

How to be cellar smart

Adam Withrington looks at a company looking to give Brulines a run for its money

THE OFFICES of Smartcellar are not exactly auspicious – a first floor space in an industrial estate in Didcot.

Take a step inside and it is a strange clash of styles, open plan office, smart meeting rooms, coupled with hi-tech design workshops next door. The two brains behind Smartcellar, Jolyon Tidmarsh and Mike Lawton, are proud of the design capability on-site. "Our technology is all designed in-house. Many of our competitors' systems are off-the-shelf. That gives us a big advantage," Jolyon says.

Advantageous position

But it is a company with a unique opportunity in the pub business. After all, it is aiming to take on Brulines in the quality monitoring game and from a PR perspective it is in an advantageous position.

Brulines has, for whatever reason, become known as the "spy in the cellar" by pub tenants and managers alike. Whatever the reality of the situation is, licensees see Brulines as in cahoots with big pubcos.

It is a perception Jolyon and Mike wish to avoid for their business. And they believe they can – mainly they say because the system offers business guidance for all stakeholders in the business, from head office, to area managers to licensees.

Jolyon says: "We want to take a lot of the tedium involved in quality control away from the licensee, so they can focus on customer experience. At the moment, licensees in the UK are facilities managers as well as retailers. They shouldn't have to be both."



The equipment can measure volume, temperature, type of fluid and flowrate and this data is then sent to a central server

The Smartcellar business was founded out of the wreckage of a failed company caught up in the burst dot-com bubble.

One of its first jobs was with Scottish & Newcastle. The team was asked by the brewer to construct a piece of temperature monitoring equipment that could fit onto a new font.

The prototype went on to become the original technology behind Foster's Super Chilled. This has now evolved into the Smartcellar system – and it is gaining a large amount of attention from both tenanted and managed pub companies, several of whom have put it on trial in their estates.

Seeing the system in operation it is easy to understand the interest. The equipment sits in the font as the liquid is dispensed and like Brulines can measure a variety of elements in the liquid including temperature, volume, type of fluid and flow rate.

All data is then sent to a central server and then the HQ, the area manager and the tenant can all log onto the Smartcellar website and have a look at the areas relevant to them.

"We found in trials so far that tenants just love the fact that we are giving them access to these reports," says Jolyon. ■

In the system...

Jolyon Tidmarsh describes the level of detail the system goes into:

"You can click on your pub and then look at the breakdown of data on all draught brands. Such as average temperature, average pour time, cleaning regime and wastage. An interesting thing you notice when you break it down, for example, is that pubs are very, very bad at cleaning their cider lines. Some never do it. And it is as important to do it as it is with beer.

"You notice that cleaning regimes aren't as good as they should be and you find out things like the staff are on yield targets, and because cleaning lines slows down pace of serving and therefore yield, staff can be loath to do it. This is endemic across the board. So you click on the line-cleaning button and it gives you a breakdown of the last three months of line cleans – what time they were, how 'successful' they were.

"And you can break it down into last week's performance and even the last hour's performance. You can see how many fonts are used at the busiest periods. Therefore do you need all those brands on the bar? Think about all those super chilled fonts using 100 watts of power, all lit – think of all the money you could save by rationalising."

How does Smartcellar work?

