June 20, 2019

BIECC Makes Progress on Master Product Catalog
MPC would provide a single source for beer item information

We know how difficult it can be for brewers, distributors and retailers to share information. That's why the [Beer Industry Electronic Commerce Coalition](#) (BIECC) is working to build a Master Product Catalog (MPC) that will streamline communication, increasing efficiency and decreasing headaches.

As it stands, lengthy new item information forms, proprietary retailer websites, cumbersome spreadsheets, data pools, outdated images and inaccurate item data are just a few of the challenges facing brewers, distributors and retailers when trying to transmit basic beer item information with one another. The current process is time consuming, inefficient and costly for all three tiers.

"The industry has talked about this concept of a master catalog for years," said **Craig Purser, President and CEO of the National Beer Wholesalers Association.** "If the BIECC is able to make this a reality, I think it will be another win for the entire industry and show retailers and consumers that the beer industry is committed to growth."

The rise of e-commerce and entry of so many new brewers and retailers only intensifies the challenges for clean, accurate and reliable item data that can easily be shared with trading partners.

Getting it Right

Absent a single, industry-supported source of item information, numerous parties from route accounting software companies, to payment companies, to e-commerce websites to mobile apps and others have all gone about creating their own item repositories with varying levels of success.

Retailers have created their own catalogs, oftentimes demanding very specific item attributes and details unique to their own systems. That information is costly – both in time and money – for brewers and distributors to complete. In many cases, these catalogs ask for item attributes that are not even relevant to beer. Additionally, brewers have realized that inaccurate data or outdated images of

their brand are inevitable as dozens of versions of their information float around in the marketplace, and it's bad for business.

With the number of craft brewers continuing to grow and retailers increasingly demanding their products, the MPC is a way to easily make sure all retailers have access to the basic item information they need.

Background on the MPC

The project comes after years of research. After hearing about this problem from members of all three tiers of the industry, the BIECC embarked on a feasibility study which began in 2017.

The purpose of the study was to talk to retailers, in this case, 16 large on- and off-premise chain retailers to understand how they obtain their beer item information today and to gauge whether they'd be interested in a beer industry MPC.

Perhaps not surprisingly, each of these retailers, which included Walmart, Kroger, Albertsons, Target, H-E-B, Buffalo Wild Wings, Applebee's, Meijer, BevMo!, Total Wine & More, Walgreens, Costco, Sam's Club and others expressed great interest in the MPC.

The confirmation of interest from retailers led the BIECC to proceed to phase II of the MPC, which was to retain a consultant to design how the MPC would operate.

With the help of a team of brewery representatives from Anheuser-Busch, MillerCoors, Heineken, Constellation, Boston Beer, Bell's Brewery and Sierra Nevada specifications were created, a list of mandatory and optional item attributes were identified and a Request for Information (RFI) was created to be shared with potential vendors who might be able to build this solution.

In late 2018, the formal RFI was sent to approximately 50 of the most capable software companies operating in the beer industry, with 14 of them responding to the request. BIECC brewer representatives met and narrowed down the list from 14 to 5. Those 5 final companies were each asked to join the BIECC at their winter meeting to give formal presentations.

Next Steps

As with any project that seeks to bring together different, competing members of the industry to accomplish a goal, there are challenges that need to be addressed before the MPC becomes a reality. Creating the proper corporate governance, demonstrating the ROI to brewers, determining and securing adequate funding from all parties and selecting the right partner to build and manage operations are just a few of the remaining tasks left to be accomplished.

"The Brewers Association views the Master Product Catalog project as an opportunity for our members to efficiently provide basic item information to all of their trading partners," said **Paul Gatza, Senior Vice President of Professional Brewing Division at the Brewers Association**. "Not every craft brewer is going to have a team of staff who can fill out item forms and transmit information to data pools, but if they can submit their information once to this catalog and have it spread from there it will benefit everyone. A retailer needs information about every product they carry, and a distributor wants to be able to deliver the full truck of products. The Master Product Catalog will be an efficient way to make all of that happen."

Conclusion

Knowing there is still work to do, this exciting project stands to be a win for the entire beer industry. Brewers large and small will be able to steer retailers and other partners to a single location to access item information. Distributors will save time filling out new item forms for retailers and their route accounting and other software vendors will all have access to this universal catalog. Retailers will have easy access to a catalog of all the beer brands they want to stock and software companies, websites, mobile apps and other beer-related companies will all be able to access the same accurate, real-time data as everyone else.

For more information on the Master Product Catalog or to know how you can help make it a reality please contact NBWA's Vice President of State Affairs, Dave Christman at dchristman@nbwa.org.