



**The secrets of
5 craft brewers**
mistakes you must avoid

DRINK UP
MICRO  BREWR
podcast

MICRO BREWR

About This Book

MicroBrewr is all about learning how to start a brewery. **MicroBrewr Podcast** has given me access to so many successful brewers, brewery owners, and others in the craft beer industry. I am honored that they share their hard-earned experience.

It's so much better to learn from other people's mistakes. Before I even open a brewery of my own, I am learning what mistakes to avoid, how to do it right, and so many other details that I had never thought of just from developing my own business plan.

I ask every guest of MicroBrewr Podcast:

What's the **biggest mistake** you ever made?

In this abridged version of [The Secrets of 24 Craft Brewers; Mistakes you must avoid](#), I've culled the **most important answers** from those questions. These are the actual transcripts from the interviews. Learn from others. Don't make these mistakes in your brewery.

I hope this book **helps your brewery succeed!**

- Nathan Pierce

MicroBrewr.com

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Planning & Education for Starting Your Brewery

Randall Denver, Yards Brewing Company	1
Nick Ellis, Opposition Brewing Co.	3
Chris Goulet, Birdsong Brewing Company	4

Starting Your Brewery

Rich Weber, Sierra Blanca Brewing Company and Rio Grande Brewing Company	6
---	---

Operating Your Brewery

Nigel Askew, Horsefly Brewing Company	7
---------------------------------------	---

MicroBrewr 015:

Randal Denver's advice *for a*
homebrewer
who wants to become *a*
professional brewer

**Randal Denver, Yards Brewing Company,
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**

June 28, 2014

Nathan: Tell me about the biggest mistake you've ever made as a brewer.

Randal: I don't have a mistake as a brewer yet. I'd say that so I don't ultimately make a huge mistake. But everyone at Yards including sales and bartenders, tour guides or anybody, they have to put some time on the packaging line. The mistake I made there, we had a new filter that we were installing and we weren't quite sure of the flow rate or what we were doing with it quite yet and when I brought beer into it, the gaskets on the bottom kind of blew out and sent 32 degree beer all over me and everyone around me and it was quite a mess and very cold and not a fun time.

Nathan: Sounds like Strange Brew.

Randal: Yeah, it wasn't too fun. That was kind of in the beginning of my shift so I spent the rest of the day soaked in beer.

Nathan: Oh my god yes, 32 degrees doesn't sound too fun but beer all over the place does.

Randal: No, because then you have to clean up and it may have looked fun. I mean we had a good time with it but I pretty much sent beer all over everything, our tools, the floor, the line, open bottles. It was kind of a mess.

Nathan: Sticky and messy and gross?

Randal: Sticky and messy and gross and cold.

Nathan: Your boss was totally pissed at you?

Randal: No, we have the mentality where mistakes happen and move on. Just don't do it again.

Nathan: Awesome. That's pretty cool to work at a place like that. So how much beer was lost?

Randal: Not too much. Maybe 5 gallons. It was in the filter itself.

Nathan: Okay so it wasn't like a whole vat or anything like that?

Randal: If it was a whole bright tank, I don't think we would have been having any sort of conversation at all right now.

Nathan: Before I get to the next question, give us a little bit of context. Tell me about how you got to where you're at in your position now. Just like your history with beer making and whatnot.

Randal: My history with beer making actually started in a winery back in 2011 or 2010. I was working at a winery part-time. It was just something new and interesting to do. I was working as an environmental scientist at that time and that was a nightmare. So I took a job part-time in the vineyard/winery and I worked with the homebrewer and he got me into homebrewing and it was the first thing that I'd ever really found that I was good at and it was relatively easy to get into. So from there I homebrewed and I continued to work at the winery and it was kind of through podcasts and reading and pretty much every piece of educational material I can get my hands on. I just kind of went from extract to all grain and building a new brew system and then from there, I was doing a brewery tour. I went to Victory, Tröegs and Yards in the same day and Yards seemed very approachable and everyone seemed very friendly there so I figured I would ask for a card and put in my resume and a few months went by and they gave me a call and I started in the packaging line, like I said as everyone has to do. Then about a year later, the position opened up in the brewery house and I applied for that and

here we are.

Nathan: So you started homebrewing in 2011 or 2012?

Randal: Yeah, not that long ago.

Nathan: You're still doing it?

Randal: I don't have as much time because of the overnights but yeah I'm in the middle of making a half barrel system right now.

Nathan: So you've been doing it for a little while on your own. You've been in the business for a little while. If you could start your career over again in the beer industry, what would you do differently to do it better?

Randal: I think I would have gone straight to all grain and not wasted time with extract. I mean there's no possible way to know what your career path is when you're 20 or 22 years old but if you like beer and you think you can do it, getting into it as early as possible and as often as possible. That's what I would do differently.

<http://microbrewr.com/advice-for-homebrewer-who-wants-to-become-a-professional/>



MicroBrewr 016: Nanobreweries RISE UP!

Nick Ellis, Opposition Brewing Co., Medford, Oregon

July 2, 2014

Nathan: One of the questions I like to ask the guests is about the biggest mistake you ever made as a brewery owner because we can learn so much from that mistake.

Nick: I think the naming situation is the biggest mistake from a business standpoint. Certainly the name game is getting much more complicated than the brewing industry and I think it will continue to get worse and frankly, yeah I'm discouraged by where it's going and I don't know where it's going to end ultimately. You know, you're not going to be able to call your beer anything because all the words in the lexicon we use will be taken and trademarked and someone will sue you for calling your beer anything other than beer 1, beer 2 or something like that. I think that's where we're going and that's discouraging to me as a brewer and a member of the brewer community. From a brewery standpoint, I would say our biggest mistake coming out of the gate was not fully appreciating and planning for yeast management. I was never comfortable with our ability in our small space with the equipment that we use in harvesting and re-pitching yeast. Some of our friends at some of the larger breweries like Walkabout Brewing here in town, they were very gracious in helping us out. You can only go to them so frequently before they start to say 'Hey, listen this is a problem you need to get under control' and thank goodness Ross Litton, the owner of Walkabout, did that for me. He was like 'Listen, I'll help you any time you need help but you need to get this under control so you can't come to me every week for a pitch' and he was right. So our solution was to switch over to dry yeast and just pitch fresh every time it's

inexpensive to do for us. On our scale, it has certainly been the saving grace of our yeast issues and we don't have problems with that management now.

Nathan: If you were going to start your brewery again from scratch, would you do anything differently other than what we have already talked about?

Nick: No. I think those things that I've mentioned would be the things--obviously understanding that the name game a little better and making sure that the name that we called ourselves was clear in the industry and then the yeast, fully understanding the yeast management side of things. Those are the two things I think that I would have done differently when I opened a brewery had I had to do it all over again.

<http://microbrewr.com/nanobreweries-rise-up/>

MicroBrewr 017: *work with* **customers** *to make* *award winning* **beer**

**Chris Goulet, Birdsong Brewing Company,
Charlotte, North Carolina**

July 8, 2014

Nathan: Can you talk about the biggest mistake you ever made as a brewery owner?

Chris: I looked at that question and it's like, when you're a first time, a start up and you've never run a brewery before, the list of mistakes is huge. So it's pretty challenging trying to figure out like which one do I think is the biggest.

Nathan: Well pick one out that we can learn from.

Chris: So one thing that we did that I definitely know was a mistake and has cost us money and definitely a lot of distraction, is we really didn't have a good understanding and agreement with our landlord when we moved into our space. They thought we were doing one thing and we thought we were doing something else and we were never on the same page. I guess my lesson learned there would be to diligently vet not just your landlord, but any vendor or any third party that you're going to be working with, young brewers or start up breweries are so enthusiastic and so excited about making beer and selling beer and connecting with our customers that they tend to forget that there's a lot of other companies that may be suppliers or maybe related in some way that aren't as enthusiastic about it that are just viewing it as a business opportunity. That's definitely a big error on our part that we didn't find a landlord arrangement that was really beneficial. Instead it was a really kind of a drag on our whole experience.

Nathan: Do you feel comfortable bringing us there and giving us some details so we can feel like we're right along with you?

Chris: The city of Charlotte in Mecklenburg

County have very specific and very I guess detail-oriented codes and code enforcement. So they give you very specific things you have to do when you build out and 99% of it is for health and safety, so it all makes plenty of sense when you're building it out. In numerous cases our landlord would fight with us with things that we were required to do. We never really understood what the problem was. I think it was just they didn't know what they were getting into and didn't like it. And even to this day, we still have issues with parking and numerous just little petty things where if we had spent a couple of extra months and actually found a building owner who was genuinely excited about having a brewery and actually have a better idea of what that meant, I think we would've avoided a lot of just needless fighting and discussion.

Nathan: It sounds like if craft beer was so new in Charlotte, a lot of people maybe weren't really familiar with what a brewery is and what it means to have a brewery on their commercial property. So if they were exposed to that a little bit more, maybe they would've had a little bit better picture before you moved in.

Chris: Right that's definitely true. We run into that. Even working with the city, who's now at a point where they're very supportive and trying to be positive and help out the local breweries. Early on, they really didn't understand what we were trying to do and a lot of confusion kind of resulted from some initial discussions. Now that it's more prevalent, people are much more comfortable with it. So that is the case.

Nathan: So you mentioned making so many mistakes. If you could start your brewery over again, what would you do differently to do it better?

Chris: It's interesting because I'm basically starting my brewery over again.

Nathan: Perfect timing.

Chris: Yeah. It's a whole bunch of little things related to just build out. It's like you don't realize how worth while it is to spend money on nice floors that slope properly and have correct drainage until you spend 3 years squeegeeing a 30,000 square foot production space and so we spend a lot of time planning the layout in the new space from a workflow perspective. In our existing place, we kind of laid things out to take advantage of utilities to minimize buildout cost where we could, but you only do construction once and then you brew everyday after that and the workflow is much more important from an employee safety perspective and just overall staff happiness. Happy staff make happy beer. So we're really trying to find out and trying to determine how to layout the brewery as efficient as possible for everybody who works there and they're not doing things like climbing on top of kegs to stack other kegs or walking all the way around the brewery to move grain or all the little things we do now because we kind of filled out a small space. We're really trying to plan ahead for that.

<http://microbrewr.com/work-with-customers-to-make-award-winning-beer/>



MicroBrewr019: *marketing a* **flagship beer** *with* **Roswell aliens**

Rich Weber, Sierra Blanca Brewing Company and Rio Grande Brewing Company, Moriarty, New Mexico

July 22, 2014

Nathan: So the brewery's been open for 18 years. Tell us the biggest mistake you ever made as a brewery owner.

Rich: I would say my biggest mistake was the initial brewery location. I'd say it was a mistake from the standpoint of it was kind of wishful thinking. I left New Jersey, very crowded, very hectic, had had enough of that. I moved to rural New Mexico. So our brewery was 38 miles from the town that our restaurant was in. It was just a gorgeous Alpine village in the middle of a desert. The Sierra Blanca Mountains are at 12,000 ft. and the town was about 7,000 ft. or in that range and it was just beautiful. I said, "Oh, this is a great spot." And there just was not enough demand in '96 in New Mexico for micros in general. It was very difficult to earn a living. The restaurant certainly helped, we kind of did it backwards from most people and did it out of necessity to sell more beer. That certainly helped but when it came time to look for a bigger brewery, we decided to go to the bigger population and also to locate ourselves next to a big highway, which is I-40. In front of the brewery is Route 66 and in front of that is I-40. That considerably helped us with shipping and enabled us to increase our market. Like I said, opening in a little place, that was kind of wishful thinking. I was like, "Oh, I'm going to live a real relaxed life in rural America." It didn't seem to work out. That was probably the biggest mistake I made, in my brewing career, was my first location.

Nathan: Now you're in Moriarty, right?

Rich: Yes.

Nathan: That's like 2,000 people. That seems pretty rural to me, but you're like 35 miles away from Albuquerque, so that's close enough to a population center?

Rich: Yeah. You know, there're two reasons. One is, we were 120 miles south, so in order to get the beer from the brewery just to I-40 was extremely costly. That was part of it. The other thing was the recognition of the breweries in Albuquerque. We were way down south, kind of under the radar so to speak. Coming out here, we have a great following of people in Albuquerque, it's amazing how many people come out here and buy their kegs. It helped. We have a taproom in Albuquerque as well. So it really helped get us on the map. I mean, our production went from 3,000 barrels the last year in 2006 and by 2008 we were over 6,000.

Nathan: So do you feel like you've already found the solution to that problem? Or is there something else? If you could start your brewery over again, is there something you would do differently to do it better?

Rich: I don't know... If I could start something over again tied to this industry, I think I would do two things. I think I would open a small micro distribution and New Mexico is a good state to do that in. In the state of New Mexico I can manufacture wholesale and retail, it's one of the few states out there that you're allowed to do that. I think that would be the one thing I'd do differently.

<http://microbrewr.com/marketing-a-flagship-beer-with-roswell-aliens/>

MicroBrewr 018: *Start a* **commercial** **FrankenBrewery** *for* **\$18,000**

**Nigel Askew, Horsefly Brewing Company,
Montrose, Colorado**

July 15, 2014

Nathan: Well just since the end of 2009, it sounds like you guys have had some great success, from expanding to a former KFC with a basement and even taking on the “Airfly” at the airport. Let’s go deep though, tell me the biggest mistake you ever made as a brewery owner.

Nigel: Biggest mistake...wow. There must be one. I’m trying to think of one, I can’t think of any big one, I mean I suppose one of the mistakes would have been trusting vendors. We had a vendor that, when we first opened up at the main street location here at the former KFC, was with one of the big companies that supplies food, and they were just charging us up the ying-yang, and we weren’t really aware, we thought, “Well, I guess they’re all the same, whether they be A, B, C, or D national food vendors.” They started jacking the price up and we were too naive to keep having them compete with another vendor to keep them both honest. I would say that definitely had been a mistake in our first year.

Nathan: You guys have a pretty extensive food menu, so I would imagine that’s kind of important. So once you’ve already established a relationship and you’re moving forward with purchasing things from one vendor, how do you make sure that they’re not doing that? What did you learn from that? What advice could you give to somebody else to keep check of the prices from their vendors?

Nigel: Literally we went and found the rep from another vendor and another one after that, and had them come in and check out what the current vendor was charging us for this, that, and the

other. You know, whether it be a crate of tomatoes or mushrooms or a head of lettuce or roast beef, cold roast beef, the various deli meats, and we found to our shock that they were really gouging us by a long way. So we just got another vendor to come in and give us the better prices and we’ve been doing that ever since. So don’t trust just one vendor, always make sure that you’ve got competition in the products that you’re buying, and that goes from the brewing supplies as well.

Nathan: Compare prices and periodically compare them again.

Nigel: Oh, exactly.

Nathan: So you had trouble thinking of a big mistake. If you could start your brewery over again, would you do anything differently? Is there any way you could have done it better?

Nigel: Well, when we started, we had someone else come in and do the food part. That was probably our biggest mistake, because we really didn’t want to be involved in food, and we did everything we could to avoid it, but really when you have a brewpub, if you don’t do food...we found this out in the little place we had, we didn’t have any food, we had menus of different restaurants you could order and bring your food with you, we had a barbeque grill outside. You could bring meat if you wanted to cook it.

Nathan: Wow that’s cool you had a little set up to let your customers cook their own stuff.

Nigel: Right, this is a little place. It just didn’t work. People wanted to be able to come in and order food. They wanted to stay and drink beer, but because there was no food and they didn’t want to order in, it just didn’t suit the mentality of the customer I guess. So they would have a

couple beers and then leave. I mean, we did okay, just because we were the only craft brew in the area, but once we moved in here we had the people we had rented the unit from, they had done catering in the past and so they had started doing the kitchen part of it, but it just became a very antagonistic relationship. They were constantly trying to double check on us to make sure we weren't screwing them over or something, and in the end they wanted to go off and help their son who started catering off in the Bakken oil field in North Dakota, so they went off to do that and sold us the kitchen for a reasonable, pretty much peachy price. So we started doing it ourselves.

Nathan: So you've got to have food from the start and do it yourself.

Nigel: Yup. Absolutely.

<http://microbrewr.com/start-a-commercial-frankenbrewery-for-18000/>

Thank You!

Thank you for taking the time to read this abridged version of:

[The Secrets of 24 Craft Brewers; Mistakes you must avoid.](#)

I hope you learned a lot from these people who have gone before us in the journey to start our own brewery. They have shared their years of experience on MicroBrewr Podcast so we don't have to learn these lessons the hard way.



If you enjoyed what you learned here, if you found it valuable, I encourage you to listen to **MicroBrewr Podcast** for more great insight like this.

The MicroBrewr website also has a blog with original content and articles by some of the guests of MicroBrewr Podcast.

If you know someone who could benefit from this book, please point them to:

microbrewr.com

Thanks again.

Cheers to your new brewery!

- Nathan Pierce

MicroBrewr.com