



THE HIDDEN TALENT OF BEVERAGE TASTING

MENTION BEVERAGE TASTING AND IT CONJURES UP AN IMAGE OF SOMEONE EXCLUSIVELY DRINKING WINE AND BEING OVERLY DESCRIPTIVE ABOUT THE TASTE AND AROMA. IN REALITY TASTING IS AN OFTEN OVERLOOKED BUT ABSOLUTELY VITAL PART OF THE GLOBAL BEVERAGE INDUSTRY, RANGING FROM FIZZY SOFT DRINKS, WATERS, TEAS TO ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES SUCH AS BEERS AND SPIRITS.

Tasters are not just used to assess the end quality of products, but to detect possible flaws with raw materials and at different production stages. By detecting problems early companies are able to save millions. Not just from lost revenue from recalled products, but from damaged consumer confidence in the brand that may have an impact for years to come. Modern taste panels are no longer made up of people with years of experience in tasting. Today's training techniques mean that almost anyone of any background, regardless of experience, can become a beverage taster.

SELECTING THE BEST PEOPLE

A minimal amount of natural aptitude is required to become a taster. This natural ability is nurtured with training to create expert tasters from novices. Many tasters are recruited from different areas of a business, from forklift truck drivers to



administration staff in offices. Smaller operations only have a minimal number of people working for the company – almost all of their employees are part of their taste panels.

The best tasters are found by using simple yet effective selection and screening methods. This can include a questionnaire based assessment and beverage tasting sessions. These identify those able to naturally sense a range of flavours and those who are able to devote enough time to the responsibility of being a taster.

FLAVOUR IDENTIFICATION TRAINING

Beverages consist of many complex flavours which are difficult to identify for a novice. To aid a trainee taster, Flavour Standards are used as a reference. Standards added to a beverage replicate different flavours that can occur during any point of the manufacturing process,

not just negative ones but even positive aspects of a brand which have become overpowering and are considered an off-flavour.

Being able to detect specific flavours allows beverage producers to understand where the problem has occurred. For example; inky or Bakelite (the old TV set smell) flavours indicate Bromophenol is present. Bromophenol occurs only if raw materials or packaging are contaminated from fireproofing materials and recycled paper, as this flavour doesn't occur during the production process.

Other flavours can include Ethyl Hexanoate, an apple and aniseed flavour, which is present normally in many beverages, but in high concentrations is considered to be an off-flavour. Musty flavours indicate poor storage of the raw materials or finished product – plastic bottles are surprisingly permeable to strong odours. These are some of the many



flavours that can have a significant impact if present in a product, even in small amounts.

THE IMPORTANCE OF TASTERS

This diagnostic and proactive approach to tasting is much more cost effective than waiting for consumers to complain, having to recall products and then analyse them for defects.

The use of tasters to detect potential problems during beverage production looks set to grow over the coming years, as financial pressure may require more cost effective and proactive solutions to resolve production challenges. What is clear however is that the hidden tasting talent that lies within every company is an exceptional resource waiting to be unlocked.

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