

New York State Brewers Association

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SCALING UP THE RECIPE: DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVITY IN THE CRAFT BEER INDUSTRY

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David A. Oksenhorn is a senior manager in Accounting Services at Marcum LLP in Long Island. He is an active member of Marcum's Food and Beverage Services Group. In his 13 years of experience, David has advised clients in manufacturing, professional services, and other various industries. He primarily works with closely-held businesses, providing financial statement reporting, tax compliance and planning, and business consulting services.

As an accountant in practice for nearing 20 years (which makes me a “seasoned” veteran, aka “old”), I’ve seen my fair share of tax law and accounting guidance changes

over the years. But what has remained fairly constant is the lack of diversity in my industry. Much like passing through the halls with rows of cubicles and offices that seem to all blend together (or getting off the elevator on the second floor, mistaking it for the nearly identical third floor), the faces occupying these spaces have been very much the same as well.

Fortunately, that is starting to change as Marcum, like the rest of the accounting industry, has made diversity, equity and inclusion a priority for our Firm.

Marcum has created a Firm-wide DEI program with the goal of fostering a culture that is both diverse and inclusive and enables everyone on the team to be successful. This is a tone and theme that many industries are beginning to adopt, not only to correct historic inequities, but in recognition that there's an awful lot of talent out there that they're missing out on.

I am fortunate to work with several clients in the craft beer industry. More than a few of my colleagues are envious, since my client meetings and site visits often as not end with an adult beverage or two! I do consider myself lucky to be involved with the industry and really enjoy hearing my clients' stories about where they came from, where they are going, and how passionate they are about their craft. If you asked me if DEI is something I ever thought about while enjoying one of the said adult beverages at one of these establishments, I'd have to honestly say probably not.

But I recently saw an article from Crain's Cleveland Business discussing how the Brewers Association (national trade organization) had examined 500 randomly selected craft breweries across the country to gauge brewery ownership demographics, with results showing a pretty stark lack of diversity overall. I heard more about DEI in the industry at the New York State Brewers Association Conference and the Brewers Association Craft Brewers Conference, which both touched upon these issues.

Similar to the accounting industry, where I have personally seen a conscious effort being made to open eyes about DEI and make meaningful changes, I heard about how those in the craft beer industry feel about it and what initiatives are being employed to make strides. It got me thinking.

While I enjoy a pint or three at my favorite breweries from time to time, I don't live in that world, so I really don't have first-hand experience in the day-to-day workings of the industry. I decided to go to the source and get a viewpoint from some people I know in my own backyard.

Jason Pazmino, co-founder and owner of Loyal Brands, which produces Gay Beer, a brand designed to speak directly and authentically to diverse consumers, explained to me how failing to direct advertising messaging to those in diverse groups is a key barrier that he sees as a challenge in the industry. He said that “reshaping the narrative around beer is the first barrier to break. This will open welcoming doors for diverse beer lovers to feel represented and feel safe to be a part of the industry, not just taste its products.”

I received a similar message from Chris Inniss, who is the president and co-founder of The Lovibond Project, a nonprofit with the mission of recruiting, supporting and professionally developing People of Color who are traditionally underrepresented among the ranks of craft beer professionals. “For so many people of color, craft beer is not a known entity. It is not a space that has broadly advertised to Black people,” Chris said.

Tara Hankinson, co-founder and co-CEO of TALEA Beer Co., a female-owned brewery, mentioned how the retention of individuals from diverse groups is an issue for the industry and that one way to retain these individuals is for employers to invest in creating a pipeline of talent, “providing opportunities for a career, not just one job.”

Chris from The Lovibond Project echoed Tara’s point. “The industry needs to commit itself to hiring diverse people in roles that actually have room for growth,” he told me. Tara said there are unique challenges that diverse individuals face in leadership roles in the industry. “Our credibility is often challenged since we are not the ‘typical’ operators in our industry – whether it’s a truck driver questioning our ability to drive a forklift or a potential investor questioning our business model,” she said.

To help combat some of these challenges, Chris mentioned some examples of promising programs that are helping to foster more diversity. For instance, the Bronx Brewery has partnered with Beer Kulture and developed an internship in beer production for People of Color. Many of those involved in the program have gone on to work full-time at Bronx Brewery or other craft beer establishments in the NYC area.

Chris sees this as a big step that has led to a new group of staff who are now role models for new interns. “That community helps support and protect new folks in the business, and gets them to want to continue, even when things are difficult. This is a step in the right direction. It is what we at The Lovibond Project hope to achieve in our own internship. We’re building out a community,” Chris said.

My discussions with Jason, Chris and Tara were definitely eye-opening, in the same way

I have observed change starting to happen in my own profession. It has definitely given me more to think about beyond the excellent beer. I'll stay tuned to see what comes next – maybe in the not-too-distant future floor 3 may look a little more unique compared to floor 2.