



## **How and why cask can help the British pub recover from Covid-19**

As pubs prepare for re-opening in a new era, publicans will have a lot to think about. They are restarting their business, and probably re-evaluating every part of it.

As a licensee, it would be understandable if cask ale, with the little bit of extra care and attention it requires, isn't at the top of your list. Here's why you shouldn't forget it, and how best to make cask ale work for you in getting the pub back on its feet.

### **Why Cask Ale is Right for Post-Lockdown Pubs**

Everything points to a renewed relevance for cask ale.

#### **1. Cask ale is unique to pubs**

Drinkers have been enjoying a lot of packaged beer during lockdown, and there are likely to be some long-term changes to our drinking habits. But there's nothing like a freshly-poured pint in the pub. – Mainstream and social media outlets have been full of people pining for the pub. The pub is the only place to get fresh, cask conditioned beer.

A survey of 22,000 cask drinkers conducted at the end of May revealed that 63% said the thing they're looking forward to most about the return of the pub is a pint of cask – more even than meals, or catching up with friends.<sup>1</sup>

#### **2. Cask ale is perfect for the initial post-lockdown mood and occasion**

With social distancing measures in place, it's going to be a while before we can enjoy the noisy, six-deep at the bar occasions more readily associated with lager or spirits. These are also the occasions that many pub-goers feel most nervous about. In the short-to medium-term, pub drinking is going to be mellow and relaxed, as people catch up with friends, family and work mates they may not have seen for months.

Many pub-goers now drink a wide variety of different products, and it's occasions like catching up with friends when they are most likely to choose cask over other drinks. With the right kind of positioning and marketing, cask can tap into other occasions too. The more you help to make cask beer the drink of choice, the more likely those drinkers are to return to the pub - rather than to drink at home.

Drinking fresh cask in a pub can help bring local people together to share stories and help support the return to 'normal life' again.

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<sup>1</sup> Survey by CAMRA between 11th May and 18th May. 21941 responses were received, of which 90% were from CAMRA members.



### **3. Cask ale is British, with a regional identity**

Lockdown has changed people's horizons. We have been forced to focus more on our immediate environment and local communities. Some of us have met neighbours for the first time, while vulnerable people have relied on people and businesses close to them for help.

Consumers will be keener than ever to see pubs stock regional and local products. Cask meets this requirement. Although some local and regional brewers focus on bottled, canned and kegged beers, for most of them, production is mainly cask ale.

Local pubs and breweries are key employers in cities, towns and villages. Cask beer helps preserve jobs and livelihoods in the region and its use of barley grown and malted in Britain adds to the economic benefits it brings.

#### **Getting Cask Right**

There are difficulties in trying to sell well-kept, well-presented cask ale. Cask is not right for every pub. For cask to help get you back in business, it's important that you pitch it correctly - and the way forward varies depending on the kind of pub you run.

#### **What Role Did Cask Ale Play in Your Pub Previously?**

##### **1. "We didn't stock cask/we stocked cask but didn't sell much of it."**

Throughputs of all draught beer are likely to be lower than usual in the short-to medium-term. It is predicted by many that turnover could be 50% less in the early months. Venues that generally have low throughput will struggle to sell cask in sufficient volume to keep the beer in good condition. A cask should never stay on sale for more than three days (four if using aspirators.) The Cask Report 2019 showed that when most people are served a poor quality pint, instead of complaining at the bar, they leave in silence, and form a negative view of both the pub and the beer they tried, which they will share with other people.

To experiment with cask for all the reasons outlines above, start off with one handpump and see how it goes. If it doesn't work, take it off sale and wait until the pub is busier.

##### **2. "We sold some cask within a broader range of beers."**

Because throughput may be lower – and because over-ranging was impacting on quality before the Coronavirus crisis – pubs may want to start with fewer lines than you had before.

Think carefully about ranging:

- Make sure you have a mix of nationally and local recognisable brands available
- Don't double up on beers of the same style and ABV – you'll only reduce the output through each tap, potentially impacting quality. Think about stocking pils to help with throughputs.
- Focus on range of beer styles – beer choices tend to be lighter in summer, darker in winter.



- As demand grows, and you achieve a throughput that means a cask is only on the bar for three or four days, consider expanding your range.

### **3. *“We were renowned for cask – it’s a major reason people came here.”***

These publicans understand and no doubt love cask ale, and have a better understanding of how it works for them than anyone else. But they need to take account of how things may well have changed

- If you weren’t doing so already, make sure information about beer styles, breweries and ABV is clearly readable some distance away from the bar, to help people decide what to order while social distancing. Make sure the bar staff have total knowledge regarding the beers on sale.
- Consider reducing the range and focus on throughput over breadth of choice. You should be able to grow back to where you were as pubs get busier.
- As people are returning to the pub after months away, this restart may be the time to try new ideas you never quite got around to before. Consider exploring new beer styles, new breweries or promotional activities.

### **Quality is key**

With pubs being closed for over three months, it’s important for all draught beer that cellar equipment is in good working order and beer lines are clean - otherwise beer flavour will be tainted and fobbing may occur. Cask Marque have issued guidelines on best practice for reopening.

Cask Marque’s countdown to re-opening:

<https://cask-marque.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Cask-Marque-Re-Opening-Guide.pdf>

Molson Coors has worked with Cask Marque and produced a useful and informative video based on Cask Marque guidelines to help us all deal with the reopening procedures;

<https://www.molsoncoors.com/InYourCorner/consumer-insights>