



HOW THESE BREWERIES USE TAPROOM BUILDOUTS TO FIND NEW GROWTH

Photos Courtesy Dust Bowl & BrewDog

The decision to expand to a new location can be driven by a mix of growth opportunities, along with brand recognition and market strategies. A multifaceted approach is required — from overcoming production constraints to strategically leveraging taprooms as brand-building hubs — many breweries now emphasize the importance of community engagement, regulatory navigation, and a clear alignment with long-term growth philosophies to succeed.

TailGate Brewery has been growing quickly as the Nashville-based company has opened a new taproom — its ninth location now — in Murfreesboro in 2024. That buildout in 2024 was its sixth location to open in just the last two years.



"We've learned that local presence grows our distribution," explained founder Wesley Keegan as the brewery has continued to expand in Middle Tennessee. "Every time we've opened a taproom, our distribution in that area increases about 20% or more. "We are a better resource for our distribution partners and can

service the accounts better. Our goal is to grow distribution — our taprooms enable more of Tennessee to experience us in person, to then continue growing our distribution.

"After 10 years and 9 locations, it's not whether another location is helpful or not. It's: Where is the next one?"





In California, Dust Bowl Brewing started in an industrial condo area in 2009. However, founder Brett Tate explained that they quickly outgrew multiple units within the development, had maxed out production for several years, and were not able to grow their production or distribution.

"When sales were stifled because of lack of space, we knew it was time for a bigger, long-term investment in an infrastructure that would allow us to grow and take advantage of all," Tate said, adding that they purchased acreage in their hometown of Turlock and started building after busting through all the red tape and opened its current 30,000 sq.ft. facility in 2016.

Over the years, Dust Bowl has opened four taprooms with one adjacent to the brewery in Turlock and the other three within two hours of the brewery: Livermore, Elk Grove, and Monterey.

"These taprooms allow us to test market new beer recipes before committing to a package and help us to build brand awareness in key markets," Tate said. "We obviously produce more beer for the taprooms where the margins are more favorable than the three-tier system, and above all, our retail sales are positively impacted in all the areas surrounding our taproom locations."

Tate said the taprooms are a huge undertaking as you're constantly monitoring the experience your staff is providing.







"Quality beer, food, customer service, and an awesome vibe are critical to taprooms working for the brewery and having that residual impact on retail sales in the area," he said.

Over the past 15 months, Brew Dog USA has committed to strengthening its wholesaler partnerships and stewardship of shared business. As part of this effort, said Chief Sales and Marketing Officer Eric Franco, they have recognized the need to evolve the brewery's presence in key geographies, especially in Ohio, with a channel-specific approach.

"This shift is designed to maximize results and build tailored solutions for different classes of trade, responding to emerging trends in the industry," Franco said.

Opening a taproom in a new area gives BrewDog a direct connection with the community and offers a unique, hands-on way for consumers to engage with our brand, he said.

"We see this is especially impactful in travel and leisure spaces, like airports and hotels, where we can create memorable experiences for travelers," Franco pointed out. "Our partnership with the

Mondragón family is also a great example because, with our Denver taproom, we are able to bring our brand to a truly authentic craft marketplace."

Taprooms are critical in building brand awareness, Tate pointed out. "Across our four taprooms, we serve close to one million guests annually. That's a lot of potential retail customers," he said. "With the opening of each taproom, we have experienced significant growth on the retail side.

"Our wholesalers are always asking for more taprooms in their areas. Our marketing team works very closely with taproom management to ensure strategic alignment on new beers and branding initiatives."

Community engagement is not just an afterthought — it is integral to the business strategy. Whether through charitable initiatives, collaborations, or direct partnerships, there are efforts created that extra taprooms become more than just places to drink beer; they become valued parts of the community fabric.

Aligning with community values strengthens brand awareness and fosters goodwill in the neighborhoods surrounding Dust Bowl's taprooms.

"Building relationships has proven to build our business from Day 1," Tate said. "Our marketing team works closely with organizations that help promote local business and drive tourism. We also support local goodwill causes through our Community Stewardship Program, which allows us to contribute to auctions and events."

At BrewDog USA, community engagement is equally prioritized, with a focus also on creating memorable guest experiences.

"We view our retail locations as 'lighthouses' in their communities," said Anne Wiseman, the brewery's finance and operations executive. Wiseman added that BrewDog's partnership with local businesses helps align retail offerings with community preferences while ensuring their presence resonates beyond the brewery walls.

"Our partnerships and outreach are essential because they integrate our new locations into the community and establish a solid support network," she said.

Keegan underscored the importance of participating locally to strengthen ties and build credibility by hosting community events as much as possible and supporting every initiative they can. TailGate even collaborated with local breweries to commemorate the opening of its eighth taproom.

"When we can highlight the local cookie shop with a collab beer, for example, that's good for both of us," he said.

Despite regulatory hurdles, each brewery remains committed to growth, turning challenges into opportunities for innovation. Expanding often brings challenges that require careful navigation.

"It's an overwhelming part of our business," Tate said. "Each city has different requirements, and navigating alcohol licensing and permits adds layers of complexity."

Yet, the importance of meticulous planning and partnering with experienced professionals to ensure smooth expansions is key.

Every new location comes with a unique set of challenges, Wiseman said about BrewDog's expansions.

"Understanding the rules of the game early is crucial to staying on track," Wiseman said.

She added that BrewDog mitigates risks by maintaining strong relationships with local governments and hiring regulatory experts.

"For us, the biggest challenge is the local municipality or city government," Keegan said. "Some of our area is split up by county or township. So all those great relationships we made with Nashville

metro? It didn't mean a thing when we went to some areas 30-45 minutes out of town." "What did matter? Our reputation. Our ability to speak the language of city codes. And the immediate effort we make to make relationships. I'll call the mayor, and city council, and visit the Codes offices and say, 'Hi, we want to play by the rules, and pay our taxes, can you help please?' It goes a really long way."

Keegan believes the long-term plans are to stay the course and continue opening brewery/taprooms for TailGate.

"We're a Tennessee-only brewery, with zero taprooms in East or West Tennessee. And even then, I think there's a lot of fresh markets for us to expand to. Tennessee is a big state," he said. "Our business plan is to be 'The Best Brewery in Tennessee.'"

"Everything we do is to try and make that happen. If opening another taproom furthers that goal, we'll do it. If it doesn't, we don't."

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