

# HOW I LEARNED TO STOP WORRYING AND LOVE COMPLIANCE

AN ESSAY BY THE BEER LABEL GUY

What two words are sure to elicit an eye-roll or a facepalm from many craft brewers?

Compliance Management. Things like COLAs, state brand registrations, licenses, permits, regulatory approvals and applications. Few enjoy managing these processes. They're time-consuming, necessary evils and nowhere near as fun as making beer.

But the reality is they're absolutely critical in the concept-to-market process. When compliance is mismanaged, it creates headaches, costs money and creates delays. It can turn into a big, nasty distraction from why brewers got into the business, which is to, you know, make beer. Right?

I'm proud of my ability to dissect a beer label, wordsmith and churn through paperwork and applications the way a mill grinds malt. I wasn't always this way, though. How did this happen?

I formerly served as marketing manager for a regional brewery with about 20 brands and an 18-state distribution footprint. When I wasn't overseeing everything that falls under the marketing umbrella, I also acted as the brewery's de facto compliance manager, submitting COLAs, writing and keeping record of distributor appointment letters and franchise agreements, registering brands with a slew of state alcohol agencies and getting on a first-name basis with their staff, and applying for supplier licenses, sales representative licenses. This is why people got into the beer business, yes?

In the midst of Q2 2016, we switched from 4-packs of tallboys to 6-packs of 12 oz. cans, and then, as if we needed another challenge, we rebranded the entire portfolio in the middle of that process — all while expanding distribution into new states, killing a few brands and replacing them with new ones. I became proficient in conquering compliance and found ways to streamline the process so I could get back to tasks like coming up with beer names and making Instagram videos.

But I learned to love compliance, and earlier this year, I decided to become The Beer Label Guy. Knowing how knotty the process can be, I wanted to help other breweries save time, resources and headaches as they develop and launch new brands, update their packaging formats and expand their distribution.

I enjoy compliance management because it allows me to tap into two conflicting halves of my professional self: the side that enjoys creating, tinkering and collaborating; and the side that enjoys project management, structure, order, neatness and adhering to deadlines.

Navigating the complex world of federal and state regulatory approvals can be a frustrating, perplexing and downright cumbersome process. I've seen it. The label review business isn't so cut and dry.

In the end, one thing is clear: staying on top of compliance is extremely important and allows breweries to focus on what matters most — making great beer and connecting with their fans.

Let me sweat the approvals so you can focus on the fun stuff.

Cheers!  
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