



WestRock and Sleeping Giant Brewing Company connect on exceptional customer service

Contract brewer aims to perform at highest levels; finds packaging partner with comprehensive packaging, equipment and financing solution perfect for company’s growth

Going west

Once a home brewer in Vermont, Matthew Osterman now owns the first and only dedicated contract brewery west of the Mississippi. In 2013, he left his job at New Plant Beer in Denver and signed a seven-year lease on a 70,000-square-foot facility near Interstate 25. Two years later, [Sleeping Giant Brewing Company](#) opened its fermenting tanks for business. Osterman’s one goal: treat every recipe as his own.



“Our customers’ beer is our beer; we’re only as successful as they are,” he said.

And success has come quickly for the not-so-sleepy company—since operations began, the brewery has increased capacity from 15,000 barrels a year to 30,000 in 2016. In fact, Sleeping Giant expects to brew 60,000 barrels or more this year, following a recent \$2 million plant expansion.

For Osterman, keeping pace with his company’s sharp, upward trajectory has meant putting his trust in key partnerships. And when it came to packaging solutions his customers could be proud of, he went with WestRock to deliver the [differentiation on store shelves](#) that beer-makers need now more than ever.

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“There’s increasing competition in the craft beer market where quality is everything. But what’s more important, the marketing or the beer? Naturally, you need great quality and great branding. If people are going to trust us to brew for them, they need to know we’re going to meet or exceed their expectations at every step.”

– Matthew Osterman, Founder, Sleeping Giant Brewing Company

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A single focus on service

Contract brewing, in which one brewery pays another to make its beer, is an increasingly common practice, particularly as more and more breweries lack the capacity or equipment at their own facilities to satisfy demand. Yet, all too often, contract brewing leaves customers feeling dissatisfied explains Osterman:



Did You Know?

66% of consumers tried something new because the packaging caught their eye.

[See our special report to learn many more reasons why Packaging Matters.](#)

Packaging matters

It wasn't long before Osterman found himself at a small diner in Denver discussing his vision with WestRock's David Hayslette, director of business development for craft beverages, and how WestRock could be part of that vision. Based in Norcross, Georgia, WestRock is a leading packaging solutions provider that offers multipack cartons and more to help beverage brands [break through the clutter and connect with consumers](#).

During the meeting, Osterman stressed to Hayslette how it was important for Sleeping Giant to have the relationship with the packaging company, rather than refer its customers to another vendor they would need to manage.

"It made more sense for Sleeping Giant to directly order the packaging," said Osterman. "This brings value because many beer-makers don't have the time or capacity to deal with multiple vendors—in their mind, fewer is better."

With WestRock, Osterman found the diverse packaging options Sleeping Giant was searching for. Beyond corrugated cases and trays, WestRock could provide [paperboard multipacks for bottles and cans](#) in many popular formats, as well as some less-common configurations. Furthermore, WestRock presented an array of printing and production capabilities that would allow the contract brewer to offer incredible choices to its customers, from UV-gloss coatings to multilevel embossing to die-cuts and more.

"In some instances, your products are competing with the house brands for tank space and attention, or in other cases, you're brewing at a large factory that's out of touch with the craft world," he said. "The truth is, you shouldn't have to compromise. Service is paramount to Sleeping Giant's identity and is the reason 100 percent of our capacity is dedicated to our customers."

Osterman added that even though the brands he works with are not his own, Sleeping Giant strives to be as complete a solution as possible for beer-makers.

"We are providing everything from grain to hops and, in WestRock's case, packaging," said Osterman. "When folks are working with us, we want to give full service and extend the supply chain to that company."

From his past experiences, Osterman was familiar with how breweries set up their packaging requirements and knew he needed a comprehensive solution for both the equipment and the packaging.

"For example, a six-pack carrier can't be different, it needs to be the same cut, the same die line, the same finish every time, and the list goes on," Osterman said. "I knew we needed our customers to be uniform on that front and get the same goods from the same vendor."

“How consumers shop the beer aisle has changed,” said WestRock’s David Hayslette. “Craft beer consumers often go into a retail outlet knowing what they intend to buy. However, our research suggests that shoppers also make purchasing decisions in the aisle, facing more choices than ever. And we know that distinctive, high-quality packaging stands out on the crowded shelf.

“With Matthew, we talked about how your multipack isn’t simply a container; it’s an opportunity to catch the eye of that split-second shopper.”

Equipment included

What also attracted Osterman to WestRock was access to the equipment Sleeping Giant needed at the back-end of its bottle line and for its upcoming can line expansion. This included a carrier erector and carrier stuffer for four- and six-pack bottled beers, and a depalletizer, filler, cartoner and tray packer for cans, along with the conveyance systems to keep things moving smoothly.

“Sleeping Giant could have looked to any supplier to build and install these machines, but they would not necessarily be calibrated and dialed in to work with WestRock cartons, cases and trays,” said Hayslette.

Osterman even recalls a time when WestRock’s pledge was put to the test early on.

“We had cartons coming to us that were a little warped and weren’t running well on the machines,” he said. “We made one call to WestRock, and there were no questions from them; they just came out and fixed it. When things do go awry, it’s easy to communicate that to them.”

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“We gave them a more turnkey solution where they don’t have to worry about cartons being compatible or trays not running. And if problems do arise, then you don’t get into that exercise of finger pointing with the manufacturer—it’s very much that WestRock owns the issue and we’re going to solve it.”
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Forward-looking finances

As part of its package deal, WestRock further arranged a financing solution that wouldn’t keep Sleeping Giant up at night.

Bearing its customer’s many upfront investments in facility space and production capacity in mind, WestRock proposed a long-term agreement aimed at helping the brewery maintain its forward momentum.

“What we did is take the actual cost of the equipment and amortize it over a period of years to arrive at a lease-to-own model,” Hayslette said. “We keep the asset on our books, and it lives in their brewery as they’re paying on it; and, at the end, we give them the title to the machine. For Sleeping Giant, it helped them avoid another big capital outlay they didn’t want to make at the time.”



What **IMPACT** does packaging have on craft beer purchases?

Learn **4 key actions brewers can take** to evaluate the effectiveness of their packaging.



Standout associates

By presenting a comprehensive solution that included packaging, equipment and the means to make immediate improvements, WestRock earned the trust and business of Sleeping Giant Brewing Company.

However, it is WestRock's many associates who have made perhaps the greatest impact on Osterman's operation.

"I was asked what I like best about working with WestRock, and that's easy for me—it's the people," he said. "Our account rep for corrugate is Don, and on the folding-carton side, it's Linda. They're both exceedingly pleasant folks and do whatever they can to help us out. When I need a favor, I don't mind calling them. They can't always help me, but they always try."

Thanks to folks like Don, Linda and David, Sleeping Giant now provides a wide array of packaging options for anything its customers can dream up.

"With in-house canning and bottling, as well as kegging lines, we can pack your product into everything from timeless six-pack glasses to a unique fiberboard-wrapped 18-pack of cans," said Osterman. "Wherever you're brewing, you'll have to go through the packaging process. But if you're with us, there is certainly a savings—for instance, our customers don't need to pay for a die line, just the art. That's a win for beer-makers anytime we can leverage the efficiencies we gain from working with WestRock."



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Efficient orchestration

As Sleeping Giant continues to craft its own place in contract brewing, WestRock will be there to manage the new demands of a thriving business and deliver innovative packaging solutions that give beverage brands a distinct in-market advantage.

“It was excellence in choreography on both sides that made this partnership work,” said Hayslette. “As a result, Sleeping Giant was able to get the packaging solution it needed quickly while minimizing its vendor management requirement. I think Matthew would agree that every hour we can give back to a busy entrepreneur is an extremely valuable one.”

“It was a good fit,” said Osterman of the Sleeping Giant-WestRock alliance. “The less time customers spend worrying about their packaging because we’re managing it—because WestRock is doing a good job—that’s more time they can spend on marketing and selling beer.”

“The better our customers do, the better we do. And with WestRock behind us, it’s become simple to get things done.”

About Sleeping Giant Brewing Company

Sleeping Giant Brewing Company is the first and only dedicated contract brewery west of the Mississippi. Located in Central Denver along Interstate 25, we are not only an excellent option for beer-makers in the Rocky Mountain region, but for all the West Coast, Pacific Northwest and Southwest/Texas. Furthermore, our location affords a strategic geographical advantage to Eastern/Midwestern/Southern brands currently distributing or looking to expand distribution to the West.

Visit www.sleepinggiantbrewing.com to learn more.

About WestRock

WestRock (NYSE: WRK) partners with our customers to provide differentiated paper and packaging solutions that help them win in the marketplace. WestRock’s 45,000 team members support customers around the world from more than 300 operating and business locations spanning North America, South America, Europe and Asia. Learn more at www.westrock.com.