

Fullers Brewery

Manufacturing

Case study



Fuller's Brewery can handle its Beer

Fuller's Brewery is one of the UK's leading independent brewers and retailers producing and distributing high quality ales. Fuller's strives both to provide a guaranteed, quality supply of beer every time and also to ensure that it offers the highest customer service and reliability. In order for Fuller's to fulfil this criteria it has implemented a system which enables staff to track beer kegs and casks to each customer. Fuller's turned to Lowther (U.K) Ltd, a specialist in the provision of business systems in the handheld and automated data capture markets, for a one-stop solution using a Zebra Cameo 2 printer.

The Brewing Industry

Fuller's Brewery was established in 1845 in Chiswick, West London. It is famous for producing traditional, award winning ales. These include London Pride and ESB and seasonal brews, such as Organic Honey Dew. Fuller's products are packaged into cans, bottles, casks and kegs. The brewery produces one million pints of beer a week to supply Fuller's pubs and bars, freehouses, supermarkets, wholesalers and the export market. It is even possible to sample London Pride at altitude, courtesy of the British Airways drinks trolley.

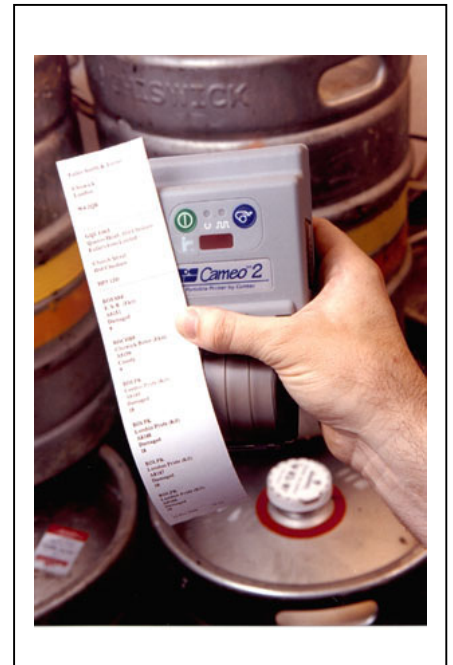
Russell Page is a trade quality advisor at Fuller's. His team is responsible for ensuring that the beer on sale in Fuller's pubs is of the highest quality. The team visits all the pubs in the Fuller's estate to monitor cleanliness and maintenance of equipment used to dispense beer. The beers on sale are sampled. If a beer does not meet the standards required, it is removed from sale. This unsaleable beer is called 'ullage' and is returned to the brewery. Customers can phone, fax or email the trade quality team if they think the beer is faulty.

Russell explains, "At Fuller's we pride ourselves on providing a high standard of customer service. Our customers are confident that we will honour any claim made on beer that is genuinely faulty although it is usually impatience that leads to complaints. Good cask ale takes time to prepare and cannot be rushed!"

Tradition Meets Technology

The trade quality team is responsible for organising the return of ullage to the brewery and was involved in the development of a computerised system to replace the previous paper-driven procedure.

Russell explains, "We contacted Lowther (U.K) Ltd, because it is renowned for producing tailor-made solutions for business systems in the handheld and automated data capture markets, which is exactly what we required. "Previously when a customer contacted us with a quality problem we filled out return notes by hand. Our aim was to minimise paperwork, so Lowther suggested that we implement a database system to make customer information instantly accessible. We now use hand held devices supplied by Lowther, which store information about each customer. Customer information from the hand-held device can be transferred via infra-red to a Zebra Cameo 2 printer for printing receipt and other hard copy confirmation."



Solution Technology

Cameo 2™



Russell continues, "If a customer contacts us with beer to return we take details of the customer, the product and the nature of the fault. The ullage is entered onto the Brewery computer system and two tickets are printed off using the Cameo 2 printer. One ticket is sent to the customer together with a bar coded ullage ticket, the other is a file copy for our records. When the containers are returned to the Brewery, I or one of my team scan the bar-coded label and, subject to analysis, credit is passed to the customer. The scanned information is then downloaded via a modem into the database. This enables us to credit the customer's next invoice."

"The Cameo 2 is very easy to use. We literally point the hand-held device at the printer, press a button and instantly we have a printed ticket. There is no repetition of work and we have not yet had to re-print tickets due to the system failing."

The Cameo 2 printer has a drop-in paper loading mechanism and a rechargeable battery life in excess of 8 hours. The integrated short range radio frequency is compliant with infrared data communication which makes it an ideal printer for wireless printing applications.

"The beauty of the Cameo 2 is the size. It is lightweight and very discreet taking up minimal amount of space, with a capability of producing a ticket which is very clear and readable," stated Nick Trower, business development manager of the portable range, Zebra Technologies. "They are very robust printers and so the harsh, active environment of a brewery is not a problem for them, they just keep on working."

A Day in the Life of a Cask of Beer

All ales produced at Fuller's have their own batch code. A container from each production run is held back as a reference sample.

Each customer order is put into the loading area for one of the 20 Fuller's trucks. Each truck could stop at several locations throughout the day delivering customer orders and collecting empty kegs and casks and so the only way to identify the unsatisfactory ones is by the bar code label applied by the customer.

On arrival at Fuller's, all the empty kegs and casks are unloaded and the unsatisfactory ones are removed and placed in an area for trade returns. This is where Russell Page and his team come in. Their first task of the day is to check the returns for their volume, a dipstick is used on the cask beers and the keg beers are weighed. Damaged containers are removed and then scrapped. If the beer is faulty, credit is paid to the customer and the Excise value is claimed.

The Future for Fuller's

Page speculates that Fuller's is so pleased with the success of the system that there could be a possibility of expanding it throughout the whole of the distribution and collection process. The application of the new system has enabled Russell and his team to dedicate more of their time to customer service. They are now able to focus on site inspections and training pub staff how to handle cask ale, so they can serve their famous brand with Pride!

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