

www.baltimoresun.com/business/technology/bs-bz-beer-tap-entrepreneuers-20100907,0,7121657.story

baltimoresun.com

Tale of the tap: Pour your own adventure

Baltimore area is nexus for Irish company selling tables with built-in beer taps in the U.S.

By Gus G. Sentementes, The Baltimore Sun

September 7, 2010

A Parkton man had an idea that even the casual beer drinker would appreciate: What if you could draw your own frothy pint at the local pub?

Turns out, perhaps not surprisingly, that someone across the Atlantic already had the same idea.


So when Josh Goodman discovered he had a kindred entrepreneurial spirit in Ireland, he teamed with the small company there to introduce Americans to the Draft Master this year. The mobile table fitted with beer taps is designed to let bar patrons draw their own brews and can be found in establishments in Maryland, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Massachusetts and Las Vegas. Tir Na Nog, an Irish pub at the Inner Harbor, has one.

"It's a great idea," said Peters Kokalari, Tir Na Nog's manager and co-owner. "It's something people have never seen before. It's quite a success."

How the Draft Master tables came to market in the United States and Europe is a tale of local enterprise, international trade and the transformation of an Irish company's business model during a deep recession – a makeover that could mean jobs in the United States.

The Draft Master could become a regular fixture in bars, especially as global conglomerate Diageo, the world's largest beer, wine and spirits company, has put its marketing muscle behind it. Diageo, based in London, has bought 900 of the tables, which typically feature Diageo's Guinness beer, for use in more than 250 pubs across Ireland.

advertisement



*Any one of them
could change
everything.*

Ellickson International, the Waterford, Ireland-based company that makes the Draft Master, is advertising the table as an efficient dispenser of beer that encourages camaraderie in pub and restaurant settings. It's starting to sell them in markets across Europe and is preparing to enter Asia. Its U.S. office is in Annapolis.

"It's a unique hook," said Charlie Kleinrichert, president of A.C. Beverage, an Annapolis-based beer-equipment distributor that partnered with Ellickson to sell the Draft Master in the U.S. "It's an opportunity for bars to set themselves apart. Everybody is looking for tools to improve the marketability of their establishment."

With the recession, bars and restaurants might be looking for novelties and new ways to attract consumers. Projected food and drink sales in bars and taverns is expected to climb a slim 2 percent this year to \$18.8 billion, from \$18.5 billion last year, according to a National Restaurant Association forecast.

Annual per-capita consumption of beer dropped 1 gallon last year, to 29.5 gallons, from 30.5 gallons or more in previous years, according to the Beer Institute, an industry lobbying group.

The Draft Master makes it easy for a consumer to buy beer on demand. The table features two taps that swivel 360 degrees. A digital meter on the taps keeps track of the amount that's drawn. Up to two different kinds of beers can be poured.

Underneath the table, which is wide enough for at least eight people to stand around, is a complex cooling system that can keep each beer keg (two per table) chilled at precise temperatures. The table, taps and cooling system costs \$7,850, and the separate wireless computer that controls it goes for nearly \$2,000.

"That's the beautiful thing: There's no waste on this thing," said Stuart Delves, general manager of The Gas Station, a restaurant outside Harrisburg, Pa., that has two tables. "Every ounce of alcohol that comes out of it is accounted for."

The tables are getting good use at Tir Na Nog and The Gas Station, especially during special events and ball games, where patrons can reserve the tables to drink for hours. It can be better than standing at a packed bar trying to get a bartender's or a server's attention, the company contends.

Local beer laws in most places, including in Baltimore, don't allow for people to pay for beer out of a vending machine, and the Draft Master can't be considered one because it doesn't accept payments, company officials say.

Instead, users of the Draft Master have to pay separately for the beer; each drinker is allowed to pour only up to two beers at a time, with a server having to authorize the next round.

The Draft Master was invented by Philip Brady, an Irishman and former pub owner who licensed his idea to Ellickson, which specializes in construction and engineering work. When Ellickson started selling the tables with Brady in 2007, its original business had nearly ground to a halt during the recession in Ireland, Brady said.

"We're a company that has been entrenched in engineering, and everything that we did was with the construction industry," said Brady, Ellickson's technical director. "Now, our electronics are aimed at the hospitality industry."

Brady said the biggest selling point of the Draft Master is that "every drop that comes out of the tap gets paid for." There's no spillage waste, and no bartender to hand out free beers to friends, he said.

Ellickson was looking for ways to enter the United States and had sold a couple of tables on the East Coast when its officials were introduced to Goodman, a 31-year-old Parkton man, by Kleinrichert.

For years, Goodman had been working on fine-tuning and selling his own beer-tap table systems in the Baltimore area, and had familiarized himself with liquor laws in several states.

Goodman liked Ellickson's Draft Master and its refined technology and jumped aboard the company earlier this year.

Over a four-day period, executives from Ellickson came to Baltimore and incorporated a U.S. division. Ellickson's U.S. office is now in a part of a warehouse owned by A.C. Beverage.

As Draft Master sales in the U.S. ramp up, Goodman said, Ellickson could create seven to 10 new jobs in the United States to support the sales and distribution of the tables.

"Maybe in 20 years, it will be the norm where you go into a bar and have the ability to pour your own beer," Brady said.

gus.sentementes@baltsun.com

<http://twitter.com/gussent>



[Text BUSINESS to 70701 to get Baltimore Sun Business text alerts](#)

Copyright © 2010, [The Baltimore Sun](#)