

What Sustainable Communities and Craft Beverage Brands Have in Common

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Michael Delp

“

Consider holding the wildness of a place in your hand, and then tossing it back, dreaming of rivers, wild fish, pure water, the spirit luminous inside you allowed to roam where it wishes.



— The Mad Angler

YET, THE INDUSTRY IS AT AN INFLECTION POINT.

The old playbook is no longer sufficient on its own.

- Middle market contracting. A generation drinking less — more mindfully, more intentionally.
- Consumer trust shifting toward brands that feel true. Rooted. Coherent. That shift is structural.
- A multinational brand cannot claim the terroir of Michigan. You can. That asymmetry grows more valuable the more intentionally you build on it.

AND EVERY ENTREPRENEUR IN THIS ROOM IS ALREADY A COMMUNITY DEVELOPER.

By structure. The question is whether you are doing it intentionally.

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“ *Economic life develops
by grace of innovating;
it expands by grace of
import-replacement.*

— *Jane Jacobs*

Cities and the Wealth of Nations, 1984

The question is not whether you are doing it. The question is whether you are doing it intentionally.

RULE ONE

The customer feels what you built before they arrived.

Service → how it's delivered

Hospitality → how it feels

Upstream Work → what makes it true



RULE TWO

Draw from place. Don't borrow it.

The river
A shoreline
Orchards & vineyards
Grain fields
Forests
A farm

A main street
A harbor town
A rural crossroads
An industrial building
brought back to life
A watershed



RULE THREE

**Who you pay attention to
and how you treat them
is who you become.**



Transaction → immediate need | Relationship → future possibility

RULE FOUR

Depth before scale.

Short's Brewing — Bellaire

Bought an inn. Planning 100-unit workforce housing. Community stability = enterprise stability.



Journeyman Distillery — Three Oaks

Breathed life into the historic Featherbone Factory. 'Journeyman was a part of bringing our town back.'



St. Julian Winery — Paw Paw

Over 100 years. Rooted in Michigan agriculture. A generational anchor.



RULE FIVE

**Know who you are before
the market tells you.**

This is who we are. This is how we do things. This is what matters to us. This is what we will not fake.

RULE SIX

Quiet work builds what visibility cannot.

Consistency

The discipline that runs from grain to glass

Team culture

Financial restraint

How setbacks are handled

Quality that holds when nobody is watching

RULE SEVEN

People connect to meaning, not just experience.

Michigan craft beverage has a special capacity to meet that desire honestly — because of its ties to agriculture, place, and the people who tend both.

RULE EIGHT

**When inside and outside
match, people feel it.**

Trust

earned through coherence
between values and choices



Affinity

not manufactured
not purchased
earned upstream, slowly

SO WHERE DO YOU CONTINUE THE JOURNEY?

Three Moves.

1

Close the gap between your brand and your culture.

Start with the people in your building. Your team's daily experience is the first expression of whether your values are real or performed.

2

Make one grower or supplier relationship truly celebrated this year.

Not transactional. Ask what they need. Show up when it doesn't directly benefit you. See what it generates — for them, for you, and for the place you share.

3

Decide — honestly — what kind of enterprise you want to be.

Not the brand you market. The business you actually run. Then close the gap between those two things.

“*Consider holding the wildness of YOUR place
in your hand, and then tossing it back.*”

Widen the circle.
Do the upstream work.
Build something that lasts — together.