



BEST PRACTICES FOR CRAFT BEER LABELING





ARTISANAL VS. AMATEUR: HOW TO LOOK AS GOOD AS YOU TASTE.

Three Key Takeaways:

- Your label is your most important marketing piece.
- Partnership with packaging equipment and labeling specialists pays off!
- Thinking about cans? Labels CAN do!

INFLUENCE QUALITY PERCEPTIONS WITH THE RIGHT BLEND OF HANDMADE AND PROFESSIONAL-GRADE.

You've spent years working on your brews, plus countless hours of thought – maybe you've stopped counting the dollars, too. Now it's time to take your dream to market, and you're thinking about packaging. You may even have a label design in mind, or in hand.

But don't pull that tab just yet. Have you spent enough time learning about the actual labeling process?

THE PROOF IS IN THE PACKAGING

Nothing beats the allure of handcrafted beers and other beverages. But as anyone who's been producing craft brews for sale for any length of time discovers, there's a difference between what customers see as "artisanal" and what they view as "amateur."

Consumers want the handmade "real deal" authenticity of craft brews, but they also want a promise of quality. A well-designed, well-produced label is where a healthy measure of both promises can be conveyed.

Thanks to digital printing, professional-quality labels that don't run, smear, fall off the bottles in the cooler, or otherwise imply poor quality are now available in short-run, "small batch" quantities. Better yet, they're surprisingly affordable.

As a leader in labels for the beverage industry, Discount Labels has partnered with beverage packaging and marketing experts to share some ideas, options, and best practices for making your small-batch brew look just the right level of "big-time."

LABELS ARE YOUR FIRST-LINE MARKETING TOOL

John Bolton of Unfiltered Media, who's also a brewer himself, has seen a lot of labels. A whole lot of labels. So he has more than a few insights about the value of hitting the right note.

Bolton says, "The label is a marketing piece for both brewery and beer. It helps define the image they are trying to portray. A good label is an opportunity to position your brewery with new and existing customers in a way that differentiates your beer and brand in a



way no other marketing can accomplish The shelves are very crowded, so it is essential to both stand out and be recognizable.

“Craft beer drinkers want to be associated with breweries that reflect their taste and beliefs. A label helps the consumer align philosophically with the brand of the brewery similar to why certain consumers prefer certain types of taprooms. A label plays an important role for the initial purchase and potentially future purchases.”

THINK BEFORE YOU INK

In our talks with industry experts, the tip we heard the most was to include your packaging vendor in your planning mix. Over and over again, brewers design labels and purchase labeling equipment that deliver less-than-ideal results – with often expensive, and time-consuming, reworking required.

Brooks Miller of Miller BevCo has spent decades in the food and beverage packaging-equipment industry. He’s seen some incredible successes, and helped straighten out more than a few failures. Miller says, “Labels

aren’t an afterthought! Designing labels that work is a big undertaking, and people don’t see the challenges until they’re in the middle of things and trying to deal with a mess. Know your label supplier. Verify their capabilities in this industry, and get both your label and labeling equipment suppliers involved with your effort up front. You need expertise in this area, and making your supplier part of this process can make your life so much easier.”

Miller also says that brewers should “test, test, and retest. If you don’t go through the testing process, you’re going to get a surprise. You’ll get into the cooler, and labels will start popping off ... or you’ll get a shipment of labels, go to apply them, and find out they’re a few millimeters off and nothing fits as you envisioned.”

STOCK TO FINISH: WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A LABEL

Again, it pays to know a label supplier who knows what works. Many considerations come into play including size, stock, placement on the can or bottle, and state requirements for label information. A label-equipment



and label supplier with experience in the beverage industry, especially in the carbonated and chilled-beverage industry, can make all the difference.

EVEN THE BEST-LOOKING DESIGN IS WASTED ON A LABEL THAT FALLS OFF.

All of our experts agreed that the most common problem brewers face is labels curling up, crinkling, and coming off bottles and cans in the labeling machine, the store cooler, or on ice in the customer's cooler. That's why Durable and Weatherproof Label Stock makes all the difference in labeling success. Combine such label stock with the right adhesive and UV weatherproof ink that doesn't smear or run, and the problem is solved before it starts.

Discount Labels Regional Sales Manager Wayne Metcalfe is always working with labeling equipment suppliers and label printers to come up with new and better ways to label drinks.

"The traditional materials for labels are foil or paper. A more durable option is 'BOPP,' which stands for 'Biaxially-Oriented Polypropylene.' BOPP film is a cousin of polypropylene and combines quality with water-resistance and durability. It comes in white, metal-colored, or clear, but you can print any colors you like on it. You can also add a variety of finishes to BOPP, so it gives you lots of options. Beverage manufacturers are exploring using BOPP on their cans instead of traditional silk-screening. It looks just as good, and allows you to buy blank cans and change the labeling as you go. That's a huge savings, since you don't have to waste half a truckload of unused printed cans if you're just running a seasonal brew."

Also consider the label finish. Add texture, such as tactile, soft touch, gloss, matte, or even kraft finish to really stand out on the shelf! Label Shape is a factor, too. Metcalfe says that while round-corner labels are the most cost-efficient, new techniques like Discount Labels' AnyShape® labels give designers total freedom. Say you've got a Pumpkin Ale for the fall season. Want a pumpkin-shaped label? Easy as – well, pumpkin pie. AnyShape® labels are laser-cut, and quantities of less than 10,000 don't require a die, which saves significant time and cost. Better still, AnyShape® labels available in rolls that work with most application equipment – again, check with your equipment manufacturer first – but are also available in singles for other uses like handouts or magnets.

As for ink, Metcalfe recommends UV Ink as the optimal choice for preventing bleeding, smearing, or fading. It can even be applied in a “raised” style that feels like letterpress. Combine a BOPP stock with raised UV ink and a kraft-paper look and textured finish, and you’ve got a label that almost feels handmade – but is truly industrial-strength.

And then there are adhesives. Metcalfe is fond of Repositionable Labels for promotional materials. These adhere to cold, damp, and frosty surfaces without losing their “stick.” They also don’t smear or smudge in wet conditions. But at the same time, they can be removed without leaving trace adhesive, and reused in another place. They’re perfect for tap labels, seasonal kegs, on-can or -bottle coupons and promotions – pretty much anywhere a label can go, repositionable labels can go, and then be placed somewhere else. Metcalfe envisions repositionable labels as perfect for in-pub promotions or bar menus: “You could literally print up these labels for a special brew or brew menu, and stick them right on the bar in front of customers.”

BRANDING, PROMOTION, AND “SPIFFS”

We already know the label is your primary marketing and branding asset. But can it work harder? Yes, indeed. Depending on their composition and adhesive,

labels can function as everything from “bounceback” coupons or promotions to peel-off game pieces to reusable stickers.

OR HOW ABOUT AUGMENTED REALITY?

Metcalfe says yes, this is a thing, and currently being exploited with great success by many winemakers.

AND WHAT ABOUT “SCRATCH AND SNIFF?”

Yes, scent can be incorporated into labels, too! Scent is a powerful motivator!

Knowing your label supplier and involving them in your planning can really pay off here, too. “Pretty much the only limit these days is the imagination,” says Metcalfe, “and I’m in the business of providing solutions that make even the wildest ideas work in reality.”

CAN? DO!

As mentioned above, if you’re considering canning, consider labels. If you’ve ever seen a can with a film “sleeve,” you’ve probably seen a BOPP label, or something close to it. The economic advantages of labeling cans over printing directly on them can’t be underestimated.



Miller BevCo's Brooks Miller says, "Cans are far less expensive than glass. But for a craft brewer to get a printed can ... that requires them to buy a truckload, which has thousands of cans of a particular graphic design. So if you're a small craft brewer and you have four beers, you have to buy four truckloads of empty cans. Where are you going to put all these cans to store them? And if you only run a couple thousand of these particular beers in the season ... then you have to store the cans until next year." Miller BevCo has recently developed a labeling machine that will take a can and apply a label to it, "... a machine that handles it very gently because aluminum cans are really, really thin. Now that we can wrap the label, we make it look just like a silk-screened can." Note: Miller BevCo also offers a complete microbrewery line of canning equipment that rinses cans, injects CO2, and tops the cans.

THE BOTTOM LINE

If we leave you with one thought: it's to never underestimate the importance of the right label, especially if you're labeling product yourself and want to minimize headaches. If we can leave you with two thoughts: it's to start early, do your homework, and open your mind to the possibilities. Don't hesitate to quiz your label-equipment and label suppliers closely about their experience and capabilities, and perhaps even get a second opinion. And by all means, take advantage of these resources. Include your suppliers in your early planning process. They're invaluable sources of ideas to help you save time, money, and make your project go more smoothly.

We hope you've found this brief introduction to labeling useful. Every day, Discount Labels works with trade partners across the country on time- and cost-efficient solutions for every labeling situation. We are always happy to connect you with a partner near you; simply call or write to us any time, and cheers to years of happy and successful brewing!



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Located in New Albany, IN, Discount Labels has been in business 1965. With more than 70 presses, 500 employees, and continuous investment in technology, sales, and support for its trade-only partners, Discount Labels has the capacity to meet any label demand and leads the label industry, producing 2.3 billion labels annually. For more information, contact Marketing Director Debbi Ulmer at (812) 981-4823 or debbi.ulmer@discountlabels.com.