



BSA BULLETIN



Trade news, insight and comment from
the Beverage Standards Association

No. 1 September 2019

The public
doesn't like
our tea!

The BSA highlights
a big problem

There is more than meets the eye to the BSA's support of the UK Tea Brewers' Championships, the first heat of which was held at our recent pop-up show. In this contest, the contenders had to prepare three classic teas – but the real purpose of our interest is to concentrate the trade's attention on the problems facing tea in the out-of-home sector... because all recent research suggests that the public does not like what we serve up.

It is well known that most tea is consumed at home, and that tea does not win cafes anything like the business they get with coffee. Several surveys in the recent past have confirmed this to an uncomfortable degree, and one has said that forty per cent of consumers were dissatisfied with the last tea they were served in a cafe, restaurant or hotel. More or less the same figure said that catering tea is not as good as they can make at home, and thirteen per cent said that out-of-home tea is 'much worse' than they make for themselves.

And yet, thirty per cent of consumers say that they would drink tea out-of-home if they could be sure of the quality of it, and a majority say they would be prepared to pay 20p or more above the estimated average price of just under two pounds a cup for standard 'cuppa' black tea. And research by Mintel says that 37 per cent of 25-34 year-olds now drink five or six different kinds of tea a month – that sounds high, but if it is true, then it consumer interest is there. What we have to do is show that we have something to offer that justifies our price.

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Welcome to the Bulletin, a new initiative from the BSA.

Our market is ever-changing – every day brings new ideas, new topics, issues, products and services, and all of us have to keep on top of what is happening.

The BSA has developed a remarkable expertise in recent years; through this project we aim to bring you a regular selection of trade news and issues as they crop up, with comments and observations from BSA experts as to how we might approach issues that arise.

This is another example of the Association working to provide the trade with useful information and food for thought.

Hope you find it useful and enjoyable.

- Steve Slark, Chairman.

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In the recent contest, the contestants were required to prepare three classic teas, a black, an oolong and a sencha. Just a few years ago, the average cafe operator would never have heard of two of them!

"They went down a treat with the judges," remarked a BSA spokesman. "We hope this will inspire more thought about the serving of tea in general across the out-of-home sector, because we cannot afford to take tea business for granted. Although it is assumed to be part of the British culture, we have forgotten how to make a cup of tea!

"We have to spend time developing a distinctive tea menu, which must include a standard English Breakfast, and we must spend time talking with our staffs about 'selling' the service of tea. This will help us offer something that customers are likely to pay for."

Tea purists still say that only leaf tea is good enough, and that teabags are always wrong in a catering context. Not so, says the BSA.

"There is nothing wrong with a good tea in a good bag. A nice teapot with a recognisably top-quality teabag label visible is perfectly fine, if you are making a point of saying that this is a very good tea you have selected to serve.

"But whatever you do, don't serve tea in a mug with a cheap teabag string hanging over the side. We have seen that quite recently in 'artisan' coffee houses... and that is how you lose tea business."

Online reviews – be ready to fight back, says the BSA

A lot has been reported in recent years about the effect of adverse café reviews on Trip Advisor and similar review websites – and several traders have decided to fight back by replying to negative reviews.

The latest is a café in Liverpool, which was savaged in a review by a customer who claimed that the café staff "refused point-blank" to allow the customer and their children to use the toilet facilities. The café owner did not take the criticism quietly, and opted for a direct response, saying that: "we are very accommodating to the use of our toilet facilities to non-customers who check in with us at reception.

"On this occasion we had a large number of unsupervised school children running in and out filling balloons and water pistols, which caused a safety issue with wet floors. Due to this we stopped unsupervised children from entering the building. If the supervisors of the children had asked if they could use our facilities, we would have obliged, if they were being monitored by their adults and staff."

The complainer retracted their complaint.

Another coffee house which has retaliated to a Trip Advisor complaint is in Cardiff, where a customer complained that seeing an LGBT sandwich on the menu amounted to 'sexualising' their food, which made them "not feel like eating". The sandwich is essentially a BLT with guacamole, hence the name; however, 50p from each sale does go to Stonewall, the gay rights charity. The café owner remarked that he had considered responding by creating a Bigot Burger, but told the Welsh media: "it's ridiculous – it's only a bloody sandwich! We don't sell a million of them, but I think it's still necessary to respond."

The BSA has repeated that whether or not you are a regular visitor to social media or review sites, it is essential to monitor what people may be saying about you. Some of this may be deliberately malicious, some may be honest criticism, but it must all be monitored and thought about.

"Trip Advisor can be helpful, but it is too easily hi-jacked," remarks a BSA



This is wonderful, isn't it? We are obliged to the Leicester Mercury for this pic of the new tea vending machine at the town's Odeon cinema in 1962. The staged photo had been set up by the cinema's management because some of the older clientele didn't trust such a new-fangled idea! The machine offered tea with or without sugar, but appears to have no option for milk... it was probably all taken white in those days.

A curious tea has cropped up at an American café – it is Asian Cheese Tea, and the management of a New York café say that millions of people already drink it in parts of Asia. It's not a slice of cheddar, said a local food writer - it's a topping, like a cappuccino foam with a rich, thick, tangy flavour. It can be made with cream cheese and milk, and used to top green teas, oolongs and fruit infusions.

A food writer who reports finding it also in a bubble-tea café in London suggests that the topping is "a velvety, mascarpone-like foam that has been whisked with sugar and salt before being floated on to your tea – the whole thing looks not dissimilar to a pint of beer.

"You tilt your glass and slurp a thick mouthful of sweet whipped cheese before the bitter taste of tea comes through a second later. The experience evolves as you drink and the ratio of tea to cheese changes."

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director. "It is also too quickly used to determine whether a venue is worth a visit, which is why criticism is dangerous. A quick response is desirable, though that is very different from a hasty one – take time to reflect on whether any criticism was at all justified, but then get your considered response online as soon as possible.

"A constructive, measured response is best – not the generic 'we'll follow this up and hope you enjoy your next visit', which we often see. That is not good enough. A measured response which shows that you have thought about what the reviewer said will do a lot to counter future visitors' views on any negative feedback that they see from others."

New ideas in coffee - are they all really new?

Several new ideas have been claimed by coffee suppliers in recent weeks – but they may not all be as new as the suppliers suggest. Typically, Taylors of Harrogate has had a lot to say about its new coffee bags – but so has Nescafe Azera, and so has Paddy and Scott's, who say their 'brew bags' will revolutionise the making of coffee.

There are so many brands claiming coffee bags as a new idea that that the Telegraph even published a 'taste test' of six of them! The paper quoted Nescafe as calling its product 'a significant new coffee invention – as game-changing as the tea bag was', and quoted Taylors as calling its product 'a genius invention'.

Rather oddly, the paper's taste tests missed out the Paddy and Scotts product, and nobody seems to have noticed that Cafe du Monde has been producing the product for upmarket hotel bedroom use for years; it has also been suggested that Lyons invented the concept many years back.

One BSA observer has noted the old professional purchasing maxim that there is such a thing as 'a product whose time has come' – that is, something which didn't set the world alight on its first appearance may do so the next time round, so it is always dangerous to say 'oh yes, I've seen that before'.

Meanwhile, the Notes coffee house chain and roastery has launched what it calls a 'first' for a British operator – a speciality single origin instant coffee. Notes is using a coffee by Voila, a roaster from Oregon, which has been working on the concept of 'speciality instant coffee' for some years now.

Its founder, a coffee cart operator, had a lightbulb moment when trying to plan a coffee subscription offer – he realised that every other subscription deal offers 'great coffee' to coffee fanatics, but does not target the general public.

He decided to create a 'great instant coffee' for those who can't be bothered to spend time brewing properly; and says: "someone who's never had speciality coffee can now start by enjoying a delicious cup."



Paddy & Scotts' coffee 'brew-bag'



The Notes/Voila speciality instant coffee



The TV drama Game of Thrones has been widely laughed at over a coffee-cup blunder which occurred in an episode of the show's final season. The effect of a dramatic scene featuring the character Daenerys Targaryen was somewhat lessened by the appearance of a takeaway cup on the table in front of her. The show's producers have protested that the matter has been 'blown up out of all proportion' and that such a mistake has not happened before... but it has. In the very last episode, a plastic mineral water bottle was seen in shot behind one character!

A prestige endorsement is always a wonderful thing... and San Francisco's Buena Vista cafe got a shout out from rock star Mick Jagger during a show in the city last month. The rocker told fans to stop in for an Irish Coffee at the historic bar; the cafe manager was in the audience, and posted the story on the cafe's Facebook page, where it went viral.

The Buena Vista has a reputation for the drink – and after the Stones' endorsement they sold 2,000 the next lunchtime. The manager said, with some understatement, "that's pretty good for a Monday afternoon..." At ten dollars a time, it's decent business!

Are we serving coffee at the right temperature?

Research by scientists in Texas has concluded that the vast majority of coffee served in catering outlets is too hot. A report in the Journal of Food Science suggests that typical serving temperatures are far hotter than what coffee drinkers actually like.

A brief summary of the findings suggests that certain chain cafes have a policy of serving coffee at between 176-194F (80-90C) and six studies conducted over the past twenty years have found more or less the same. However, say the researchers, studies measuring customers' preferences all show that they want their coffee between 135-162F, and so there is a recommendation that a range of service temperatures from 130-160F would be safer, more acceptable, and more energy-efficient.

Is this just an American phenomenon? Perhaps not – in one recent case here, a customer in a hurry objected that his latte was far too hot to drink comfortably, to which the cafe owner retorted that as they used a milk-jug thermometer, their temperature had to be correct.

"This is a topic which still pops up every day," remarks the BSA's training director. "Because of the quantity of instant coffee which is made at home with boiling water, consumers have come to believe that coffee will be too hot and habitually leave it to cool. As a result, even when baristas serve a perfect-temperature coffee, you see customers leaving it to cool!"

One drink which does present a temperature problem, say trainers, is the Americano – "this is often made by using the water which has been sitting inside the boiler which houses both water and steam. You know this because of the way it leaps ferociously out of the tap! The end drink is far too hot to savour."

Guidance from BSA trainers includes the extremely simple yet practical advice of making sure that staff regularly sample the drinks they serve... during every shift!

(A few years ago, the footballer David Beckham was quoted as saying that every day, he went to one of the biggest coffee chains for a vanilla latte, 'extra hot'. A senior member of the coffee trade was asked what he thought of this, and replied: "well, he's already ruined it twice – once by going to that chain, and once by having a flavour in it. After that, it doesn't really matter how hot it is!")

Betty's reaches 100

Probably the most famous tea-room business in Britain, Bettys, has celebrated its centenary. The chain opened on July 17, 1919, at Cambridge Crescent, Harrogate, just opposite the current site, and although the business is often held up as an example of a typical English tea-room, it is in fact of Swiss heritage.

The chain was opened by Fritz Bützer, who left his home in Switzerland in 1907 to travel to England, where he changed his name to the more local-sounding Frederick Belmont, and apparently forgot where he was supposed to be going... one story says that he only remembered that the destination sounded like 'bratwurst', so he got a train to the place that sounded most like it - Bradford.

He got a job there with a Swiss confectioner, married a girl from a well-off family, who backed his bakery and tea-room venture. In the 1960s, his company acquired Taylors of Harrogate, blenders of Yorkshire Tea. The company has appeared in the Sunday Times list of "the 100 best companies to work for".

(The origin of the Bettys name is unknown - and so is their reason for not having an apostrophe before the letter 's' !)

Handling the unexpected...

There is a bizarre aspect to the latest story about disruptive customers being thrown out of a coffee-house.

We have heard all the stories about loud children, dogs and nursing mothers being asked to leave, but now Starbucks staff at a site in Boston, USA, have ejected a team of six police officers – because another customer said the officers' presence made them feel unsafe!

Although Starbucks apologised and said that the incident was 'completely unacceptable', a spokesman for the chain also added that his barista had been placed in an impossible situation: when the other customer complained, the barista attempted to politely move the police to a position out of the complainer's line of vision, but the officers chose to leave instead.

The BSA has recalled what the great hotelier Kit Chapman, who ran the Castle in Taunton, wrote in his book *An Innkeeper's Diary*: he said that no matter how well you try to train your staff to cope with all predictable situations, you simply do not know what they may say in an odd situation when you are not around to sort it out.

It has been wisely recommended that a greater use of pre-shift and post-shift catch-up sessions between staff and management often helps: when someone says 'do you know what happened in the cafe yesterday?', there can be very useful resulting debate.

The International Coffee Organisation has said that International Coffee Day will be on 1st October and its theme will be 'a coffee pledge', to encourage the public to campaign for a living wage for coffee farmers. The ICO has suggested that some farmers receive one-hundredth of the retail price of a cup of coffee.

What's on your saucer?

The online commentators have been having great fun with the story that Marks and Spencer has decided to stop giving a free biscuit with its café beverages – and that the chain has claimed it is trying to cut down on food waste! The department store is reported to have justified the decision by saying that too many people threw their biscuits in the bin. When faced with the criticisms, M&S said that a free biscuit is still available, but customers have to ask for it.

The matter of a free saucerside treat has been a fraught subject in the café trade for years – café owners are caught between offering an 'industry standard' caramelised biscuit, which is economical but runs the risk of their business looking unimaginative, or the alternative of looking for an imaginative and characterful saucerside treat which will make their business stand out, but which will cut into profit. In recent years, some of the classier artisan coffee houses have experimented with a piece of fudge or even a piece of fruit beside a coffee, and one company in the midlands did import a whole range of such treats from Holland, but met with little enthusiasm from café owners.

The BSA has remarked that this is an essential but difficult area – if a café owner does not give a treat on the saucer, they are seen as penny-pinching, and if they use one of the standard mass-produced biscuits, they are seen as unimaginative!

Veganuary, the organisation campaigning for people to give up meat and dairy, has taken aim at certain high street coffee chains for profiteering from non-dairy milks. On World Plant Milk Day (August 22) the vegans claimed that certain coffee chains impose a surcharge of up to 50p for soya, oat, almond, or coconut milks. Veganuary said soya milk is free of surcharge in some chain cafes, yet even those cafes have put an extra charge on the other milks.

A petition on the matter by the PETA animal rights organisation has already won 50,000 signatures. The owner of a vegan coffee house in Plymouth has said that in her experience, absorbing the cost of non-dairy milks was minimal compared to the extra trade she won.

BSA director Angus McKenzie recently raised another aspect of the milk issue: he said "why has no plant milk eco-warrior created foodservice milk packaging larger than one-litre cartons? It's madness! And more cafes could reduce plastic milk bottle use - there are already many cafes who have gone bottle-free."

Trades descriptions rules can sometimes be useful and sometimes a pain, but we do rather enjoy this one: a vegan café in Canada has refused to comply with an order by the country's trading authorities order to stop using the terms 'cheese' on her menu – even though the 'cheese' is not made from a dairy product.

The café labels its product as '100 percent Cheddar cheese', though it is made by fermenting almond or cashew milk and thickening it. Other nut cheeses on the menu are labelled 'cashew mozzarella', 'cashew parmesan' and 'almond feta'. The authorities suggested that the owner use the terms 'mozzarella style' or 'cheese alternative', but she refused on the grounds that "the word 'alternative' makes the items sound less appetising than they really are."

Meanwhile, in the midlands, a café owner ended up in court for breaching health and safety regulations, in a strange case which saw the prosecution allege that the only way to get to the first-floor toilet was by climbing up some steps that were deemed unsafe, and then climbing onto and walking across a sloped roof. The roof was said to be in a poor state, was sloping and slippery, had no edge or fall protection, and could not be demonstrated as being strong enough to take the weight of a person.

The first case against him for this was brought in 2011! This year, they finally got him, and he was fined £975.



One of the more entertaining features of the American coffee trade is the remarkable number of 'bikini barista' businesses – which are, quite literally, coffee bars staffed by scantily-clad girls.

Not surprisingly, a high number of court cases arise from complaints about this. Now a court in Seattle, the centre of Starbucks' coffee universe, has ruled that bikini baristas 'must be protected from themselves'. An appeal court has overturned a previous ruling on the matter, and says that 'bikini baristas' must now wear at least a tank-top and shorts, which rather ruins the point of the business.

The hearing follows a case brought by the owner of Hillbilly Hotties, a bikini barista chain, and seven female employees who argued that they were sending a message of female empowerment and confidence by working nearly naked. "The baristas are seeking to exercise their right to choose their work clothing," said their lawyer. "The baristas sought to express positive messages of body confidence and female empowerment."

Apparently with straight faces, the appeal judges replied that "any message of female empowerment the women intended to send would probably be lost on their male customers."

A Leeds coffee shop has created a charity doughnut in support of migrant and refugee families torn apart in camps in the United States. The 'Have Heart' doughnut is named after the Massachusetts punk band who are notably outspoken on the issue of refugees; the coffee shop created a Boston cream pie doughnut in tribute to the band, and will give the proceeds to UNICEF. The doughnut bears a logo saying: "separating migrant children from their families is a human rights violation." It is not the café's first doughnut publicity – they made one earlier this year with TV presenter Piers Morgan's face, following his on-screen rant about Greggs offering vegan sausage rolls. Proceeds again went to charity.

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Meanwhile Greggs, which credited its active move into coffee as the big force behind its massive growth of recent years, is to launch a hundred new stores, and says its big new star is... that vegan sausage roll. Rather oddly, the chief executive has been quoted saying: "the product has remained extremely popular with customers and is now one of our top sellers, demonstrating the demand for greater dietary choice in food-on-the-go." Odd, because a concurrent story elsewhere tells how a man ate nothing but Greggs takeaways for six weeks - and managed to lose two stones.

The chain also says that its concept of 'breakfast on the go' has performed very well, and Greggs is also opening its first drive-thru. One daily paper's website showed the video of it with the dry comment: 'try not to get too excited...'

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One of the most regular café stories in the south-west has surfaced again in their local press - a Devon-based café has received a torrent of criticism for producing a new menu with illustrations of its cream teas. However, it showed a scone with jam spread directly on the scone with cream on top... and that is the Cornish way of doing it. Devonians serve scones with the cream first, then jam on top. Faced with a torrent of complaints, the café in Tavistock decided, perhaps wisely, to avoid making any comment.

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The latest development of the crowdfunding strategy is credited with saving a coffee business in Bethnal Green, London. A coffee vendor had been trading outside the local tube station for twenty years, until he was forced to close his stand. More than 4,000 people signed a petition supporting him, and although he was eventually granted permission to stay in place, the trader had in the meantime had to sell his van and equipment. In support, his customers launched a crowdfunding project, and 300 of them donated a total of more than £10,000 to equip his new coffee stand.

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The trend for in-house barista contests continues - and now Waitrose, the company which caused a nationwide storm a few years ago when it began offering free coffee to its customers, leading to severe problems for neighbouring coffee houses, has now crowned its own barista champion. The winner is Szabina Azalma, who works at a Canary Wharf store. She wins a trip to the Milan Coffee Festival. It has been suggested that barista contests, which were probably at their peak ten years ago, have recently seen declining interest and competitor numbers; the exception may be in-house contests such as the Waitrose one, which drew 250 entrants.

There has been a wonderful row in America over the launch of the first cannabis café in Hollywood, of all places.

When plans for the cafe were approved unanimously by the city authorities, the café founder declared it 'the end of prohibition in America'.

However, Rabbi Denise Eger, who leads a gay-friendly reform synagogue across the street, has complained that some of her congregation are involved in drug-recovery programmes, and could receive a 'contact high' on their way to her services.

She said: "I don't know why my congregation members and participants have to walk through clouds of marijuana to get to synagogue." The café responded by promising to encircle their business with 'fragrant and odour-absorbing' plants.

Meanwhile, Brand Botanic Lab has launched the UK's first cannabidiol tea. It is called Dutch Courage, and features sour cherry, floral hibiscus and botanical hemp which comes from the cannabis sativa plant, and has been reported as having medicinal benefits - but it won't get you high.

Scotland's first cannabis oil cafe is set to open in Stirling; it will offer drinks laced with CBD oil, which is said to help reduce stress and anxiety, inflammation, pain relief and is believed to promote restful sleep. The Hemp Room Café is to be opened by someone who says that her own back pain was considerably eased by the use of 'medicinal cannabis'. Other advocates have said that "CBD lattes are a great way to take the oil; it's a tasty way to improve mental clarity, reduce anxiety, and keep alert and awake. It's no wonder that it's such a trend."



The Bulletin is published by the Beverage Standards Association
www.beveragestandardsassociation.co.uk 07944 161785
admin@beveragestandardsassociation.co.uk

The BSA has created this Bulletin in partnership with the beverage trade writer
 Scoop Malone. scoopmalone@hotmail.co.uk