

Craft Brewers - User Research



Brendan Lane
Patrick Magdua
IAT 334 – D102
Assignment 3 – User Research

Research Context

Our group has decided to research the domain of craft brewers, focusing on those in the Greater Vancouver area. We decided to undertake this context firstly because of the growing popularity of microbreweries in the Greater Vancouver area, such as Granville Island Brewing, Brassneck Brewery, and Four Winds Brewing. We decided that the popularity and availability of such users would allow us to effectively gather information from a variety of sources. We also chose to pursue this topic because we both enjoy good beer and know of some of the breweries that produce this beer, but we have no knowledge of the actual processes that these breweries undertake to produce the beer, the goals and tasks of the brewers themselves, or what is important to them. We want to explore this context to gain a greater appreciation for a craft that we enjoy.

First Method - Extreme User Interviews

The first research method we have selected is **Extreme User Interviews**. This method involves conducting interviews with users who are either extremely familiar or unfamiliar with a context. Given our relatively niche context of craft brewers, we decided to interview extremely familiar users: the head brewers of craft breweries. We chose this method because it allowed us to meet industry professionals who could articulate information, as well as goals and tasks, of craft brewers, and gain information directly from the people we wanted to research.

Second Method - Behavioural Archaeology

The second method we employed is **Behavioural Archaeology**. This method involves observing the actions, object placement, clothing styles, and other nonverbal cues and clues of the people we are researching, which can provide us with information about their behaviour and activities. We chose this method because it complements our direct interview method by allowing us to observe the surroundings and gain knowledge that is not outright stated by interviewers.

Summary of Research Findings

We conducted our interviews with three brewers: **Brent Mills** of Four Winds Brewing, **David Bowkett** of Powell Street Brewing, and **Gary Lohin** of Central City Brewing. Unfortunately, we were only able to physically interview Brent Mills, while David and Gary's schedules didn't mesh with ours and needed to be reached via phone interview. These interviews formed the basis of our **Extreme User Interviews** method. We also visited the facilities of Four Winds and Central City to generate observations which gave us insight into brewers' behaviours and actions - these visits and observations formed the basis of our **Behavioural Archaeology** method.

Below are the notes we took during our interviews:

Gary Lohin

80s - SFU student - wanted a beer he wanted to drink

Homebrewing

Worked as bartender

Influenced by mini-beer during mid-80s

First job w/ Whistler Brewing

Started brewing in 3rd year

Lots of brewing experience

Ran first brew pub at Lower Mainland

Central City after that since 2003

Central City

Beer stands out

Different brands for different names eg. Wally's Wheat, Red Pacer

Red Pacer - original packaging from 50s

↳ Made everything Red Pacer due to popularity, and everything stands out

Iconic brand

Biking influenced by painting

Gary is a big biker - drives the brand that way

Partner in business, oversees brewery, administration, brand development, brewmaster

Central City growth - to all of North America

↳ going into Washington and Portland

↳ having Canada's largest barrel program and bottle program

↳ pushing business not in volume, but in high quality, high end

↳ moving into distilling (e.g. whiskey)

Most beers are traditional - into style categories

↳ doesn't experiment too much

↳ best ingredients possible

↳ best fermentation and maturation process

Still does physical labour

Friends with other brewers

Very open with others, ready to share

Huge supporter of other brewers

Has boutique distributors

With several beers, willing to go to international distributors

Brent Mills Interview

- Desire to drink better beer
- Explorative with beer - more picky, willing to spend more
- Lived in China for 1 year
 - Wanted to drink flavorful beer
 - Started with homebrew about 7 years ago
 - Then started Pub while working as a chef
 - Started at R+B brewing - left Oct. Sept. to start Four Winds (June 1)

Four Winds

- always on his mind - song lyrics
- four winds NEWS - influenced by all beers all over the world

Goals have been enhanced - new and unique beers

- expectations have been raised
- enjoys being pushed

Inspiration from other beers, different foods, cultures

- looking at old-world brewing techniques

Great day - 10 hour days

- more supervisory role now
- SAM - brewing half away
- 8 hour brew
- Spending a lot of time refining business
- Developing a lab

Malt (80%) - All/Mtn. Barley, malted in Calgary

Spec. Malt (10%) - Source to maltdried (Fidel France)

Yeast - Head River Co.

Unique

Uniqueness in Brand

Uniqueness in packaging - 4 pack

Proter - smaller sizes - don't need too much

- Smaller investment

Limited edition label - use cork and champagne bottle

Gender-neutral design in packaging - less masculine

Future

- Doubled in size in about 4 months
- have recognition + foothold in industry
- Sustainable growth - don't grow too fast

Tricky cash flow

Brand program

- Condition beer in wine/whiskey barrels

- Wants to be known for bottling

Brewing - requires dening sanitation

Tasks

- Soft water
- Starch into sugar, yeast eats it
- Separate sweet liquid from solids
- Add ingredients to boil

Hops - least used, most expensive

- harder to get (90% from Washington)

Brewers - know their stuff about equipment and techniques

- Competition is good - people get along

- All brewers are along - toward the craft beer movement vs. macrobreweries

- Knows what's important to him

- Equipment - startup costs

- Important - local equipment

- Bottling line

- Original expansion - started with Lohner pub owner

- Then went to Alibi room

- Social media is huge to craft beer brewery - that's how so much spread

- Gone from 10-15 accounts in a very short amount of time

- Beer is drinkable for more casual drinkers

Enhanced by beer geek community

Gary Lohin Interview

David Bowkett

Tell us about yourself

- Homebrewing for several years
- Dec 2012 - about a year

Science + Art

- Love of beer itself - experimentation - artistic science
- Experimentation with ingredients

Best ingredients possible

- English ale = English malt

Keep making beer

Become community brewery

- Don't grow too much - some growth to meet demand - planning expansion
- No projected size

Day In The Life

- Day job + brew on weekends
- Does everything with wife and one employee

Tasks - lot of waiting (80%)

6 AM

Malt

Cleaning

Mash

Boil kettle

Ferment

Yeast

Choice of equipment

- Very important
- Durable equipment is huge
- Best equipment possible

No animosity between brewers

Everyone is family, willing to share
Everyone tries to help everyone

Importance of Brand

- Name doesn't matter
- Good to associate product + people w/ good brand

Innovation

- Cider field - find interesting things
- Sells in the US during seasons
- New tastes

Great quality product - not a focus on uniqueness right now

Physical labour - makes you stronger

Favorite beer - one I'm drinking at the moment

Extreme User Interviews

We found that a key long-term goal for craft brewers in microbreweries is the desire to brew a high-quality product, beer that the brewers themselves would enjoy drinking. For all three brewers, this goal has preceded their roles as professional brewers, as they all began as home brewers due to their love of beer and the pursuit of brewing and drinking better beer (for example, Gary notes that he was an SFU student who simply couldn't find a beer he wanted to drink).

Coinciding with the desire for a high quality product is the brewers' desire for high quality ingredients in their beers, as well as high quality equipment. The brewers were quite picky with their ingredient choices: for example, Brent always acquires his yeast from a distributor in Hood River, Oregon, while Gary and David are adamant about acquiring the proper type of ingredients for the right type of beer, such as English malt for an English ale. The brewers also were picky with their choice of equipment, and were willing to spend more money on locally-produced, high-quality equipment that would not break down or deteriorate as easily. Despite this common goal of acquiring quality ingredients, goals of different brewers differ slightly. For example, Gary considers himself a traditionalist and desires to make high quality versions of beer that fit into established style categories such as IPA, while Brent enjoys experimentation with new flavours while still paying tribute to old brewing techniques.

For both Brent and David, the creation, maintenance, and growth of their respective breweries is also a long-term goal, as Brent and David are the founders and key stakeholders in their businesses. Both Brent and David sought "sustainable growth," meaning that they do not want to expand into large macrobreweries, but do want to increase their ability to meet demand for their products. Gary, meanwhile, as a partner in the much larger Central City, has shown considerable interest in larger growth, and one of his goals is to push Central City beer into the United States. The goal for all the brewers is some form of growth, but Gary seems to desire larger growth than Brent and David.

The brewers enjoy the camaraderie that stems from the craft brewing community. Brent describes himself and other craft brewers as "brothers in arms" against large macrobreweries such as Molson, and David states that in the craft beer community, "everyone is family". Gary sees other Lower Mainland brewers and his friends and is even willing to support them by sharing his ingredients and recipes if need be. The brewers are extremely open and receptive to other brewers, and noted that fostering this sense of community and supporting and embracing other craft brewers is one of their goals.

In terms of actual brewing, goals varied slightly, although the overarching goal for all of these brewers was to craft a high quality product. David's goal, due to the extremely small size of Powell Street brewing (which he describes as a "nanobrewery", with he, his wife, and one other employee as its only workers) is to simply craft high quality versions of recognizable beers (for example, English and Belgian ales). Brent of Four Winds, however, places a much higher priority on uniqueness. His goal is to create well-received and highly drinkable beers that are also unique in flavour. Gary's goals are to "brew the beers I want to drink", which includes well-recognized beers (such as the Red Racer brand and its popular beers such as the IPA and Extra Special Bitter) as well as unique, experimental seasonal beers, such as the Spiced Pumpkin Ale, as well as high-end, more expensive beers created through unique barrel aging and bottle aging programs.

Despite the seemingly visionary goals of these brewers, their tasks seem more formulaic. All of them described a "day in the life" of a brewer as a series of often-physical tasks, including boiling water, fermenting yeast, and pouring grain. Brent noted that a common task for brewers is sanitation and constantly cleaning equipment, while David noted that waiting - such as waiting for water to boil or for yeast to ferment - made up a large part of a brewer's day. For Brent and Gary, who hold administrative roles, tasks also include training other brewers and ensuring that they do their jobs correctly, while David's tasks are more widespread, including answering emails and fielding phone calls, as he is one of only three employees at the brewery. Gary states that he "does everything", including actually brewing the beer itself, fielding phone calls, checking inventory, and developing the Central City brand.

Observations - Behavioural Archaeology

At both breweries we visited and observed (**Four Winds Brewing** and **Central City Brewing**) we first observed strong smells of beer ingredients within the facilities. Furthermore, in both breweries, the equipment is clearly displayed. Four Winds' equipment room is directly adjacent to the bar, and the door is always open, allowing visitors to look inside, while Central City has a large glass wall between the equipment room and the merchandise room, allowing all customers to observe the brewers at work. This suggests to us that the brewers are very transparent - they want people to become curious about the beer-making process, and they want to ensure their visitors that they are crafting their products with care. The equipment in both breweries also seems very well-maintained, and we observed the brewers sanitizing equipment copiously, suggesting that well-maintained and fully-functioning equipment is important to the brewers.

At Four Winds, Brent also wore a pair of gumboots to the interview in an office, suggesting that the work is primarily laborious and reminding us that despite the fact that these brewers are often in administrative roles, they are also chiefly responsible for the physical labour of actually brewing beer.

Despite being areas for creating beer, both breweries featured customer-focused spaces - Four Winds has a bar at the entrance, while Central City contains a taproom and a large merchandise area. These areas show the importance that the brewers place on reaching out to customers.



The taproom inside the Central City brewing facility.

The brewers also seemed to be proud of their brand. This is made obvious by Central City's large merchandise area for customers, but Brent shows his personal affinity for the Four Winds brand by keeping beer labels and bottles on and above his desk. Central City's Red Racer brand (featuring a woman on a bicycle) is also prominent in the various biking gear and merchandise on display, and Gary,

as a self-proclaimed cycling fanatic, continues to push the brand in this direction, suggesting that the brands are not only business-focused, but have deep ties to the brewers themselves.

Central City's pride also extends to its success, as it proudly displays its awards at national and international beer festivals on the walls for customers to see.



Gary Lohin: We're proud that our beers have been recognized on the local, national and international levels.

Analysis of Research Findings

One of the goals of all brewers is simply to produce beer, and David and Brent both found tedious tasks in this process, such as copious sanitization of equipment and long waiting times. While waiting times may be inevitable - water takes a certain time to boil, for example - there is a potential for interaction design here to help streamline the process and allow brewers to more efficiently undergo the brewing process. This could increase their production capacity without needing to expand the size of the facility or purchase new equipment, and allow the breweries to achieve the "sustainable growth" that they desire. Interaction design could also streamline the cleaning process by remembering when equipment was cleaned, analyzing how clean equipment is, and letting brewers know when the best time to clean equipment is. This would allow brewers to work efficiently while completing their sanitation tasks and achieving their goal of clean, well-maintained equipment.

Brent also noted that a key way that Four Winds was able to quickly expand its customer base was through social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. As several craft breweries such as Four Winds and Powell Street are relatively young, and the brewers are also key stakeholders in the company, social media could continue to be a key way to help expand the businesses. Thus interaction design here could be used to create platforms and new avenues of outreach for brewers to reach untapped customers. Again, this could be used to help young breweries and their brewers achieve desired growth.

Although the brewers were extremely concerned with the quality of their ingredients and equipment, they did not seem shackled to particular distributors. Perhaps an interaction design opportunity exists here in the form of a marketplace that would allow brewers and distributors to connect. This would allow brewers to develop relationships with distributors, compare prices and quality of ingredients and equipment among distributors, and make informed choices about their purchasing decisions.

All three head brewers were responsible for both physical and administrative duties. All the brewers seemed to prefer the actual making of the beer, and Gary stated that he tries to keep administrative duties to a minimum, despite his leadership role within the company. There is an interaction design possibility here for a design to help streamline the administrative processes (such as contacting distributors and checking inventory) and thus allow the brewers have more time to actually craft the beer, which they seem to very much enjoy.

Reflection

Our research experience was quite different than what we expected. The complexity and work behind the world of brewing craft beers and distributing them is incredibly interesting. Being able to meet and speak to brewers like Brent and David has given us new insight on creating craft beer. The whole process of driving to the breweries and being able to sit down with these people alone was a great experience, and we were able to taste great beer as well! It was definitely more fun than the both of us had anticipated or even would have imagined.

One of the strengths we were able to achieve by our research methods was we were able to experience the world of craft brewing first hand. Because we approached industry professionals with the intention of interviewing them, we were provided with the knowledge and an inside look at how beer is produced and the ideas behind different styles and flavours. Because these were **extreme** user interviews and we chose head brewers, we were also privy to the administrative duties that head brewers have, giving us insight into more than just the physical labour behind making beer.

We were also able to effectively complement our interviews with observations, allowing us to pick up on cues that we couldn't obtain otherwise. The use of our complementary methods meant that we could gain information from the brewers' verbal and nonverbal cues.

Another strength was not having expectations when we first decided to approach craft brewers. This allowed us to interview the brewers with open minds and not ask leading questions.

One key weakness was that we weren't able to contact some other brewers at all, such as Conrad Gmoser from Brassneck Brewing. We never realized how busy a brewer can be and it was very difficult to get into contact with certain breweries. It made it a challenge as the interview pool quickly began to dwindle. In the future, we would try to get in contact with these brewers much sooner and schedule interviews earlier in order to run successful interviews.

Another weakness was that we needed to physically interview these brewers, but due to scheduling constraints we needed to use telephone interviews with two of our three brewers. Because of this, we weren't able to run our behavioural archaeology method effectively with Gary or at all with David; we simply had to rely on their words. The phone interviews, although incredibly insightful, required us to rely on words, as we couldn't observe the brewers' nonverbal cues. Again, we would try to schedule interviews earlier to give the brewers time to meet us in person and conduct more effective interviews.

A final weakness in our research is that it did not give us a hands-on look into the physical work that the brewers do. While we were able to glean plenty of information through both of our methods, it would have been beneficial to ask for guided tours to watch and see exactly what the beer-making process entails. Although our interviews and observations gave us a good sense of the brewers' **goals**, guided tours would allow us to understand the brewers' **tasks** better.