


# Surging forward

Diageo's long association with Guinness is characterised by the combination of packaging and dispense expertise and the bold brand identification that created the widget. Now, Diageo hopes it has created the next revolution in serving nitrogenated products – the Surger. **Jim Banks** finds out more from Diageo's packaging and dispensing innovations director, Mark Harrison.





**Guinness is** a brand that has worked hard to set itself apart from the crowd in the beverage market and its efforts have been rewarded. It has, for example, developed advertising campaigns unlike any others, with its award-winning press and TV campaigns known the world over for their originality, and often talked about as artworks in themselves.

The ritual of serving Guinness is also distinctive, the perfect pint being the result of a pouring technique bar staff must master in order to meet customers' high expectations of the premium draught product. A pouring time of 119.5 seconds, the pour down the side of the glass and the pause while the drink settles to produce its distinctive creamy head are all part of the theatre that adds to the brand's cachet.

Furthermore, packaging and dispensing have traditionally been areas where the brand has sought to innovate over its 200-year history, most recently under the Diageo banner.

#### **RISING TO THE CHALLENGE**

There have been numerous innovations in both technology and branding as Guinness attempted to perfect delivery systems that could recreate the experience of the draught beverage in both the on- and off-trade sectors.

'In the early days, Guinness was a carbonated product, with a loose, foamy head; then in 1958, a new variant, a nitrogenated product with a tight, white, creamy head was introduced,' says packaging and dispensing innovations director Mark Harrison. 'The problem was how to recreate this when it was not being served from draught.'

1978 saw the introduction of bottled draught Guinness, which required a syringe to achieve the distinctive head. In 1989, draught Guinness in a can was launched with the famous widget, after a five-year development programme costing £5m. In 1997, this technology was refined with the floating widget, which was easier to insert and cost half as much. Then, in 1999, Guinness draught in a bottle hit the market.

The solutions arose partly from Diageo's strategy of developing technologies that were closely allied with consumers' needs. In 2001, however, a new challenge arose that caused the company to look at technologies it had developed in the past, but which did not meet the needs of the market at the time. ►

## Timeline: A history of innovation

**1759**

Arthur Guinness  
leases St. James' Gate  
site in Dublin



**1958**

Draught Guinness  
launched



**1978**

Bottled draught Guinness

**1989**

The widget  
launched: draught Guinness  
in a can



**1991**

Widget  
awarded Queen's  
Award for Technological  
Achievement

**1995**

Guinness ENIGMA – the first  
use of the widget outside of stout or ale

**1997**

The floating widget

**1999**

Guinness draught in a bottle



**2004**

Surger  
tested in Tokyo

**2006**

Rollout of Surger  
to European market (At-home  
Surger pictured)



LEFT: The price  
of the on-trade  
Surger has  
dropped under  
£100, allowing  
Guinness  
to grow its  
presence in  
the Japanese  
market

### CONQUERING JAPAN

The challenge in question was increasing the penetration of Guinness into the Japanese on-trade market. With 450,000 outlets, the potential was huge, but Guinness draught was only available in 590 outlets, and only 12,000 offered Guinness Draught in cans. Generally, cans are not acceptable for the Japanese on-trade sector, but draught accounts were limited by the high cost of installation.

'There is a tax mark-up on imported equipment in Japan, so the costs of business are very high,' remarks Harrison. 'Sourcing equipment locally in Japan is also very expensive. Japanese bars often don't have cold cellars, and kegs often stay on longer than a week. This means quality can suffer with consequent loss of sales. Japan is all about delivering and selling fresh products.

'But people there love Guinness so there is lots of scope for market penetration, especially given the number of outlets,' he adds. It was this that led to the development of a revolutionary serving system for Guinness – the Surger – which has not only allowed the brand to tap into the Japanese on-trade market, but has created new opportunities in both the on-trade and off-trade sectors in Europe.

### HOW DOES IT WORK?

The Surger, launched in Tokyo in March 2004, uses ultrasonic technology to deliver the perfect pint of draught Guinness from bottle or can, while maintaining the ritual of pouring that is so important to the brand's identity.

The bartender still pours the product down the side of the glass, but the customer will see a black liquid with no head. Then the bartender places a drop of water on the Surger plate and puts the glass on top. At the push of a button, the Surger then sends an ultrasonic pulse through the Guinness, causing the bubbles to be released and the head to rise in the same way as it would if poured from a keg on draught.

'The barman wants to feel proud of what he does,' notes Harrison. 'He does not want to simply recreate what a customer could do at home. The Surger maintains the ritual; the ultrasonic pulse is a bit of theatre and provides a pint of perfect quality.'

**OLD IDEA, NEW USE**

Diageo had first looked at ultrasonics with Guinness in New York bars in 1972. However, customers did not respond to the idea, preferring instead the serving ritual with which they were familiar. The technology was shelved, but thirty years later found its purpose. ‘In many ways, ultrasonic technology was ahead of its time,’ observes Harrison.

Now, the technology is the key element in an easy-to-install, inexpensive solution initially designed to pave the way for low-throughput outlets in Japan to trial sales of Guinness, with a view to moving to a draught installation. The country has rapidly warmed to the idea, and by the start of 2005 there were 12,000 Surger installations in Japan.

Now the system is set for a full release on the European market in 2006, following successful tests in alpine ski resorts over the winter. Guinness targeted Germany as a key market for summer 2006, in order to take advantage of the World Cup, which increased business in the country’s bars, restaurants and hotels. It is hoped this will stimulate interest in the product and provide a sound basis on which to develop the Surger’s potential in the on-trade sector.

**‘The barman wants to feel proud of what he does. He does not want to simply recreate what a customer could do at home.’**

**DELIVERING DRAUGHT TO THE HOME**

In its original incarnation the Surger, costing around £300 per unit, was a less expensive option than draught installation. Refinement of the technology has brought the cost down even further – to under £100 – making it even more viable for on-trade use.

The first model of the Surger came with an integrated water supply in order to simplify the process of adding the drop of water to the drip plate. The removal of this system, along with the shift of the firm’s manufacturing base to the Far East, has had a significant effect on costs, as has the capacity to use existing mass-produced fonts.

Bar staff and consumers can now enjoy premium quality draught Guinness with all the traditional theatre associated with the pouring process.

‘The Surger has caught on well in the on-trade sector,’ notes Harrison. ‘At Diageo, we believe that technology must have a consumer focus, so perceiving that many people who experience the Surger in the on-trade sector wanted to use it at home, we designed a version they can take home for a reasonable cost.’

**THE HOME-USE MARKET**

The version intended for home use differs in styling more than anything. Its design is smaller, rounder and does not include the prominent font that would normally be attached to the bar in an on-trade environment. However, it still delivers the same experience and is used in exactly the same way.

As more consumers experience the Surger in the on-trade environment, so there is a growing market for the use of a similar device at home. So far, this interest is not supplanting traditional sales of draught Guinness in other forms intended for home consumption or from sales in bars, but appears instead to be increasing the overall size of the drink’s off-trade market.

‘We are not taking people out of the pub, and we are not trying to get people away from draught Guinness in cans. We are bringing something else to the brand in a domestic setting. If anything, we are stealing market share from premium lager,’ observes Harrison.

Furthermore, the technology, which can be used with other nitrogenated beverages such as Boddingtons, is in many ways still at the start of its development, and Diageo is already looking at how it might build on the system’s capability. The Surger is a sign that the tradition of innovation associated with both the Guinness brand and Diageo is alive and well, and it will be interesting to see how other beverage makers respond to such a novel idea. For now, however, it is a highly original solution that further extends the appeal of a unique brand. **pci**

**INNOVATION: THE LIFEBLOOD OF BUSINESS**

Looking for good ideas? Visit [www.packaging-gateway.com](http://www.packaging-gateway.com) | [www.diageo.com](http://www.diageo.com)

