

Being a brewer is one of the finest and most rewarding occupations in the world. If not always rewarding in terms of money, it is undoubtedly rewarding in terms of satisfaction in giving so much enjoyment to so many people.

Brewing is also one of the oldest occupations. With a history stretching back more than 5,000 years, few others have a comparable history or experience.

But even by these standards, developments over the last couple of decades have been remarkable. Consolidation has developed remarkably quickly. The four biggest European brewers have more than doubled their volume share. The development in quality and packaging is undergoing constant improvement. But the most interesting challenge is the change in consumer habits.

Beer brings pleasure to millions. People love the simple, natural combination of barley, hops and pure water. But they also appreciate the other associated values, such as social bonding, heritage and connoisseurship.

Understanding the dynamics of the consumer's mind is just as important as understanding the fine art of brewing. Today beer is more popular than ever, but over the years many drinks have tried to compete and today's consumers are exposed to alternatives at a speed we have never experienced before.

To understand brewing, one must appreciate the history and diverse culture of each nation. Germany's remarkable brewing history and foundations are almost part of its national character. But contrast the restraints that places on development with the situation in Mexico, where giant breweries, built on green-field sites, each have the capacity to brew more than 4 times the total production of Sweden!

Europe is the cradle of world brewing. Most nations have imported from Europe not only the knowhow but also the equipment to make quality beer. Even though Europe has only 7% of the world's population, it is home to over 3000 breweries, including four of the world's five biggest brewing groups, and accounts for 25% of world consumption and 60% of world exports. The pride we feel in our heritage and in the brands we have successfully developed is part of the explanation.

The sector also continues to enjoy the strong support of the great brewing families, many with well over 100 years of history. Heineken, Busch, Coors, van Spoelberg, Fuller and Spendrup represent families who have worked to ensure continuity and long-term commitment to society and the consumer. We are sensitive to the social responsibilities this entails and we work to live up to the standards expected of us.

Brewers are also an integral part of today's debates around responsibility with regard to economic sustainability, the environment and public health. On the latter, the brewing sector is being increasingly challenged. Though part of a more general debate on the burden caused by certain lifestyles choices, we need to demonstrate we are part of the solution when it comes to tackling alcohol misuse. This is why Europe's brewers have welcomed the European Commission's strategy to support EU Member States in reducing alcohol-related harm, which takes account of the differing drinking cultures and is based on an action-oriented, multi-stakeholder approach.

During the past five years alone, Europe's brewers have supported and funded over 300 responsibility initiatives, mostly at local level and with partners including local authorities, doctors' groups, road safety authorities and NGOs. As a founding member of the EU Alcohol and Health Forum, a cornerstone of the EU's strategy, The Brewers of Europe is strongly committed to further stepping up these actions.

2008 sees the 50th anniversary of The Brewers of Europe. The decision by an earlier generation of brewers to set up our association showed remarkable foresight, yet even they could not have anticipated many of the recent developments. However, our combination of heritage and foresight, tradition and innovation, place us in a strong position to thrive in the next fifty years and onwards.

Mr. Ulf Spendrup

Tenth generation in the drinks industry

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