

# Czech Republic brewers trying 'brand imaging'

Alex Friedrich  
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PRAGUE, Czech Republic — If there's one thing that has united Czechs, it's their love for the common beer.

But an imported advertising technique soon may divide the country. Major Czech breweries are importing Western "brand imaging" techniques to redefine beers and cement a position in the market.

Soon the average Czech will be able choose an image — rocker, cowboy, yuppie, connoisseur — just through a brew.

In an increasingly competitive market, breweries "have to start concentrating on emotional benefits" of their beers, says Miroslav Tomka, marketing manager at Prague-based Prazske brewery. "You have to have a clear story to tell about your particular brand."

The Czech beer industry has relied on hometown loyalty for customers. Weak distribution long limited drinkers to local or regional brews. Imports have always been negligible.

But the free market is transforming the Czech beer industry and executives such as Tomka face higher costs, stagnating consumption and similar-tasting brews available throughout the country.

That's why his Staropramen, one of the nation's most well-known beers, will shed its blue-collar image next month and "upgrade to the middle class."

Ads will depict the average Staropramen drinker as a confident 24- to 45-year-old male urban office worker with a car, secondary education and average income.

Next month the brewery will also launch Velvet, aimed at connoisseurs, artists and power executives. Its Vratislav beer will try to

attract outdoor types; Branik wants to lure country fans; Mestan beer will target young, hip rockers.

Prazske, which has received marketing guidance from its owner, Britain's Bass, isn't alone. Breweries such as Jihoceske and Plzensky Prazdroj also are developing their own drinker types.

Plzensky Prazdroj is marketing its world-famous Pilsner Urquell as its brand for elites, while keeping the rest of its brands downscale.

Iain Loe, research manager for the U.K.-based Campaign for Real Ale, a grass-roots lobbying group for beer purists, says such a technique "sounds negative. It's likely to put people off."

But a highly sophisticated form of brand imaging has long worked for Austria's largest brewer, Brau AG. Its slick annual reports show almost a dozen different people, from bespectacled intellectuals to sporty pensioners, each holding their own niche beer.

Whereas the Austrian club scene is conducive to brand imaging, Czech pubs will need to change if the technique is to ever work.

Brau supplies beers to bars frequented by target groups, but the Czech pub scene isn't as diverse. Breweries will need to push hard to encourage the creation of niche pubs for their beers.

It has already taken Western guidance and millions of dollars to transform the Czechs' one-size-fits-all communist-era advertising.

"We weren't used to having brands in this country," says Jiri Mikes, executive director of the Association of Advertising Agencies.

Promotion of brands "is one of the biggest advertising changes since the revolution ... and now we're adapting them to our own tradition."