' preferences and get an understanding of their needs. Does your taproom regularly host parent meet-ups? Is your taproom open early in the day? Do bicyclists treat your taproom as a post-ride stop? When you're drawing a broad range of patrons, not everyone wants a beer. There's a whole array of other non-beer options to consider, ranging from hard seltzers to ciders and nonalcoholic drinks such as hop water. A recent First Key Insights article<sup>4</sup> explains how nonalcoholic drinks are becoming the next frontier at brewery taprooms. Our rule of thumb: If you can produce a high-quality beyond-beer or nonalcoholic beer option that is exceptional, go for it. If not, we recommend curating a compelling, tightly edited list of options.

**Re-think Your Food Approach.** Offering food at your brewery can lead to longer stays, according to a recent trend report from POS company Arryved<sup>5</sup>. If building or adding a kitchen to your operation and hiring additional staff isn't feasible, then consider other alternatives, such as partnering with a local restaurant to deliver food to your establishment. Teaming up with a complementary local business encourages community and collaboration. Alternatively, bringing in a steady rotation of food trucks can keep customers fed. Many of these trucks have built-in customer bases and can bring new customers to your taproom. Having food increases the chance that your guests will stay longer, order that extra beer, and add to your revenue stream.

**Reshape Your Hiring and Training Program.** In *Setting the Table*, a renowned book that focuses on the transforming power of hospitality in business, author and restaurateur Danny Meyer describes one of the best compliments that makes him proud. It's when a customer says "I love your restaurants and the food is fantastic. But what I really love is how great your people are." He goes on to say that "the only way a company can grow, stay true to its soul, and remain consistently successful is to attract, hire, and keep great people."

Does your brewpub or taproom have a formal hiring and training plan in place? If not, invest the time in setting one up. It's essential to consistently and continually educate new team members about your brewery's ethos, as well as your latest beers. Also, it's important to provide pathways to advancement, either within your taproom or a satellite location. By cultivating a welcoming and engaged workplace culture, you'll attract talented candidates to your brewpub or taproom and retain employees too.

**Review Your Strategy for Event Programming.** While activities like trivia nights are now a common activity at brewery taprooms, they still attract groups who will stay, buy beers, and mark their calendars to visit your brewery on those trivia nights.

Get together with your team and draft some creative event options that align with your brand, and then figure out how to advertise those events to attract new guests. Hosting game and puzzle nights, building up a group run club with a route that begins and ends at your brewery, bringing in yoga classes, or partnering with a local charity to host a fundraiser at your brewpub or taproom are all options for increasing foot traffic while building a new and repeat guest following. Also consider your favorite hobbies. Do you garden or have houseplants? Knit? Collect records? Karaoke? Aligning your interests with events will help you get more excited about them too.

**Recreate Your Experience By Incorporating Some or All of the Above.** Once upon a time, fresh beer was enough to attract people to taprooms. Now that better beer is everywhere, breweries are finding that offering experiences can be as impactful as the beer. Some breweries have recreated their experience in brand-new ways in recent months.

In Massachusetts, Tree House Brewing purchased a golf course and added a taproom<sup>6</sup>. In Wisconsin, Broken Bat Brewery turned an unused space in a former industrial building into an indoor wiffle ball field.<sup>7</sup> In Texas, Frontyard Brewing has a pickleball court.<sup>8</sup> In North Carolina, Highland Brewing has volleyball courts and a disc golf course.<sup>9</sup> Breweries like Dogfish Head and BrewDog have added hotels.<sup>10</sup>

Your reinvention doesn't need to include adding a hotel. Changes can be simple as making some low-cost tweaks, such as sprucing up your interior to align with your brand or investing time into hiring, training, and retaining talented team members.

Warren Buffet said that "it takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it. If you think about that, you'll do things differently." There are no limitations on your ability to recreate the experience. By not investing time in any of these efforts, you're choosing to stay the same and placing limitations on your operation.

Keep reinvention at top of mind and get people excited by creating a memorable new taproom experience.

## **References**

<sup>1</sup>Cambridge Dictionary reference: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/reinvention>

<sup>2</sup>All quotes and statistics from this section are drawn from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sGvYotW7s3E>

<sup>3</sup>Brewers Association: <https://www.brewersassociation.org/press-releases/brewers-association-releases-annual-craft-brewing-industry-production-report-and-top-50-producing-craft-brewing-companies-for-2022/>

<sup>4</sup>First Key Insights Article: <https://firstkey.com/nonalcoholic-drinks-are-the-next-frontier-at-brewery-taprooms/>

<sup>5</sup>Arryved 2023 Trends Report: <https://www.arryved.com/blog/trending-craft-beverage-experiments-to-increase-profits-in-2023/>

<sup>6</sup>Treehouse Golf course info: <https://treehousebrew.com/visiting-tewksbury>

<sup>7</sup>Broken Bat Brewery: <https://brokenbatbrewery.com/wiffleball-league/>

<sup>8</sup>Frontyard Brewing: <https://frontyardbrewing.com/>

<sup>9</sup>Highland Brewing: <https://highlandbrewing.com/>

<sup>10</sup>Dogfish Inn: <https://www.dogfish.com/inn>

<sup>10</sup>BrewDog Hotel: <https://www.brewdog.com/usa/doghouse-columbus-hotel>