New Belgium Brewing is a craft brewery located in Fort Collins, Colorado. It was opened in 1991 and is currently the fourth-largest craft brewery and eighth-largest overall brewery in the US. In 2016, they opened their second location in Asheville, NC and their beer is now available in 50 states. New Belgium implemented an employee stock ownership plan in 2000 and as of January 2013, the brewery is 100% employee-owned. Visit www.newbelgium.com.

PERFECTING THE CRAFT

Most breweries rely on third-party panelists to develop and test new taste experiences—but, New Belgium Brewing isn’t just any brewery.
Brewing experts running the New Belgium’s Sensory Lab conduct their own market research and product often relying on the seasoned palates of their employees.

By training and tracking the evolution of each individual employee-owner, New Belgium is able to continuously innovate the brewing landscape, driving product development and ensuring they stay at the top of the fast-growing craft beer industry.

Fort Collins, Colorado is home to New Belgium Brewing, the fourth largest craft brewery in the United States. They maintain the reputation of being one of the most innovative players in the industry, leading the exploration of new recipes and resurrecting old styles.

Using surveys, New Belgium continuously hones their their employee-owners into trained tasters with senses conditioned to describe the next great recipe.

The Challenges of Creating the Next Great Craft Beer

Many commonly employed research methods are ripe with pitfalls that stand in the way of gathering quality data, such as:

- Sensory Labs are usually an afterthought, not a research driver.
- Product development usually relies on untrained panelists, not beer experts.
- It’s difficult to efficiently train professional-grade panelists and organize tasting data.

New Belgium’s Survey-Driven Solutions

Approaching employee-owner palate development with precision through strategic data collection helps ensure the best quality product. Tactics the brewery uses to ensure this process occurs accordingly include:

- Engaging with passionate, invested employee-owners in regular Sensory Lab panels, which trains their palates over time.
- Track palate development through longitudinal studies to ensure quality data is being captured.
- Segment responses to ensure that data from undeveloped palates is not included in final, decision-making results. When an employee-owner has learned to identify subtle changes in beer taste, smell, and color, their validated data is included in official Sensory Lab results.
- Use the data collected in the results to ensure the highest level of product quality and consistency, as well as produce flavor profiles that appeal to casual beer drinkers and sophisticated palates alike.
- Ongoing training ensures validated palates retain a high-level of sophistication and consistency.

Situation:
Prior to implementing survey projects into their data collection process, the analysis and actionable use of data coming in from tastings was cumbersome.
They found the best way to keep track of every response and test employee-owners on their way to validation was with surveys. Employee-owners are invited to attend twice-weekly attribute training. In this training, attendees sample and select the attribute that they think was added to their sample. Data analysis is conducted immediately after the training to check which respondents were able to correctly identify the attribute.

In addition to twice weekly formal trainings, monthly informational trainings are held. In some of these trainings, the results are shared immediately, allowing for panel-hopefuls to receive near-instant feedback on how their palates are developing.

## Results of Relying on Homegrown Panelists

### Huge Savings

New Belgium saves thousands of dollars each and every month. Having highly trained and seasoned panelists on-hand to evaluate batches in real-time results in continuous quality assurance.

### High Engagement

When employees have skin in the game, they stay highly motivated. Having employees as panelists allows them to learn and help shape the direction and creation of new products.

### Location Expansion

New Belgium opened a second brewery in Asheville, NC in 2016 due to the high demand of craft beers across the country.

### Industry Leader

New Belgium has become the fourth-largest craft brewery in the country and the eight-largest brewery overall.
The Value of Sensory Lab Survey Data

Many of the people currently working in New Belgium’s Sensory Lab used to work in labs at big, industrial beer companies. They told the SurveyGizmo team that many corporate beer companies hide their sensory labs “in the basement” and use them as an afterthought rather than a research driver.

New Belgium’s approach couldn’t be more different. The findings from their sensory lab surveys are an essential contributor to the market research that leads the development of new beers going to market.

As the brewery grows, and with the addition of the second location in North Carolina, so too does the number of validated Sensory Lab panelists. While it takes as long as two years to bring an employee-owner from novice to expert, the benefits of in-house experts far outweigh costs of training external panelists. At current count, the Colorado flagship location sports 65 validated panelists and there are already 20 trained at the Asheville location.

Market Analysis Through Surveys

While much of what the Sensory Lab panelists do is centered around quality assurance and quality control, that’s not all the team does.

Before bringing a new beverage to market, New Belgium’s team conducts mountains of research. New Belgium has their fingers on the pulse of what is happening throughout the craft brewing industry and they continuously sample beer from around the country.

After learning about, and tasting what’s currently on the market, the sensory team, with their expert palates, analyze the flavor profiles of each beer. Then, they map them based on descriptive analysis and quantitative data. From here they can determine where to position a new product within the craft beer landscape.

“Our favorite thing about SurveyGizmo is how easy it is to use from both a creator and user standpoint. The sensory department initially got a subscription for internal training, but after seeing how well it works, we’ve started using it for all our outward-facing consumer studies. Now multiple departments have their own accounts as well!”

Ali Schultz, Sensory Analyst, New Belgium Brewing

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Founded in 2006, SurveyGizmo is a powerful insights solution that empowers business professionals to make informed decisions. It provides data insights in over 205 countries, with 50,000 new surveys created and 7.5 million responses collected every week, for customers like Fedex, IBM, Microsoft, Bloomberg Television, GE, and ESPN. SurveyGizmo is recognized as a leader in the survey industry for its innovation, service, and value.

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