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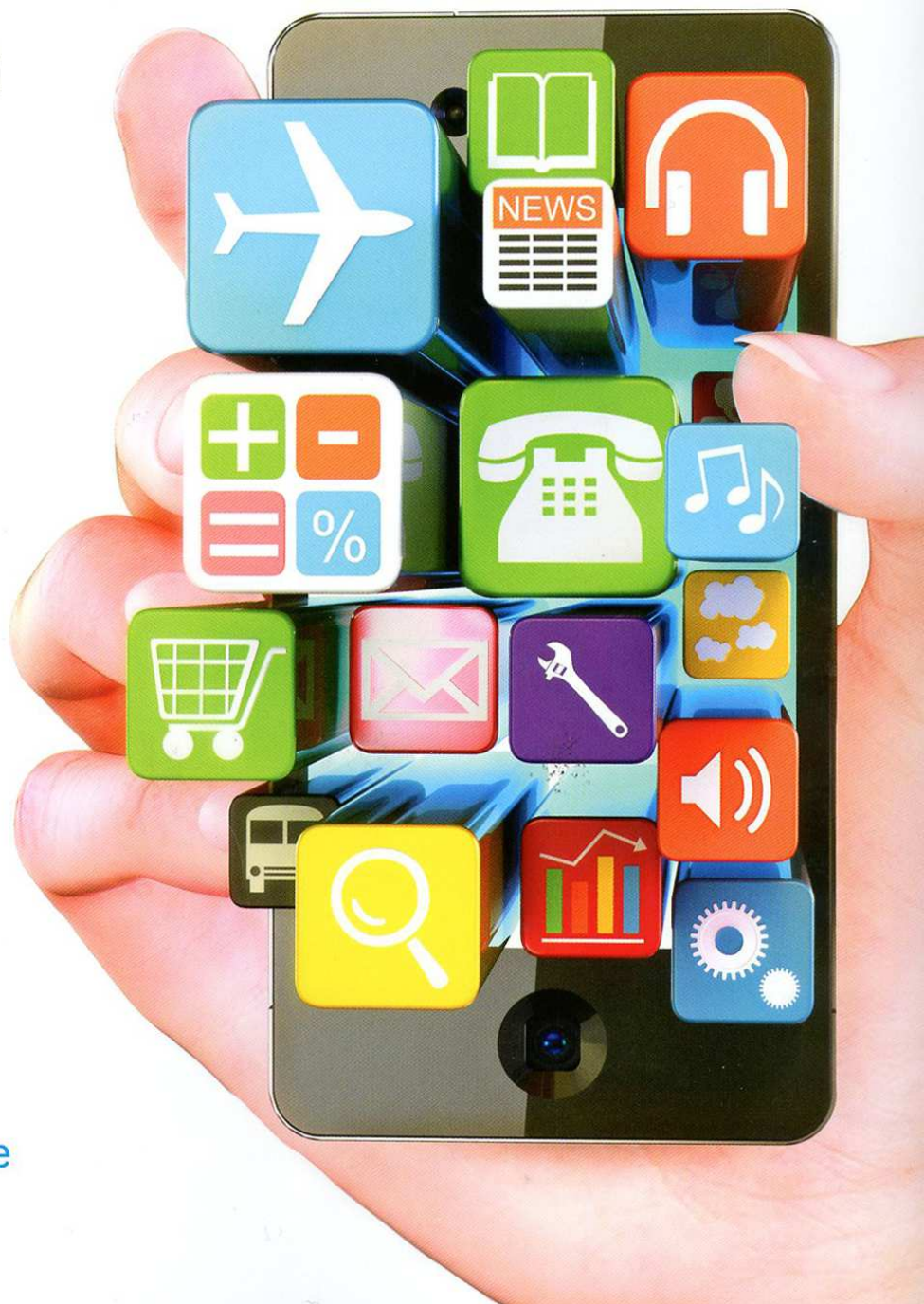
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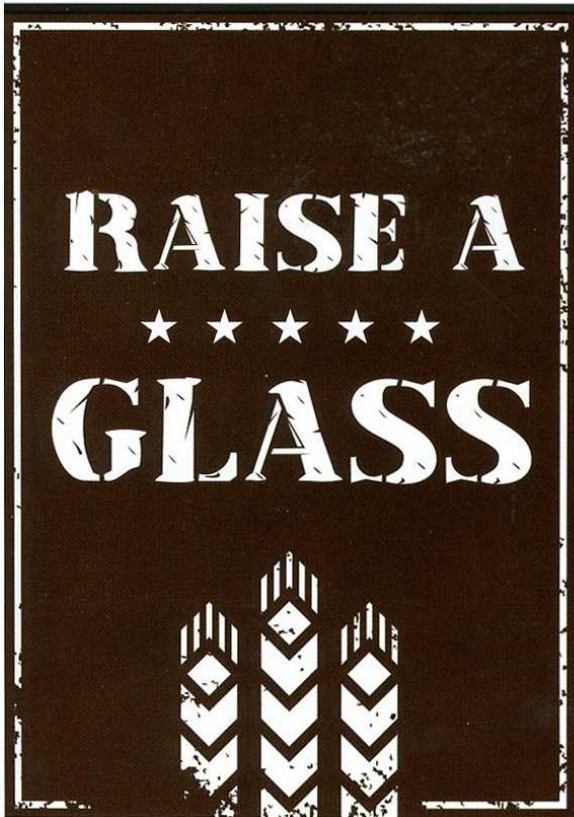
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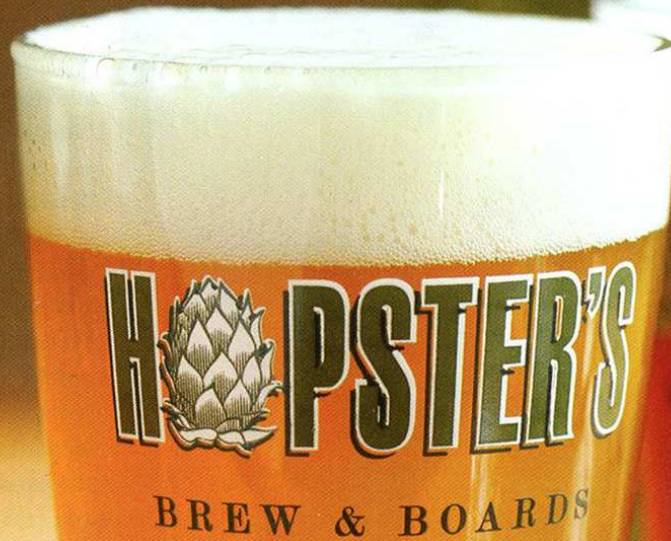
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By Alex Palmer



Hopsters offers meeting spaces and group tours, and lets groups create their own custom brews

PLANNERS ARE TURNING TO MICROBREWERIES AND DISTILLERIES TO CREATE ENGAGING EVENTS

The members of the Downtown Dayton Partnership wanted a venue for its board meeting that struck just the right note. The nonprofit, which supports efforts to strengthen the economy and cultural vibrancy of Dayton, OH, typically uses its July meeting as a chance to combine business and pleasure.

"It serves as the annual social," says Val Hunt Beerbower, the organization's communication manager. "The agenda is short and the group can relax while they network."

That made the local Warped Wing

Brewing Company an ideal venue choice. The roughly 40 attendees could enjoy a pint of the brewery's signature Flyin' Rye IPA or 10 Ton Oatmeal Stout while discussing upcoming projects and sit down at the venue's wooden tables when more complicated business needed to be discussed. "It gave attendees the ability to unwind a bit," says Beerbower.

That goal — to create a meeting that balances business with a casual, out-of-the-boardroom feel — has led a growing number of meeting planners to look at microbreweries like Warped Wing, as well as small distilleries, as great

spaces for meetings. And as microbrews and small-batch spirits have grown in popularity, the beverage makers are quickly adding new spaces and group activities that encourage attendees to tingle while they work.

Unconventional Meeting Spaces

"I think more companies are looking for a non-traditional atmosphere in which to engage their employees and/or customers, where they can have a private space and then socialize afterwards, all in an environment that fosters cre-

READER ROI

- New venues and business-friendly offerings are making microbreweries and distilleries popular meeting destinations
- Planning an event at these places creates a casual, memorable atmosphere

RAISE A GLASS



Hardywood Park Craft Brewery has hosted charity events as well as corporate gatherings for Altria and Capital One

activity,” says Patrick Murtaugh, co-founder of Hardywood Park Craft Brewery, based in Richmond, VA.

He adds that the growing popularity of craft beer and breweries means “there is likely one within a few miles of most offices” that can host gatherings for small or large groups. Hardywood itself offers rentable private event space in its 12,000-square-foot building. The Alumni Charity Challenge, which raises money for the Central Virginia Food Bank, used the space recently.

“Altria and Capital One both hold meetings here quite frequently,” says Murtaugh. “As we speak, Lifesize, a video conferencing company, is hosting a meeting.”

As breweries become more popular as destinations for groups, they are bolstering their spaces to better accommodate the needs of organizations. Hardywood recently expanded, adding a room with A/V capabilities including projector, screen, and sound system. A glass garage door on one side of the room allows guests to see beer aging in whisky barrels, and a bar with a half-dozen beers on tap.

The same unconventional feel can be created at local distilleries. The Las Vegas Distillery offers a 1,000-square-foot Spirits Room

and 4,000-square-foot Distillery. Visitors can join in tours to see how the distillery makes its vodka, rum, and whisky — including its Nevada 150 Bourbon, the state’s first official straight bourbon, released on Nevada’s 150th birthday. In addition to tasting the products, visitors can create custom labels and fill their own bottles

from the barrel.

“The copper pot stills, the whiskey barrels, and the scent of the fresh-distilled mash creates an unforgettable experience for an event,” says George Racz, the distillery’s owner.

This month, on the same premises, the distillery opens the Booze District event space along with the Chocolate Makery (creating handcrafted chocolates such as Booze Bumps, Grandma’s Apple Pie Moonshine Balls, and customizable Story Chocolate Bars).

A Sense of Community

The Las Vegas Distillery is a rare space for the country’s gaming capital — a venue that offers what Racz calls “local community.” A refreshing change from the high-end restaurants, eye-popping shows, and dazzling casino floors, the distillery is a casual venue with an old-fashioned feel.

This points to another advantage meeting planners are finding with breweries and distilleries: There are few better ways to get a feel

for a city or region than to try what the locals drink and see how it is made.

Similar to Las Vegas Distillery, Kings County Distillery, based in Brooklyn, NY, offers a down-to-earth meeting venue in a larger-than-life destination. Located in the two-story Paymaster Building (originally built in 1899) in the Brooklyn Navy Yard, it is a short ride or drive from more traditional Manhattan hot spots.

“Because we’re in Brooklyn, a lot of companies can see the distillery as a ‘corporate retreat,’” explains Colin Spoelman, co-owner of Kings County Distillery. “Even though we’re just over the bridge from most companies, we’re in a quiet part of Brooklyn, so it feels very removed from Manhattan.”

AOL, the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce, a footwear brand, and a film distributor have all held recent events in the historic space.

“Breweries and brewpubs are traditionally where one goes to meet with folks in the neighborhood, discuss plans to overthrow the monarchy — they were the hub of the neighborhood,” says Joel Halbleib, brewmaster for BBC Production Facility and Taproom in Louisville, KY. “You do not get the same comfort level sitting in a chain restaurant as you do in a brewpub down the street from your house, where folks there know you and your family and have for years.”



Brooklyn, NY’s Kings County Distillery provides a venue that’s both historic and off the beaten path from typical New York City gatherings

BBC has hosted groups from Jim Beam as well as other national companies on brewery tours.

“Breweries reflect the essence of the community,” adds Nico Freccia, co-owner of 21st Amendment Brewery, based in San Francisco.



The new 21st Amendment Brewery space in San Leandro, CA will include a restaurant and event space

“Historically they are the neighborhood gathering places where people can enjoy a handcrafted, unique, and local beverage along with good food and good conversation.”

21st Amendment offers “Beer School” tasting events for groups and operates a full-service restaurant and pub in the city’s SOMA district (a couple blocks from the Giants’ stadium). An upstairs mezzanine loft is available for private functions of up to 50 people, and the entire restaurant and outdoor patio can be booked for as many as 200 people.

But the real excitement for 21st Amendment comes next year. The brewery will be opening a new brewery, restaurant, and event space in nearby San Leandro, CA. It will include tasting rooms, meeting spaces, and large event spaces for groups — all easily accessible from San Francisco.

“The customer experience with the brewing and production process will be highly interactive,” says Freccia. “The dining and bar spaces will flow into the outdoor space and the outdoor space will flow into the interior. The event areas will provide dining, meeting, and casual gathering options for groups of all sizes and types in a spacious, lively, and unique setting.”

The community focus of microbreweries often means that they can offer spaces at lower costs

than a meeting venue that is looking mainly to maximize its revenue.

“We support our local businesses and associations as much as possible,” says Julia Rosenthal, co-founder of Pair O’ Dice Brewing Co. in Clearwater, FL. “This is why we open our doors up to groups that are looking for meeting space at no or minimal cost.”

The brewery offers about 3,000 square feet for events, including a 750-square-foot tap room and 2,250-square-foot open warehouse area for larger events, such as a recent “Cornhole for a Cure” tournament the brewery hosted for the Bay Area Apartment Association.

Telling a Story

In addition to giving a sense of a destination’s local culture, breweries and distilleries can also provide a sense of history. The Downtown Dayton Partnership selected the Warped Wing Brewery not just because of its drinks, but also because of the building itself. Constructed in a rehabilitated warehouse, the brewery is an active example of what local businesses can do to revitalize and energize the Dayton economy — a chief goal for the Partnership. “It showcases incentives and programs available for the small business owners who launched their brewery and distribution system,” says Beerbower.

Rhinegeist Brewery, located in Cincinnati, OH, also tells a great story of local rehabilitation. Built within the skeleton of a 19th-century bottling plant set on the historic Over-the-Rhine historic district (*Rhinegeist* means “ghost of the Rhine”), it offers 15,000 square feet of public meeting space that can accommodate more than 250 guests. Groups can hold events in the expansive main area or more intimate tap room to the side of the brewery area.

“It has a positive and creative energy to it,” says Bryant Goulding, the brewery’s co-founder, about the benefits of such a historic space. But he adds that breweries in general provide something special for groups who can get an inventive spark from a place “where production of an artisanal good is produced. I think that

Craft Brew Considerations

Val Hunt Beerbower, communications manager for the Downtown Dayton Partnership, has helped to create several brewery outings for her organization. She recommends considering a few points when deciding which venue would be the best fit.

❶ **Facility settings.** These are probably the first questions any planner will want to address in selecting a venue: what is the seating capacity, can private space be booked, and is there a tasting room separate from the brewing area? “Many tasting rooms have a combination of seated options and standing tables,” says Beerbower.

❷ **Technical questions.** Hosting meetings is not the main business purpose of distilleries and breweries, so planners will want to double check the available screens, projectors, and other technical capabilities (is high-speed Wi-Fi an option, for example), and adjust accordingly. Warped Wing had very little A/V equipment, so the Partnership created “an open-house style format,” according to Beerbower, with different stations showcasing important charts and graphs.

❸ **Product.** With the proliferation of breweries, many are specializing in certain kinds of beer or a particular drink that can fit an event’s theme. Beerbower gives the example of another Dayton brewery: Toxic Brew Company, which specializes in using Belgian yeasts, giving the beers a slightly sweeter flavor. “If that’s not appealing to your group, better select a site with a wider variety of beers,” she says.

❹ **Production schedule.** Planners may actually want to avoid holding their event when the brewing session is taking place. Beerbower points out that the beer mash can “produce a smell that’s quite potent, and it may not make all your guests comfortable.” The Partnership asked the Warped Wing owner if he could delay production for an hour while attendees addressed the “business” part of the meeting.



Hopsters allows attendees to choose from 30 recipes — or bring their own — to create a special customized beer

provides a great inspirational backdrop for creative meetings.”

A number of organizations agree, and have used the space for events focused on creativity. Procter & Gamble (based in Cincinnati) held its global marketing party at the brewery, incorporating an *Alice in Wonderland* theme to the festivities. Luxury eyewear company Luxotica held a creative team-building seminar in the space, the *Cincinnati Enquirer* held a Beer Salon, and marketing firm AGAR hosted a design-week talk by designer Aaron Draplin.

Part of the storytelling benefits of a brewery or distillery comes in seeing how the drink gets made.

“Getting a behind-the-scenes tour adds the dimension of education to a fun and informative experience,” explains Goulding. “Tasting is fun, but really understanding how the beer is made let’s everyone leave with a better appreciation for beer.”

Beyond the educational component, the brewing or distilling process can be applied to a company’s corporate goals.

“One of the unique advantages of holding a corporate meeting at a microbrewery or distillery is being able to compare the ‘Point A to Point B’ attention to detail in crafting these beverages to upcoming goals corporate executives may have for their teams, especially top performers at corporate destination incentives,” says Karen Shackman, president of Shackman Associates New York, an event planning company that has worked with brewers and distillers in creating a number of innovative programs.

Shackman adds that when looking to create a more sophisticated atmosphere, the itinerary can be shifted to a more formal tasting.

Beyond the Brewery

Of course, groups don’t have to limit their activities to the brewery or distillery itself. Increasingly, hotels and conference venues are partnering with local beverage makers to bring their offerings to the meeting groups.

Hotel Monaco Seattle, a Kimpton Hotel, has partnered with the Craft Brew Alliance to provide local beers (particularly offerings from Redhook Brewery based in nearby Woodinville, WA) to guests.

“It’s a great way for us to showcase our support of local companies and provide our guests a true taste of Pacific Northwest microbrews,” says Tom Waithe, general manager of Hotel Monaco Seattle.

The Amway Hotel Collection, a group of three properties in Grand Rapids, MI (known to many as Beer City USA), has gone even further, partnering with 15 nearby breweries, including Founders and Brewery Vivant. Groups can arrange for the Beer City USA package, including local beers waiting for attendees upon arrival, along with a brewery map, Beer City Passport, and a Beer City



The Amway Hotel Collection incorporates brew-themed merchandise and social media offerings into its events

T-shirt.

Two of the Collection’s properties, The JW Marriott Grand Rapids and The Amway Grand Plaza, even offer “Brew and

Renew” spa specials. The treatments include using local hops and barley to exfoliate the skin — while enjoying tastings of the local craft beers, of course.

A number of organizations, including Acton University and the American Home Brewers Association, have held beer-related events at the Amway properties, for which the hotels added beer and beer-themed items to the hotel gift shops and restaurants, as well as promoted pre- and post-meeting brewery tours.

Those seeking an even more out-of-the-box brewery experience can visit Hopsters in Newton, MA (about 15 minutes outside of Boston). Able to accommodate up to 90 people, the brewery offers groups the chance to brew their own signature craft beer. Groups can select from 30 recipes (or bring their own), and a concierge assistant brewer guides them through the brewing process — measuring ingredients, bottling, and labeling the final product.

Once the brewing is finished, the beer is stored at Hopsters where it is fermented, bottled, and then sent to participants complete with a custom label created by attendees.

“Groups actually work together in a laid-back, fun atmosphere to create something they can enjoy after their initial experience,” says Hopsters Owner Lee Cooper. “I think places like Hopsters are growing in popularity as a meeting venue because people are looking for a new, unique way to bring groups together, whether it’s for a meeting, a fun company outing, or a holiday party.” **SM Questions or comments? Email alexpalmer3000@gmail.com**

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