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Young Lion Brewery: Leveraging Female Leadership?

Standing next to the keg of beer on the floor being served from a jockey box at the Landmark Theatre, Jennifer Newman, CEO and co-owner of Young Lion Brewing Company (YLBC), was one of only a few women at the 2018 Syracuse (N.Y.) Beer Festival. Hundreds of beer connoisseurs and craft beer fans had paid the \$25 entry fee to receive a 5-ounce beer glass and the chance to sample and learn about 200 different craft beers. The air smelled slightly of hops, and the atmosphere was jovial as brewers and their customers socialized.

Wearing a quarter-zip YLBC-logoed sweatshirt and jeans—the craft beer uniform—Newman stood next to one of her sales reps, a six-foot-two bearded man, pouring samples and chatting with attendees. Inevitably, people tasting YLBC’s beer would turn to him to ask, “So, is this your brewery?” And, just as inevitably, he would raise his hands as if surrendering and to say, “Whoa, nope, not mine—hers. Let me introduce Jen Newman, the CEO.”

What struck Newman was that no one asked her first.

Toward the end of 2020, little had changed in that regard, and Newman wondered about making some major changes in marketing. Should YLBC leverage the fact that the company was 75 percent woman-owned and woman-managed? Should the company go all in on niche-marketing itself as a craft beer for women? Or, would it be more innovative and profitable to highlight her role as a rare female leader among all the beer-making lads?

Newman’s Path to the Beer Business

After college graduation, Newman had worked as a business analyst at PwC, Scholastic, and elsewhere, gaining valuable training in corporate strategy, business management, and marketing. In 1998, she co-founded three software start-ups and assisted in selling them. By 2011, she was at a point where she could pursue her passion: craft beer.

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