

Beer Growth initiative's 'Beers to That' Campaign Launches in Austin

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After about four years of discussion, the stalled effort to launch a brand agnostic, pro-beer marketing campaign to improve category health officially kicked off today in Austin, Texas.

The so-called Beer Growth Initiative, a coalition of the industry's three trade groups — the National Beer Wholesalers Association (NBWA), Brewers Association (BA) and Beer Institute (BI) — as well as large and small beer companies also revealed its first slogan: "Beers to That."

Brewers Association senior vice president Paul Gatza told Brewbound that the goal of the Beers to That campaign is to reach a broad audience and showcase beer as part of "a fun lifestyle." The initial campaign, however, won't take on other alcoholic beverages, such as wine and spirits, which have taken marketshare from beer in recent years.

"Right now, it's about trying to project beer as a fun, interesting part of vibrant lifestyles," Gatza said, while targeting a younger legal-drinking-age consumers in the market with imagery that "resonates locally."

Announced a year ago during the NBWA's annual convention, the Beer Growth Initiative was hailed as a way to reverse beer's loss of market share to wine and spirits. Over the last two decades, the

beer industry has ceded billions of servings to wine and spirits, while its biggest brands — Bud Light, Budweiser, Miller Lite and Coors Light — have lost volume.

The future of the initiative was called into question earlier this year after MillerCoors backed out of meetings following Anheuser-Busch's "no corn syrup" Super Bowl ads and subsequent transparency campaign. During the trade organization's annual meeting in June, BI president and CEO Jim McGreevy announced that the Beer Growth Initiative would finally launch this summer.

In a note to BI members this morning, McGreevy said the first phase of the campaign — which includes digital advertising, a consumer-facing website, experiential events, point-of-sale items and billboards, as well as four "Beers to That" murals painted by local artists in Austin — will run through December 10.

Speaking to Brewbound, McGreevy said the three-month window will give the group time to see which activations worked and gather takeaways for potential launches in other markets.

"We thought Austin had a good mix of the kinds of folks that we're trying to go after to celebrate drinking beer," he said.

Gatza added that launching in a single market will allow the group to see what works and if the campaign can "turn on an area to embracing beer in a different way than they've been embracing it."

About 250 people attended a launch event Tuesday night, McGreevy said. Many took selfies with beer and photographed beer and food pairings.

"There was a lot of energy in the room," he said.

Alcohol consulting firm Tamarron Consulting is managing the effort, while advertising agency Motive is leading the creative direction. The Beers to That campaign will lean on social media influencers in the Austin market to help spread the message, McGreevy said. The group is also partnering with Boston-headquartered on-demand alcohol delivery company Drizly, which has created a Beers to That landing page for the Austin market in which consumers can learn more about beer and purchase product.

Austin Beerworks and Austin Eastciders are among the local craft beer and cider makers taking part in the effort, as are beer wholesalers Ben E. Keith, Capitol Wright Distributing and Brown Distributing. The group is also working with grocery chain H-E-B, which is incorporating point-of-sale materials within its stores.

"The Beer Growth Initiative is exciting because for the first time distributors and brewers, as well as competitors, are working together to grow the overall beer category," NBWA president and CEO Craig Purser said in a press release.

At this point, Gatza said there is not a “guiding manifesto behind what” the effort is trying to do other than “help the beer category get back to a healthier state.”

Asked if hard seltzer would be included in the campaign, McGreevy said they are “fair game” and the campaign could potentially incorporate other alcoholic beverages being produced by beer companies.

A-B, Constellation Brands, Boston Beer Company, the BA and NBWA are among those who have pledged funding for the campaign. The BA’s contribution “is not as much” as it had originally planned, but the trade group believes the effort can benefit small and independent craft brewers, Gatza said.

“It’s good to play nice with the industry,” he added.