

Press release

Consumer study: "The Taste of German Beers": A Comparison of Pilsner and Mild Beers

Munich / Mannheim, April 21, 2006: It foams and fizzes on every television station. German beer drinkers are courted more than virtually any other consumer group. Nevertheless, for more than a decade, beer consumption in Germany has continued to sink. Are the breweries really doing everything possible in order to achieve maximum success against the cutthroat competition of other beverage businesses in today's marketplace?

The beer industry spares no expense when it comes to advertising, PR, and other usual marketing tools; but do the breweries show an interest in their customers' taste desires? Do they know what really tastes good to the beer drinker, and what they expect in a beer? Where are the systematic measurements to track down the consumers' real wishes, and then develop a beer that fulfills these desires?

This is where SAM ASAP Sensory and Marketing Germany GmbH come in with their study of "The Taste of German Beers". SAM tested taste acceptance of a total of 18 pilsner and "mild" beers in four representative German test regions. The company used blind tests (i.e. without knowledge of the brand name), as well as a second run-through where the brand name and a picture of the respective product was given.

Parallel to these tests, a trained sensory panel devised an objective profile of the taste characteristics of the beers that were tested.

With the help of both test results, it was possible to answer numerous questions, e.g.:

- How would the beers' taste be evaluated when the consumers were not informed about the various brands?
- How much does the brand name influence the sensory acceptance of the product?
- Objectively, how different are the most popular beers on the German market?

In 2003 SAM ASAP Sensory and Marketing Germany GmbH (Munich and Mannheim) published the EPP-Study „Beers in Europe". Within the framework of this study the company came up with a map of German beer taste, comparing the taste profiles of 60 of the most important European beers and of some other popular beers from non-European countries. This was the first time that the range of European beer tastes was studied and depicted in a comprehensive way.

Acting on the wishes of many of its German clients, SAM Sensory and Marketing has built on the success of first project with a supplementary study that focuses on the specific aspects of the German beer

- Which taste characteristics go down well with the consumer, and which ones are rejected?
- For the German market, is there a regional variation in acceptance, and thus a regional effect regarding the "optimal taste"?
- How were "mild" beers evaluated in comparison to pilsner brands?
- SAM ASAP Sensory and Marketing Germany GmbH has put together a detailed report with 146 charts covering and comparing every aspect of the subject. Here is a sampling of the results:

Brand molds the taste

The results mirror the marked influence of brands, as many popular beers lower scores in blind taste tests. In these cases the consumers, uninfluenced by brand name and image, are thus giving a "naked" sensory assessment of the brewing process.

Alexander Quadt, Managing Director of SAM ASAP Sensory and Marketing GmbH warns, "A popular brand's image may promote product sales in the short term. However, when there is a lack of sensory quality in a beer, no matter what its name, there is the long-term danger that the customer will cross over to other beers that conform more to his or her taste." The expert goes on to declare that, "For long-term market success, a product's sensory profile must be brought to conform to the expectations of the consumer. These expectations are built up through the brand image and the product's conceptual positioning."

When the opposite situation happens, and the consumers rate the product higher in the blind test than when they know the brand name beforehand, the company is advised to work on strengthening the brand image.

There is little of difference between pilsner and "mild" beers.

The consumer study can qualify common biases within the German beer market. For instance, in general, it is assumed that Germany is divided into a north that loves bitter notes in beer and a south that prefers a sweet taste in beer. The study shows that in reality there is only a slight preference for sweet, fruity tasting beers in the South, whereas there are no regions in Germany where consumers prefer a strong, bitter-tasting beer.

Along with this, the sensory profiles of the beers tested show there is no clear delineation in the degree of bitterness between the "mild" and pilsner categories. Instead, there is a fluid transition from the mild representatives in the pilsner category to the somewhat bitter end of the "mild" beer category. Project leader Olaf Biedekarken states that, "This means that the strategic marketing positioning of a mild beer is often conceived from a purely conceptual and communicative standpoint, while the sensory characteristics of the product differ only slightly from the more established world of pilsner beer."

Everyone has Their Own Idea of a Good Pilsner

Accordingly, preferences of German beer drinkers cannot be differentiated according to the drinkers' regions of origin. Rather it makes more sense to split the large group of pilsner lovers into four national sub-groups that have varying ideas of what makes a good pilsner. For instance, most consumers are bothered by the metallic taste-note that many beers have. Approximately every third consumer prefers a pronounced malty note, whereas for every sixth person is important that the beer exhibits no lingering aftertaste. Beer drinkers opinions are divided concerning preferences between the aroma notes of roasted grains and hops.

Alexander Quadt concludes, "For the breweries, this is an important indication that today's marketplace demands a differentiated and individualised product range where consumers should be able to easily recognize which product is best suited to their respective expectations."

The EPP follow-up consumer study "The Taste of German Beers" gives the breweries conclusive customer-close and market-relevant information concerning the German beer market. These data can supplement the classic market and brand analysis, facilitating the various stages of future marketing decisions for German and international breweries.

The study costs € 12,000 (exkl. tax) and can be obtained through

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SAM Sensory and Marketing International is specialized in Quantitative Consumer Research and Sensory Marketing. The group has subsidiaries in Switzerland, Germany, France, Italy and Spain. In Germany SAM Sensory and Marketing is represented by SAM ASAP Sensory and Marketing Germany GmbH in München and Mannheim.

We appreciate receiving a draft copy. Thank you!

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