

Ales and Stouts - UK - May 2010

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What is this report about?

The ale/stout market has been adversely affected by its over-reliance on pubs' revenues, as the long-term decline of pubs peaked in 2009, when economic problems caused a record number of pub closures. The market needs to increase its share of the growing off-trade market, something which the increasing popularity of bottled ale/stout should help it to achieve.

It is not all doom and gloom for the sector though. There has been a renaissance in cask ale, which is attracting a younger consumer to a traditionally 'old man's' category and has helped falling sales of ale slow dramatically in 2009, and actually increase its share of beer sales at the expense of lager.

The stout market is dominated by Guinness, and while it has held up better than ale over the past five years, unlike ale it is failing to attract new users into the category.

What have we found out?

- The steady decline of the ales/stout market has worsened over the past decade. In 1998, these darker beers accounted for 40% of all beer volume sales in the UK, but just ten years later this had slipped to 25%.
- Key to the demise of ales & stouts has been the rise in popularity of lager. Younger men have been attracted to being served a cold and refreshing drink, rather than the more complex taste of ales/stout.
- Brewers have failed to change a common misconception that ale is at its best when served cool rather than at room temperature, albeit not cold which would mean it losing much of its distinctive flavour.
- A new generation of younger beer drinkers are starting to appreciate colder ale, which is helping propel sales of cask ale. This type of ale has more of a unique flavour than standardised brands.
- Both the ale and stout markets have suffered from an over-reliance on pub revenues which are also experiencing decline: a record number of pubs went out of business in 2009.
- The success of cask ale has been instrumental in slowing the decline of ale. Between 2005 and 2008, on-trade volume sales of ale fell by 23%. But in 2009 ale out-performed lager, slowing its decline to a more respectable 4.8%.

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