

Brewery Equipment Selection

Brewery & Production Planning 101 – Part 2

by Derek Wasak, Plato Brewing & Consulting

Equipment Selection is an extension of your Brewery's capacity planning efforts. It is one of the most important components of any start up brewery business. For more information on initial brewery capacity planning, [check out my previous article on the subject here](#). Not only does brewery equipment selection tie into your capacity and multiyear growth planning, it is an opportunity to identify the best equipment vs functionality while leveraging that against the price you will ultimately pay for it. Here are some of the most important considerations to keep in mind while selecting equipment for your brewery:

- **Sales and Production Goals established during initial Capacity Planning**

What beers will you brew and what are their brewing process needs? What is your average beer residency time? Finally, how many barrels of beer do you want to sell/produce on average for your first 3 years in business?

These are the main criteria you will need to consider when selecting your large equipment. The answers to these questions will dictate your brewhouse and tank sizes, quantity of tanks, and specialty process needs (e.g.: filtration, centrifuge, yeast propagation vessels, etc.). It may take some math to get to, but nothing is worse than not having the equipment or space to brew the beer you plan to sell! You also don't want to have to constantly brew small volumes to keep up with your tasting room sales rate. Planning ahead to grow into your equipment is important, but planning too far ahead may leave you with unused capacity and wasted equipment/space or excess overhead to maintain.

- **What packaging formats will you be selling your products in?**

While many brewery owners have a vision for how they want to sell their beer in kegs, cans, bottles, etc. it is very important to understand the back end needs and costs of offering your product in different formats. It is safe to say that every brewery will offer their beer in kegs for sale both in their own taproom on draft as well as bar/restaurant local distribution. However, the decision to package beer in a can or bottle and distribute it should not be taken lightly.

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Packaging equipment and processing adds substantial cost, time, and space requirements to the entire process of construction as well as brewing and distribution efforts. It is very important to know what you are getting yourself into in this regard. It should not be done simply because of the perception: “that’s what all successful breweries do”. It is important to fully understand the space and equipment needs for your packaging plans. Going into this or other large scale initiatives blind puts your brewery and business at a disadvantage from the start. This can lead to a large amount of capital being tied up or used inefficiently when it matters most – during your brewery start up process.

- **Brewery and Warehouse space availability**

The other major item to take into consideration is the space you have in your brewery to place all this equipment! If you have already picked a location, signed a lease, and are just now getting to this point then you are already restricted to the space available, so this may be the most important consideration to start with. Ideally, you have gone through these capacity planning and equipment selection exercises well in advance and know the square footage you will need to accommodate the brewery and tasting room goals that are included in your business growth plan.

When thinking of space needs for your brewery, large brewhouse and tanks should be the initial factor to consider. However, equally important is working space, support equipment (e.g.: mill, grist case, filters, forklift, packaging materials, etc.), and storage space for both finished product (cold box) and raw materials to make it all. You should also reserve some space for administrative work and storage of files for your Head Brewer and Tasting Room manager. It is possible to operate without these things, but generally efficiency is hurt where corners are cut.

While these are some of the most important considerations when selecting your equipment and beginning to design your brewery, there are countless other items to be mindful of throughout the construction, commissioning, and eventually operation of your brewery and tasting room. It is possible to select and design your brewery and tasting room space yourself, but it is highly recommended to have a professional on your side during this process.

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A brewery consultant can help you avoid common pitfalls, ensure you have the equipment you need to accomplish your business goals, and ultimately save you thousands of dollars in costs of equipment through experience and vendor relationships. Understanding these key considerations is only the tip of the iceberg when planning your brewery equipment and space.



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Derek is a graduate of the Siebel Institute/World Brewing Academy and has been a professional brewer specializing in Production and Operations Management since 2009. He is an expert in all things brewing from grain to glass as well as brewery planning, forecasting, budgeting, and construction. He founded Plato Brewing and Consulting Inc. in 2019 to share his knowledge and experience.