



HOW TO GET

# INTO THE BREWING INDUSTRY

Written by a 25-year  
Industry Veteran

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# Brewing – How to get into the Brewing Industry

I often get “how do you get into the brewing industry?” With many people asking for my personal story of how I became a brewer (more about that later).

This guide is my take on how to transition into the brewing industry. It’s the culmination of my experience and thoughts after being a brewer for 25 years. So, without further ado...

There are several roles that are required in the industry that we’ll cover. However, I need to be blunt...**particularly when it comes to brewing.**

Brewing seems like a great job with comments like “Wow’ you must drink so much free beer!”. I do love brewing. Even after 25 years in the industry I couldn’t see myself doing anything else.

However; it isn’t as glamorous as most people perceive it to be. Brewing is 75% cleaning; usually in hot surroundings with dangers everywhere. Industrial accidents happen and people get hurt.

So; knowing this, why did I become a brewer?

## How I Got into the Brewing Industry

I am from the UK which has a long brewing heritage. However, 25 years ago “craft breweries” weren’t as numerous as they are today. I was in high school and looking to finish my studies and go to university.

One day some people came to my school talking about higher education. They joked about how you could even study brewing at university.

One of my best friends (thanks Nick) turned to me and said “That is what you should do”. He was half joking.

You see, it was known I liked a beer or two. It was a like a light turned on and from that moment all I wanted to do was get into the beer industry.

## I Wrote to Pretty Much Every Small Brewery in the UK

I wrote off to over 240 breweries the breadth and depth of the England. I got 2 replies! One was for a brewery in Hampshire. I went down for a taster day but something was off.

The other was for a lager brewery in London. I was 17 went by myself to London spoke to the brewers there. Like what I heard and promised them I would take the job after I finished my last exam (in two weeks’ time).

Three days after my last high school exam, I entered the brewery for my first day of work. Luckily, I had family that lived in Kent so could commute whilst paying rent for a room. I was on 5,000 GBP in my first year! Most of my money was spent on the commute to work.



## How to Get into The Brewing Industry

### Starting from the Bottom

I started by cleaning tanks and working on the bottling line. I was a figure of fun and my colleagues would send me out for “left-handed” screwdrivers. It was all in jest; they took me under their wing and taught me.

In 6 months, I was doing a lot of the brewing and slowly understanding the processes involved in making beer. It was an old-fashioned apprenticeship and a great way to learn.

It led to an on-going career where I have brewed in 7 countries, on numerous systems as well as being involved in several installations.

I have had an interesting wonderful career and now work as a consultant helping other breweries get started.

However; enough about me, time to give you some pointers on how to get into the industry. Let's start by looking at roles in the brewing biz.

## Roles in the Brewing Industry

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Roles in the brewing industry fall into the following category. Production, packaging, sales, tap room and admin. Then within each section there are levels and positions depending on experience and needs.

Smaller breweries often see people “wear different hats”. With bigger breweries having hierarches and a structure in place for how the various departments interact. Let's take a closer look at the various brewery roles:

### Production

Production involves many roles from brewer, cellar person, packaging to quality assurance. It encompasses everything from raw materials to making sure the beer in package is fit for consumption. So, let's break it down further:

#### Packaging/Cellar Person

These aren't the most glamorous positions; it is mostly cleaning involving manual and repetitive work. However; these positions are often “**how you get your foot in the door**”. If you want to be a commercial brewer.

This is how I got my start; cleaning tanks plus kegs and working on the bottling line. You'll be wet a lot of time. However, you are the engine room of the brewery doing unglamorous but important work.

You will monitor fermenting beer; checking sugar/alcohol content (recording it down) and reporting back to the brewers. You'll learn about dry-hopping and dumping trub.

You'll work around noisy machines and dangerous chemicals. So, make sure the brewery gives you the right PPE (gloves and ear plugs).

On the plus side; you'll know what is going on with every beer. As I say; these positions can lead to a brewing role. So be inquisitive; asking the brewing team questions when the opportunity arrives.

## How to Get into The Brewing Industry

### Quality Assurance (QA) / Quality Control (QC)

Larger breweries or more serious smaller operations will have a dedicated person or team that monitor quality. Those that go into these roles usually have a science background

People do transition to breweries from lab and microbiological backgrounds. For these roles having a good grasp of mixing media, microscopes, plating, autoclave and sanitary process is desirable.

During every step of the brewing process including packaging, samples are taken. This is to ensure there's no wild yeast or bacterial infection adversely affecting the beer and guarantee the final product is shelf stable.

Larger breweries will develop a sensory analysis program. Using statistics to understand different aroma and flavour profiles in beer. Allowing the team, a greater understanding of the beers produced by the brewery.

### Brewer

The main role associated with any brewery. The people that make the sugar (wort); that later turns to alcohol during fermentation. Depending on the system a brewer will mill grain and perform basic maintenance on pumps, valves, tanks and other equipment.

A good brewery runs on system of preventive maintenance to reduce brewery downtime and knowledge comes with experience. A brewer will be responsible for grain out after lautering; which could mean shovelling a ton of barley by hand out of a vessel. It involves a lot of other cleaning too.

Times and temperatures are key to brewing; so, an attention to details is a must. Brewers need to record data every step of the process. It allows the brewing team to understand where an issue maybe if a beer goes wrong or make improvements to a recipe over time.



### Head Brewer/Production Manger

A head brewer will be involved in the day-to-day running of the brewery. However; depending on the brewery size they may have a less hand-on role. They will be brainstorming new recipes and dealing with logistics

The head brewer actually does “less” brewing. He/she will be creating recipes, taking care of stock control, so ordering ingredients, scheduling brewing plus packaging and implementing training programs.

It isn't particularly glamorous either (seeing a theme of here?). It involves a lot of paperwork (excel and word), numerous emails plus phone calls and making sure the team is happy and working efficiently.

They do get to have some fun and are often one of the “faces” of the brewery. They are involved in brewery events. Get to do collaboration with other breweries. They often get free beer when they visit other breweries too!

Head brewers know how each beer should taste. They develop standard operation procedures to enable a brewery to have a consistent product. A good head brewer appreciates his team and has good communicates with the other departments of the brewery.

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### Tasting Room

Most breweries now have a tasting or tap room. It can be a separate area with bar attached to a brewery or a stand-alone bar in another location.

Most breweries have their own tasting room; it allows them direct sales to the public to help with running capital. **Getting a job in a tap room is another “in” into brewing.**

The people working in the taproom are generally interested and knowledgeable about beer and want to share their passion with customers who visit.

Staff in the taproom should be able to engage visitors, whatever their level of interest in beer and be knowledgeable about the brewery’s story and beer-making processes. Taproom staff are important members of the brewery team.

They can set the tone for a brewery visit; if the bartenders are distant and aloof. It can lead to those qualities being associated with brewery and brand itself. Not a good look!

Furthermore, some breweries have staff who solely look after tours and merchandise. As we said before, taproom staff often transition into production roles. They need to demonstrate enthusiasm, a willingness to learn and be a team player.

#### Also...

The [Cicerone](#) credentials can make for a more appealing candidate, and a general knowledge of beer is necessary for working front-of-house.

### Taproom Manager

As the name suggests they manage the taproom. It involves people management; taking care of the taproom rota and dealing with customer problems.

A taproom manager should have good communication with other managers in the brewery and be constantly aware of inventory levels.

### Sales

Sales, where a brewery can live and die. Sales people are often the face of brewery; being the main contact point for off-trade clients (be it a sales rep or a driver). Therefore, the sales department is a key cog on whether a brewery is successful or not.

#### Sales Rep

Being a sales rep can mean a lot of travel and strange hours. It depends on the size of a brewery and its distribution footprint. Your sales range could be a major metro area, a portion of a state/province or several states.

The sales team are expected to look after key accounts plus inform bar owners and managers about new beers and promotions. A sales person will often plan events to promote the brews.

Furthermore, the job is developing and preserving strong, positive relationships with account staff and distribution sales reps.

People in sales have to be aware of what is happening all the time. For example; when new retail locations come online; it’s their job to make an impression and get beer on shelf or tap.

## How to Get into The Brewing Industry

### Sales - Beware the drink!

The role does require a certain amount of drinking; which you need to be aware of, so you can adjust your health and wellness routines accordingly.

***NEVER drink and drive as you will lose your job.*** If you are unsure take a taxi or use a ride service. At events; you want to be seen with a beer in your hand (without being drunk); not be seen pounding imperial stouts all night long.

Never make promises to an account you can't keep. Also having a good understanding of computer software such as MS word plus some brewing software like [Ekos](#) will help.



### ***OH, and keep a good calendar!***

### Deliveries

Usually a delivery role is an entry level position in a brewery. Depending on the size of brewery it may be combined with being a brewery assistant. It involves a lot of manual work lugging around kegs, cans and bottles often up and down stairs.

Depending on the brewery; a driver might also be involved in the organization of delivery routes. They also need to be aware of local laws for hours allowed to drive in a given period.

### Sales Director

This is the senior sales position. The sales director creates the sales goals and budget for each brewery's territory often in conjunction with brewery owners.

In this position you will work closely with the marketing team to organize events and promotional materials. It will also involve handling logistics for the brewery's various distributors.

It is a wide-ranging role as you'll need to have a broad view of the brewery's sales strategy and figures. As well as understand which people are best for certain roles. Important aspects are to develop sales talent and create a harmonious sales team.

### Admin

#### Accountant / HR / Marketing / Design / Events

Some breweries have these positions in-house, while others use outside services. The bigger the brewery, the more likely it is that they have an in-house position in your field.

At the very least, most breweries have some sort of in-house marketing position that coordinates events and manages social media. These people create and shape brand messaging and craft the brewery's story. This is how the more art-oriented folks can get their piece of the craft beer action.

## Workplace Culture in Brewing

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In a brewery "culture is everything". Breweries are often stressful work environments where different departments have to work together for the brewery's success.

The majority of breweries are very small businesses made up of groups of people who spend long hours with each other solving problems, carrying out repetitive manual tasks in cramped, hot uncomfortable conditions.

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This leads to those in charge often seeking out people who are personable, friendly and can work well in team over other traits. In breweries people are like family. You will certainly see more of the people you work with than your own family.

Hell, my wife jokes "I love brewing more than her!"

Let me blunt...***nobody wants to work with an asshole!***

As a brewer of 25 years, I can train most people to be a be proficient on the production floor. So, I would rather hire someone who's a good person plus pleasant to be around rather than academically trained brewer who I don't really like."

## Should I Volunteer to Work in a Brewery for Free?

You go on any pro-brewing forum and they will always say "**NEVER work for free**". You may think; if I work in a brewery, I can prove I am invaluable to an owner and then he/she will take me on...

**HELL NO!** By working for free, you are showing a money-grabbing small business owner can cut corners and use free labor to increase their profit margin.

Plus, you're devaluing the work of the people already working there. The brewing industry generally speaking isn't a high paying profession.

So, working for free may re-enforce to a brewery it doesn't need to reward its workers with a fair wage. Also, as we have previously mentioned breweries are dangerous work places.

You are working with hot dangerous chemicals, vessels under pressure, 3-phase electricity, heavy machinery such as forklift and pallet trucks as well as the possibility of asphyxiation by CO2.

An inexperienced volunteer or a person working off the book can cause substantial liabilities if they were to be injured or worse killed.

If the brewery doesn't have the proper insurance; who will pay the medical bills→ YOU? Then your surviving family /dependents sue the brewery leading to closure. In this instance everybody loses!

It isn't just the production floor that can lead to issues. There are liabilities in the volunteering in the tap room too as you will be serving alcohol to customers too.

**OK...**

### It isn't all gloom and doom

Volunteering in a brewery can be worth the risk. Yes, contrary to what I have written above. If you do insist on working for free make, make sure the brewery has proper insurance in place or you have your own insurance that will cover any issue that could arise.

Make sure you and the brewery have an understanding before you start. Agree on a time-frame so you are not strung along in the hope of a permanent paying role "sometime down the line".

Volunteering will introduce you to the industry allowing you to decide if the trade is right for you. It can provide valuable hands-on work experience as well as build a network in the industry you're able to leverage in the future.



# How to Approach a Brewery about Work

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In the brewing industry it's often not what you know **BUT who you know**. If you go to a brewery with a tap room and leave, you're resume at the bar without introducing yourself to the bar staff you'll never hear back.

Likewise emailing a brewery out of the blue saying you would like to work for them has a low chance of success. If you want to work at particular brewery then be a regular there.

I don't mean be a raging alcoholic; be seen, make good impression and let people know that you want to get into the industry. If a slot comes; it might be you that gets the call if a brewery is in a bind.

The brewing industry is a small one. So; for example, if I am looking for someone to join my team and I reach out to another brewery asking if they know someone who is looking for work. If that brewery vouches for you; you go to the top of my list of people to speak with.

## Other Notes

If you don't have any brewing experience and want to work on the production floor. If you can show understanding of the type of work done in a brewery and actively sought to learn those skills it will be noted.

I don't mean explaining that you can brew a phenomenal fruit gose and that you've read "How to Brew". It's taking action; like attending a local MBAA meeting or similar local event in your region.

It can be taking the IBD General Certificate exam, picking up a copy of the [MBAA Practical Handbook series](#) (or the equivalent in your region), you've taken classes in a local community college to learn on electric motors/pumps.

### Or...

You've read up about I fundamentals of CIP applications and technology, the different types methods to clear beer or OSHA (or healthy and safety like 5S). There are many ways to show a brewery that you are serious about a career in beer without spending \$30,00+ on a brewing school.

# Be Humble – Be Willing to Learn

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If you are looking to get into the brewing industry you will most likely start at the bottom. You will be washing kegs, scrubbing things as well as lifting stuff. The lower rung jobs are about 90% cleaning...if that doesn't sound like your bag **then stop reading now!**

We all do our part in the brewery; it's a machine which is only as good as its weakest link. As a brewer with 25 years in the trade if I need to get in a tank to clean I will. You can't be precious in a brewery...we all work together!

You need to be prepared to help others without being asked or thinking too hard about it. You will be working in close quarter with other humans often for hours at time. You need to be someone people don't mind being around plus be able to make mildly amusing small talk.

### OK...

We do get wierdos in brewing world...it does take a special kind of person to work on a production floor for little pay like we do.

## How to Get into The Brewing Industry

We can do weird but don't be boring, high maintenance, lazy, unwilling to learn and give everybody the creeps. Make drinks for the team be it tea or coffee from time to time...do you fair share.

### I am a Homebrewer and Everyone Says My Double IPA is the Bomb!

We are pleased you are interested in brewing and happy your friends like your beer. However, if you are homebrewer there is a good chance, we will have to re-teach you everything you've learnt to be a commercial brewer.

We need to know what other skillsets you might have that will be useful in the brewery.

- Can you weld?
- [Have lab experience?](#)
- Done any plumbing?
- [Can you troubleshoot electrical issues?](#)
- Have you worked at farm? If so, what jobs did you do?
- [Have you ever been enlisted in the military?](#)
- Do you have a food handler/alcohol permit?
- [Can you use a caulking gun?](#)
- Do you have a hobby for wood-working?
- [Did you go to college? What subjects did you take?](#)
- Ever worked in a factory?
- [Have you ever built your own website?](#)
- Know how to use photoshop?



In a brewery we don't want people who can do just what they are hired to do. If you bring extra skills that complements the team and makes the workplace better, more interesting and competent you will stand out.

## On Your Resume

So Ok, you don't have relevant real-world experience in the brewing industry. Instead, highlight skills that you have that can transition well into the job you're applying for. If you have relevant skills and good references it could enough to be given a chance.

It can be relevant mechanical experience, electrical or plumbing skills. If you tell a head brewer you can plumb in a bathroom, he/she would most likely consider it more value than saying you've a limited homebrewing setup.

If you have worked in construction, as a car mechanic, electrician, welder, in pneumatics, been a welder or similar industry they are all skills useful in the brewing industry.

Commercial brewing covers a number of skills sets biology, chemistry, physics and manufacturing. Having previously held a job involving one or more of these areas of interest will help. When building a resume; try to include examples of prior job experiences that will be applicable to brewing.

For example, experience with a with a haemocytometer **in a lab** would be useful when it comes to yeast cell counts.

For chemistry, if you understand the difference between total acid and pH that good knowledge. With physics if a previous job involved the use of pumps or working with pressures then it is relevant.

In manufacturing if you've worked with machines and understand preventive maintenance then a brewery is going to love you!

### Away from the production floor

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For other positions such as in sales (be it sales rep or delivery driver), HR, accounting or QA and QC; the skills are inherently more transferable. Previous work in a similar position all be it in another industry will most likely fit the criteria of a similar job in a brewing industry.

So, a resume with work experiences and good references will most likely get you an interview. It will then often come down to why you want the position and having a passion for beer which will get your that job offer.

Of course, relevant qualifications in the field for the position you're applying for will help also.

There are plenty of positions in brewery that need to be filled. You have graphic designers, marketing, event coordination, cleaners, IT and even some larger breweries have their own workshops and build their own wood casks.

It may take some creative resume writing; however, any candidate that presents a resume which makes them stand out and look easily trainable stands a greater chance of being hired.

### The Pay can often Suck

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When I think about being a brewer and explain it to others...they often ask why I do it.

Why? Well...

Often the pay isn't great compared to similar industries. I've spent 65% of my career cleaning in often cramped humid hot conditions. I've been cut, had chemical burns and broken toes.



I know I could have transitioned to other industries and been paid more. The skills needed for brewing are valued in other professions. **Why do I do it?**

- Brewing has allowed me to meet great people (which I continue to do so).
- [It's a unique industry; the brewing community for the most part is friendly and open. I have drunk my fair share of FREE BEER.](#)
- I get to make a product from scratch and see it being consumed by people who love it.
- [It has taken me around the world allowing me to experience other cultures. I have brewed in Britain, France, Portugal, Armenia, Bermuda, Hong Kong and China.](#)
- I have picked up skills like electrical work, plumbing and pump maintenance.
- [I get to be creative and make different recipes.](#)
- I've worked in one-man operation; been my own boss and made my own hours.

I have had a great life; and brewing has been a big part of that. They say "money doesn't buy you happiness.

I am earning well now, because I came to Asia and the pay for brewers is good compared to the similar positions in the West. I have transitioned into [my running my own company as a brewing consultant](#) helping other breweries with their brewing related issues.

A lot of people in the industry end up having their own brewery business and getting into the industry can lead company ownership. However, at the start the pay will suck and the work will be hard.

If you can get a brewery to let you help out for a few days would be ideal. It will allow you to see if the brewing industry is the right one for you. **But don't work for free!** It encourages bad behaviour from the worst actors in the industry and devalues your own self-worth.

## How to Get into The Brewing Industry

You're trying to get a job showing you bring value to the brewery, right? And that value has worth. You have worth, earn it. Good breweries understand that; they are the ones you want to work for.

## The Round-up

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The brewing industry is a wonderful one...in my experience anyway. For the most part it is welcoming and friendly. If you are keen on a career in the industry it's possible to enter even without relevant prior work experience.

Myself and other experienced brewers can train most to work competently on the production floor. With other roles in the industry such as sales rep, QA and QC skills are much more transferable if you've worked in those fields before.

If you decide to pursue a career in the industry; then I wish you best of luck and hope you find a position that you love.

If you want to learn more about the brewing industry then please feel free to email me at:

[neil@asianbeernetwork.com](mailto:neil@asianbeernetwork.com)

Further information is also available at my website: [asianbeernetwork.com](http://asianbeernetwork.com)

Thanks for taking the time to download and read my guide...I hope you found it useful. I hope I get the opportunity to meet you in the brewing industry someday.

Have a great day and best of luck!

Cheers

*Neil*

