

Craft Beer Design Trends Study



Accelerated Marketing Insights by Quad

Overview

Under three seconds. That's how long a craft beer brand gets to grab a shopper's attention. In that split-second showdown, bold, creative packaging isn't optional — it's what drives shoppers to buy.

In the fall of 2024, Quad's Accelerated Marketing Insights surveyed craft beer shoppers and used Tobii 3 eye-tracking technology to see what types of packaging captured their attention and drove their purchases.

What shoppers said:

Package design is the third most important consideration for choosing a beer, after flavor and price. 72% of consumers said the design of the beer packaging made them more likely to buy.

What eye-tracking revealed:

Certain designs caught shoppers' eyes more quickly, more often, and held them for longer.

Which craft beers came out on top?

Those with:

- Bold, heavily illustrated designs
- Descriptive and thematic names
- Pressure sensitive labels



Methodology



The study took place at Ray's Wine & Spirits in Wauwatosa, WI, where participants answered demographic questions and then shopped for craft beer.

474 different products from 124 craft beer brands were tested in this real-world setting.

Participants wore eye-tracking tech to measure which designs grabbed attention—and which didn't.

After shopping, participants answered survey questions about their purchases.

Participants were:

- Age 21+
- Regular beer buyers (a few times/month)
- Fans of craft brands
- Not loyal to just one brand or style
- Open to trying new brands and styles

61

qualified participants

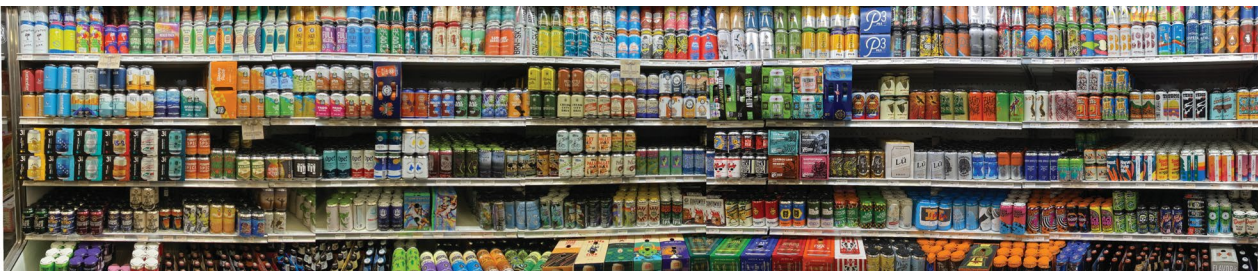
474

different products

124

craft beer brands

Ray's Wine & Spirits Beer Wall A



Ray's Wine & Spirits Beer Wall B



Five metrics

To measure what characteristics of beer packaging grabbed shoppers' attention, and why they chose the beers they purchased, AMI researchers measured five metrics:



Quantitative Variables:

(using eye-tracking technology)

**Total Fixation
Duration**

**Time
to First
Fixation**

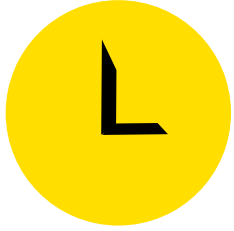
**Fixation
Count**

Qualitative Variables:

**Purchase
Decision**

**Post-
Shopping
Survey Data**

Quantitative Metrics



Total Fixation Duration (TFD)

“How long do they look?”

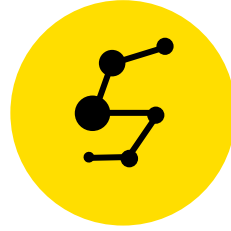
This metric is most closely tied to purchase intent. The longer something holds a shopper's attention, the more likely they are to buy it.



Time to First Fixation (TTFF)

“How quickly do they see?”

This metric indicates how well a design or placement catches attention. The smaller this metric, the more eye-catching the design.



Fixation Count (FC)

“How often do they look?”

This metric indicates how efficiently consumers absorb packaging information.



Quantitative Metrics



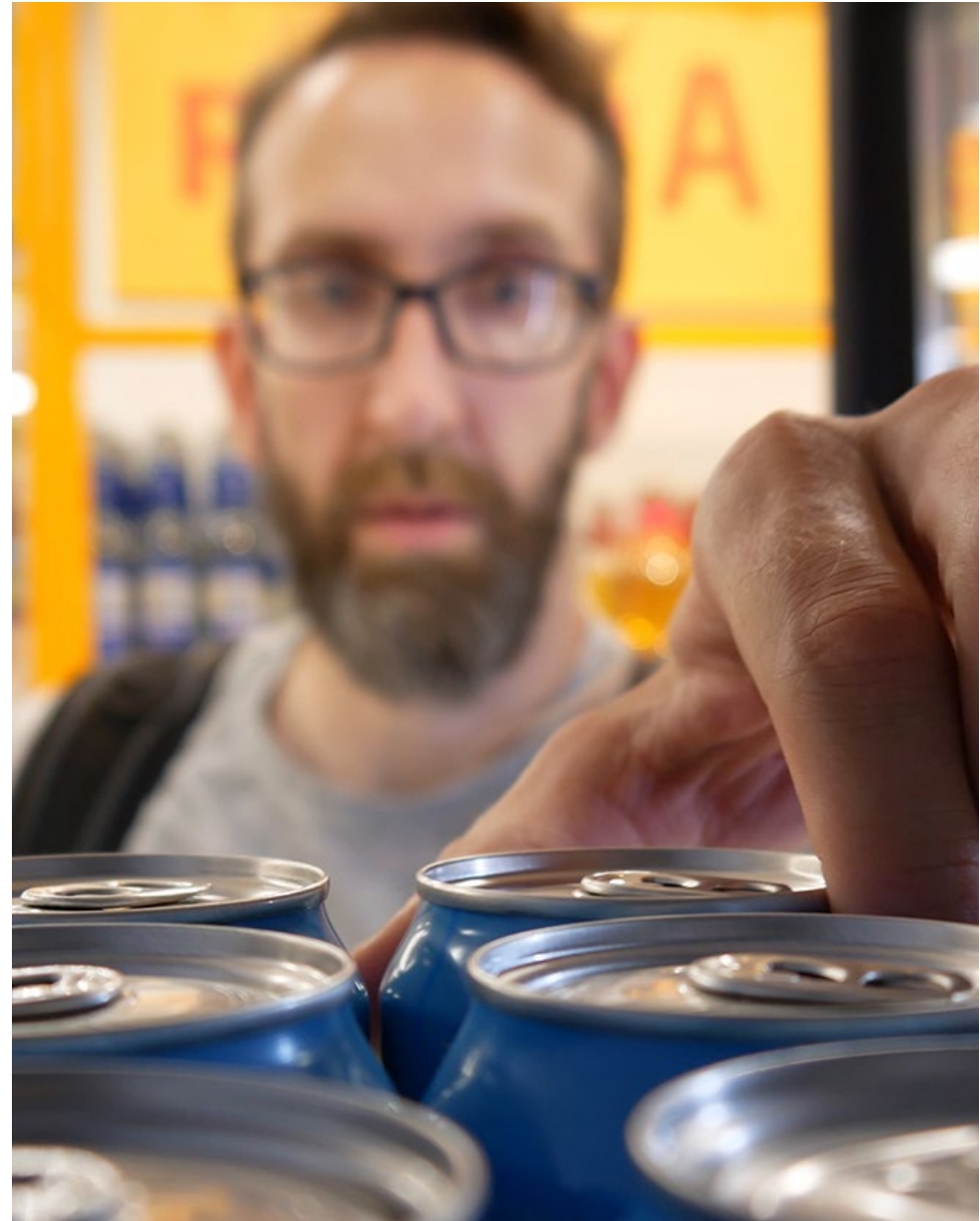
Purchase Decision

What did each shopper purchase?



Post-Shopping Survey Data

Participants explained their purchase decisions, shopping history, and gave feedback on the test product.



Study Findings: Trends



Attention-Grabbing Design Trends

Analysis of the top-performing designs, based on eye-tracking metrics and top-purchased items, revealed clear trends: heavily illustrated designs, descriptive and thematic names, and the use of pressure-sensitive labels were the most effective in capturing consumer attention and driving purchases.



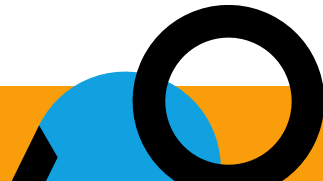
What caught their eye?

Walls A and B depict all the options available to shoppers in the study conducted at Ray's Wine & Spirits. The red areas on the heatmap show the most concentrated visual attention.

Ray's Wine & Spirits Beer Wall A



Ray's Wine & Spirits Beer Wall B

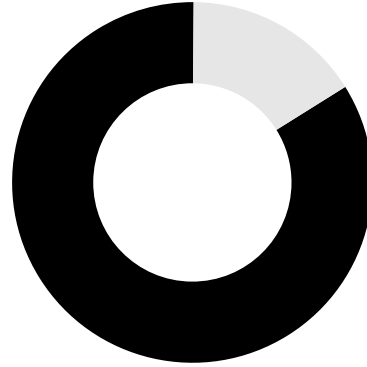


Trend | Consumers Browse First, Decide Later

When deciding which craft beer to buy, consumers prioritized:

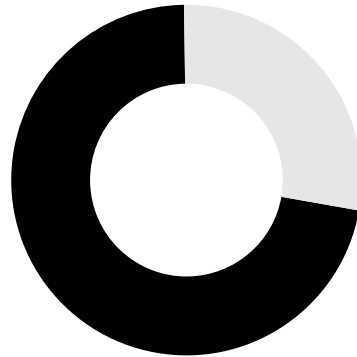
1. **Flavor profile**
2. **Price**
3. **Package design**

While flavor remained the top driver, the impact of package design was strong, ranking just below price and playing a significant role in final selection.



84% of consumers came in to browse

The craft beer category is highly exploratory, with most shoppers entering stores without a fixed choice in mind.



72% said the packaging design made them want to buy the beer more

Visual differentiation in packaging helps craft beer brands capture attention and drive purchase decisions in a browsing-heavy environment.

Trend | Heavily Illustrated Designs

A consistent trend observed since 2020 in Accelerated Marketing Insight's craft beer design testing is that heavily illustrated designs effectively capture consumer attention, leading to longer time spent focusing on the can (higher total fixation duration).

Notably, the product with the highest total fixation duration was Gus Polinski and the Kenosha Kickers by 903 Brewers. It featured a design where the likeness of a celebrity's face dominated the majority of the label.

Additionally, the human-face graphic was also the element that attracted attention the fastest (lowest time to first fixation).



Product with the longest total fixation duration

Trend | Descriptive & Thematic Names

A key trend observed in craft beer naming is the use of descriptive, thematic names that highlight unique ingredients or evoke strong sensory associations. This strategy appears to resonate well with consumers, as seen in top-performing products.

The success of these beers suggests that names emphasizing flavors, ingredients, or thematic concepts help attract attention and influence purchasing decisions.



Hot Dog Lager by Explorium Brewing taps into beer's association with hot dogs on the grill. The highly illustrated character piques novelty and curiosity, making it distinctive.



Maple Coffee Porter by Lion's Tail Brewing Co clearly communicates its flavor profile, appealing directly to consumers seeking a specific taste experience.

Trend | Pressure-Sensitive (PS) Labels

Pressure-sensitive (PS) labels are adhesive labels that stick to surfaces when pressure is applied, without requiring heat, water, or solvent activation. These labels are prominently featured in this study.

Notably, PS labels offer lower investment costs and maximum flexibility, which aligns well with the packaging needs of craft beer. This may explain their widespread use.

Additionally, there is no significant indication that PS labels create a less premium perception or negatively impact consumer appeal compared to traditional can printing.

However, PS labels can complicate recycling due to their adhesives and mixed materials.

The data highlights:

- The top-selling product utilized a PS label.
- 6 out of the 13 top-selling brewers used PS labels.
- 80% of the Top 5 most attention-grabbing brands (longest TFD) featured PS labels.



Study Findings: Highest Performing Brands



Longest Total Fixation Duration

Total fixation duration measures in seconds how long a participant looked at something. This metric is most closely tied to purchase intent. The longer something holds a shopper's attention, the more likely they are to buy it.

The Gus Polinski can had the longest total fixation duration. It was looked at for 1.37 seconds on average.

Design Trend

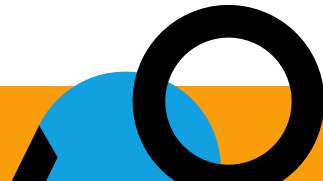
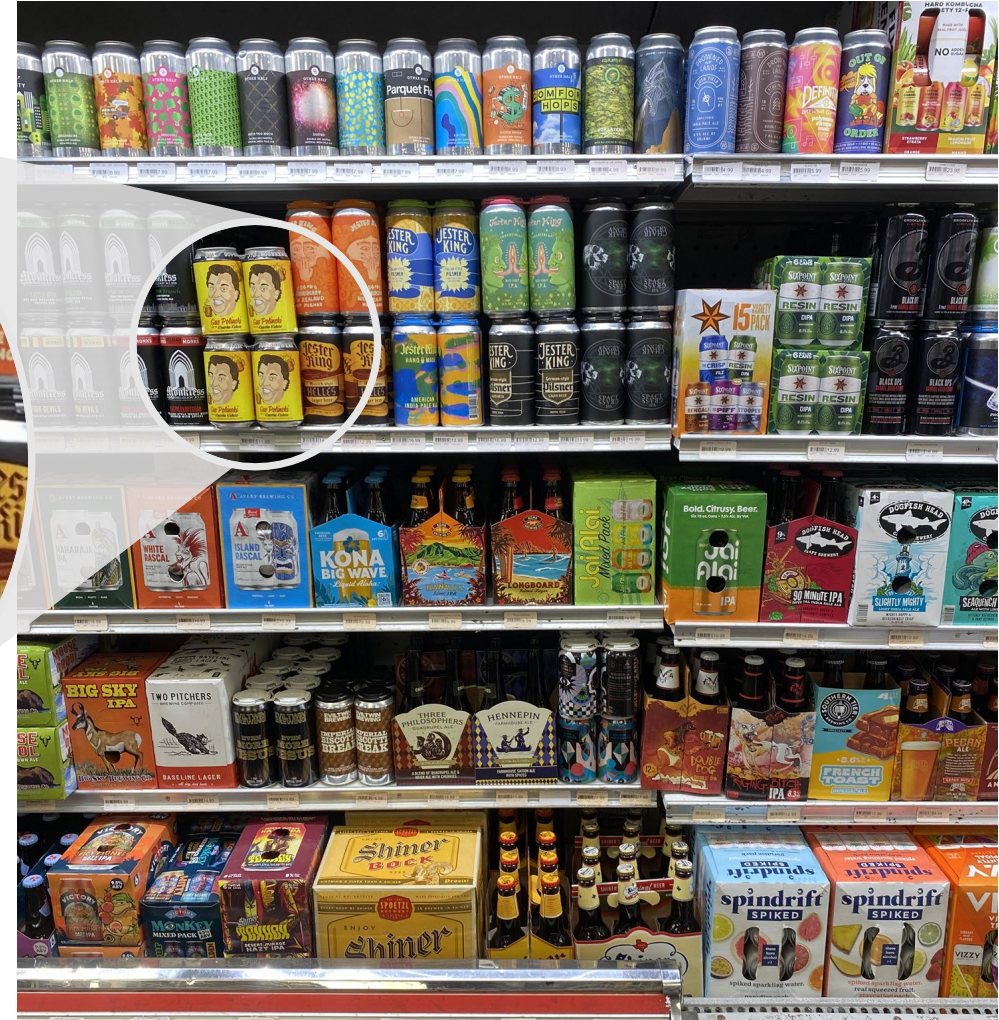
Heavily Illustrated

Minimal Branding

Mascot



Gus Polinski and the Kenosha Kickers by 903 Brewers



Gaze Plot

The Gus Polinski can had the longest total fixation duration of 1.37 seconds on average. The illustrated face was the visual element that shoppers viewed the longest.

| Total Fixation Duration (seconds) | |
|-----------------------------------|------|
| Graphic | 0.12 |
| Product Name | 0.04 |
| Brewery Name | 0.02 |
| Brewery Logo | 0.02 |
| Description | 0.00 |



Gus Polinski and the Kenosha Kickers
by 903 Brewers

Highest Fixation Count

Fixation count measures how often shoppers looked at something. This metric also indicates how efficiently they absorb packaging information.

The Gus Polinski can was looked at about 5 times per shopper on average.

Design Trend

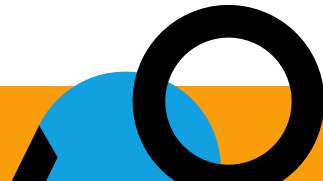
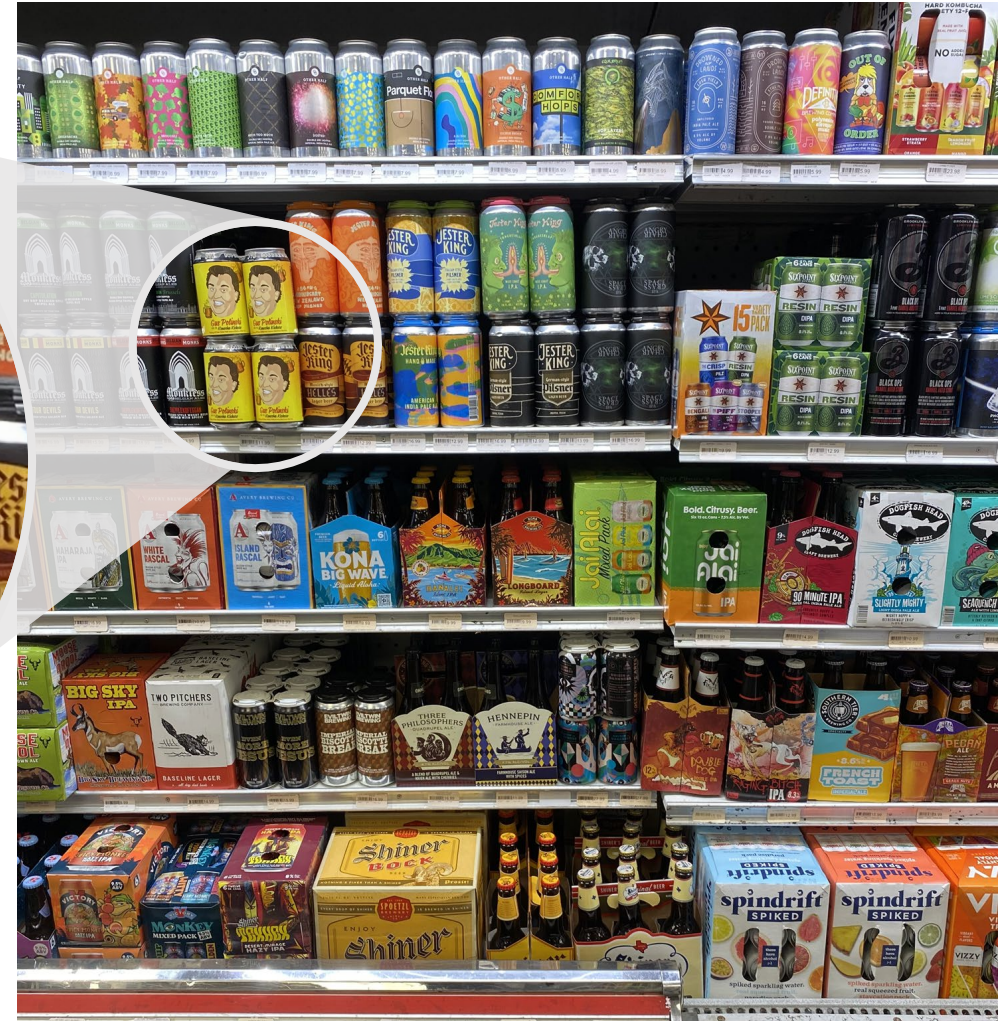
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Mascot



Gus Polinski and the Kenosha Kickers by 903 Brewers



Lowest Time to First Fixation

Time to first fixation measures how quickly shoppers see something. This metric indicates how well a design or placement catches attention. The smaller this metric is, the more eye-catching something is.

The Alaskan Brewing Co's Grizz Coffee Brown had the quickest time to first fixation. The cans were noticed in 60.77 seconds on average.

Design Trend

Heavily Illustrated

Minimal Branding

Mascot

Grizz Coffee Brown by Alaskan Brewing Co.



Most Purchased Product

Lion's Tail Brewing Co's *Maple Coffee Porter* was the most frequently purchased product in the study.

This can demonstrates various design trends, including the use of a pressure-sensitive label, a descriptive or thematic name, and a heavily-illustrated design.

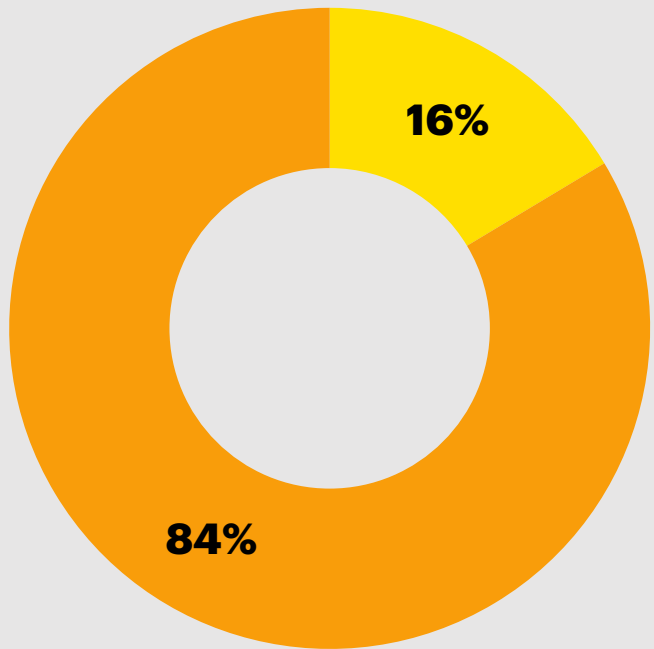
The brew's name, *Maple Coffee Porter*, descriptively conveys an interesting flavor profile. Flavor was participants' second most important consideration for choosing a beer, after price.



Study Findings: Shopper Survey Q+A

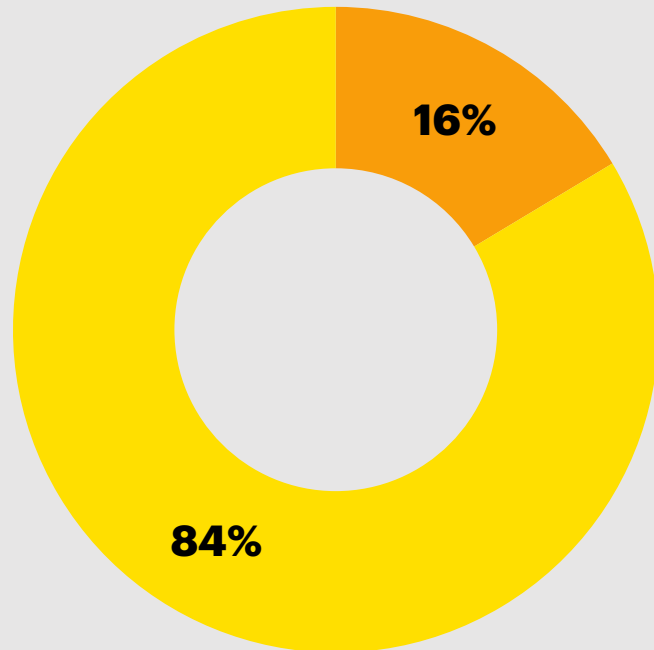


Did you have an idea of what craft beer you wanted to purchase before coming here today or did you come to browse?



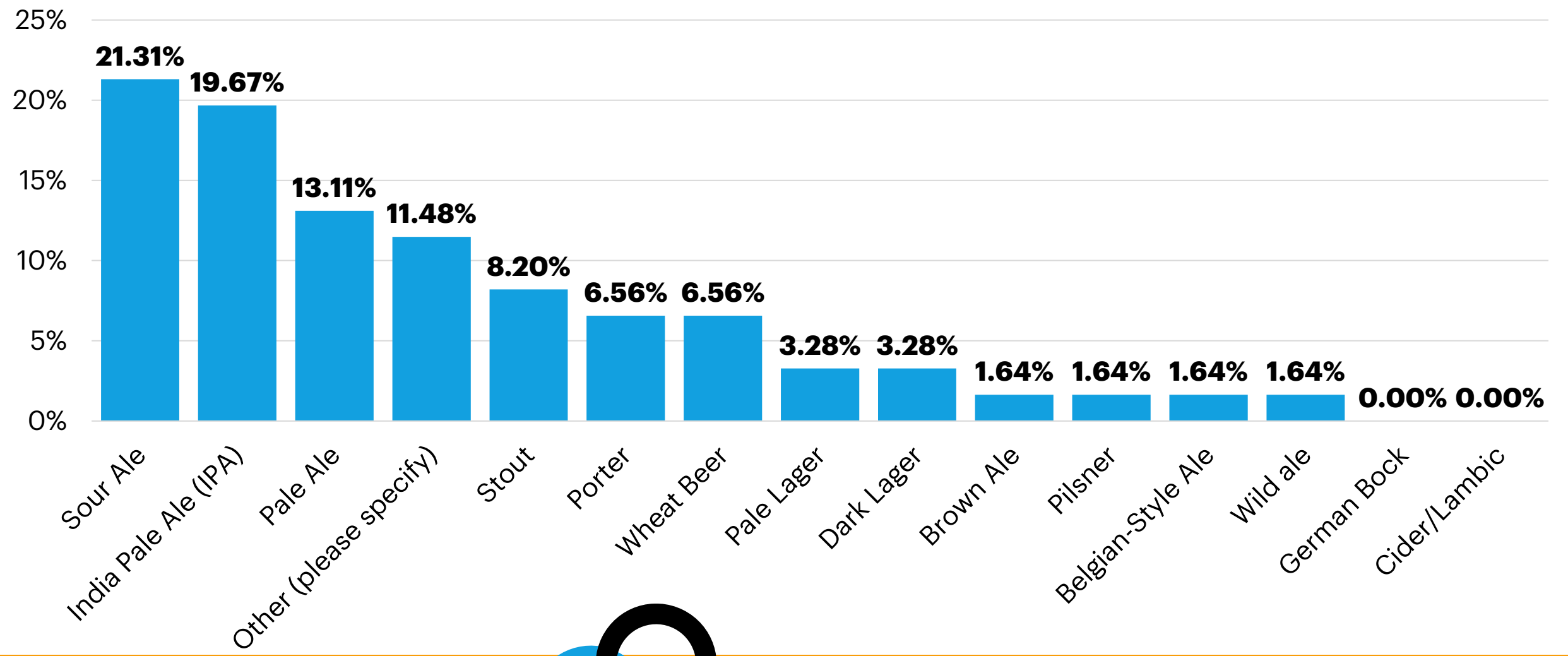
- I came in with something in mind
- I came in to browse

Have you purchased this craft beer before?

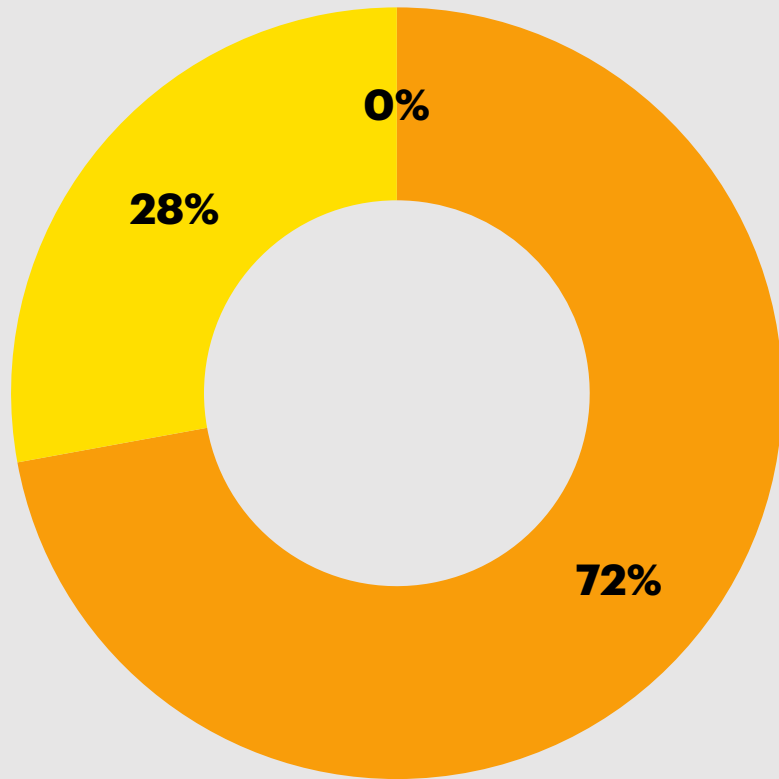


- Yes
- No

Which category best describes the beer type you purchased today?



How do you feel the packaging design influenced your choice of purchase today?



- Positive influence - the packaging design made me want this beer more
- Neutral influence - the packaging design barely played any factor my purchase
- Negative influence - the packaging design didn't influence my purchase. I chose it anyway for other reasons (please explain below)

What made you purchase this craft beer today?

The vibrant design
and the flavor profile.

Purchased:
Catharina Sour Ale,
Sketchbook Brewing Co.

The red packaging caught
my eye, the company being
from Wisconsin, and the
flavor being cherry.

Purchased:
Soft Parade Shandy,
Short's Brewing Co.

I was looking for a sour and
liked the fruits in it as well
as the price. Another sour
caught my eye initially, but
was more pricey.

Purchased:
The Gadget,
Urban Artifact

I was looking for a Belgian-
style and it is one I hadn't
tried before, was local, and
looked nice. I've also had
the brewery before.

Purchased:
Catharina Sour Ale,
Sketchbook Brewing Co.

One of the only pilsner
that I found that I have
not had before.

Purchased:
Slopes French-Style
Pilsner, Black Stack Brewing

Been looking for something
dark as the weather gets
colder. My dad really likes
bourbon aged stouts so I
decided to give them a try.

Purchased:
Sticky Stacks,
Hinterland Brewery

I appreciated the silly
name and the art on
the packaging. I also
liked the price.

Purchased:
Moose Drool Brown Ale,
Big Sky Brewing

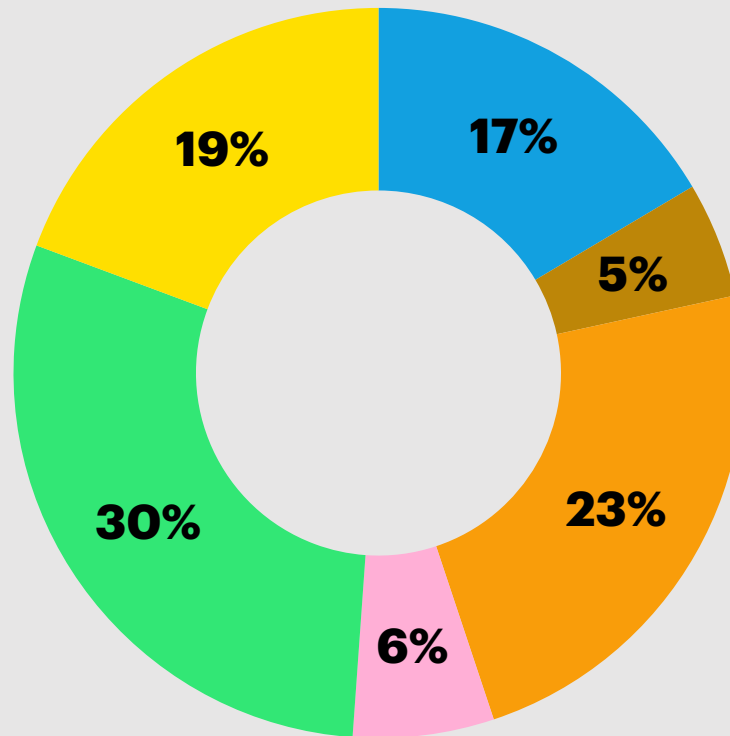
Heard it advertised
on sports talk radio.

Purchased:
Carry the G, Gathering
Place Brewing Company

What information do you expect to obtain from a craft beer package to help you decide which beer to purchase?

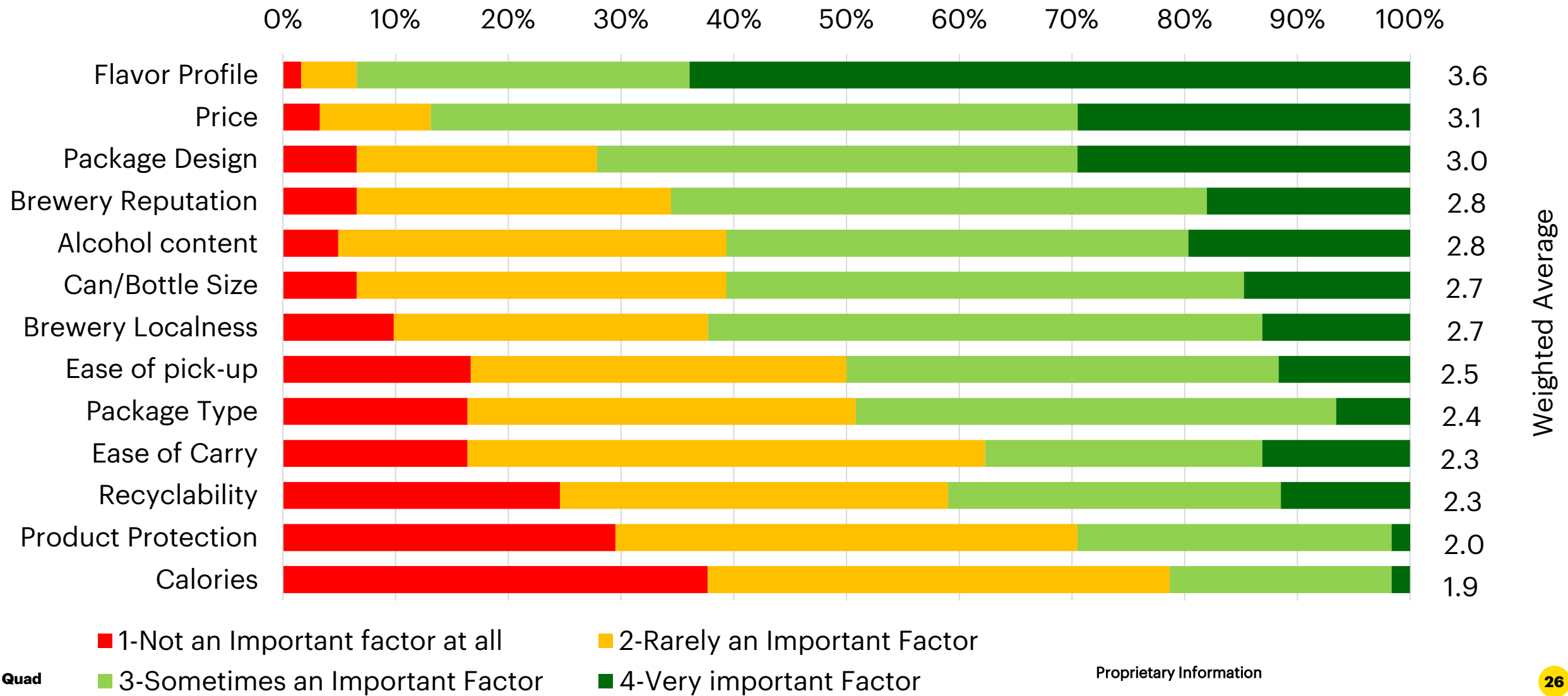
(Check all that apply)

- Color
- Aroma
- Alcohol Content
- Calories
- Ingredients/Tasting Notes
- Brand/Brewery Story

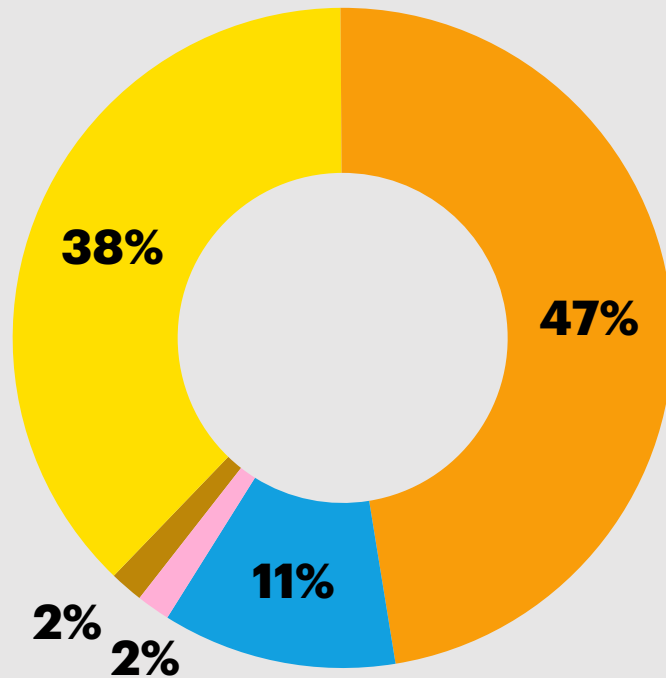


When you are considering a purchase, how important are these attributes to your decision?

Please rank each attribute from 1-4 where 1 is not important at all and 4 is very important to your decision-making.



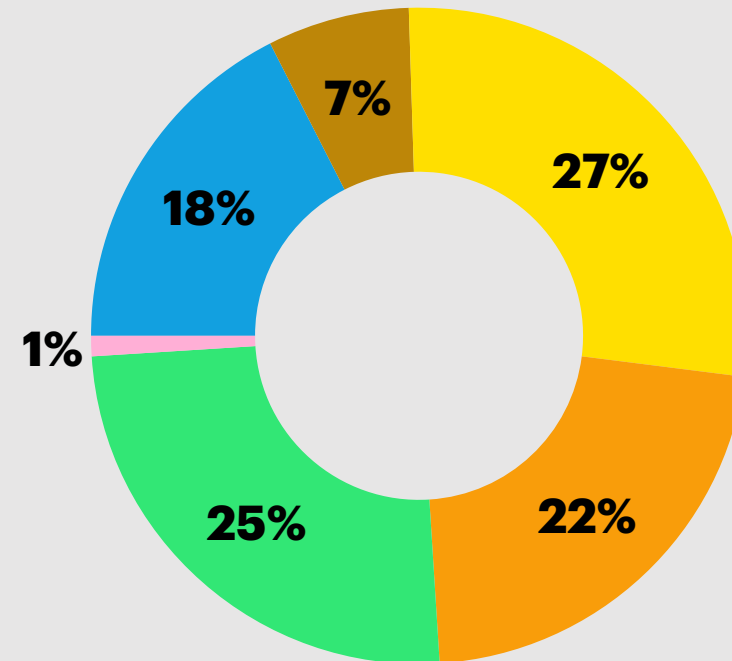
What is your frequency of craft beer consumption?



- Daily
- A few times a week
- A few times a month
- Once a month
- Only on special occasions

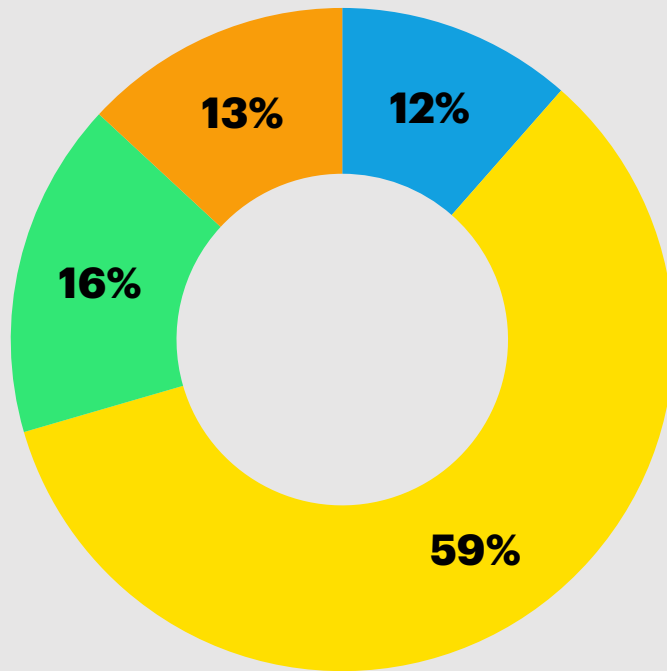
What are the occasions where you usually consume craft beer?

(Check any that apply)



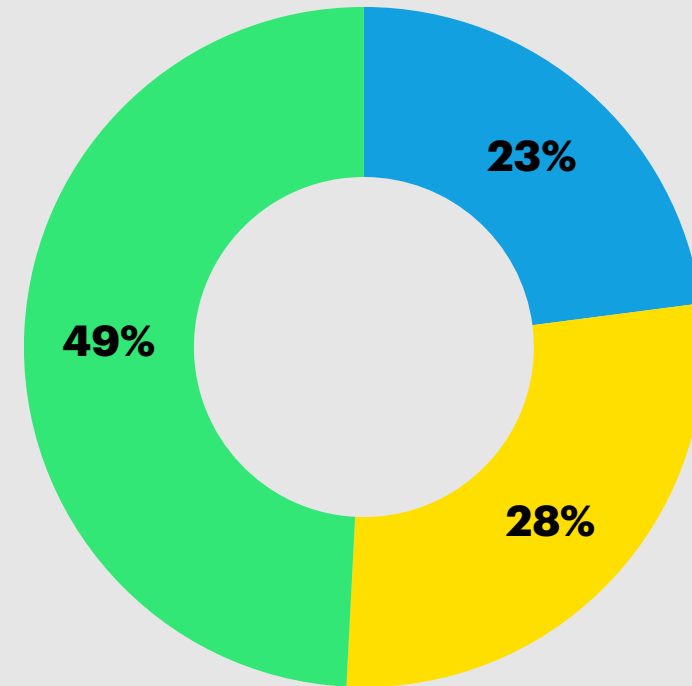
- Unwinding at home
- Event at a restaurant, club, or bar
- Social events or parties
- Meals at home
- Sporting events
- Other (please specify)

How often do you purchase craft beer?



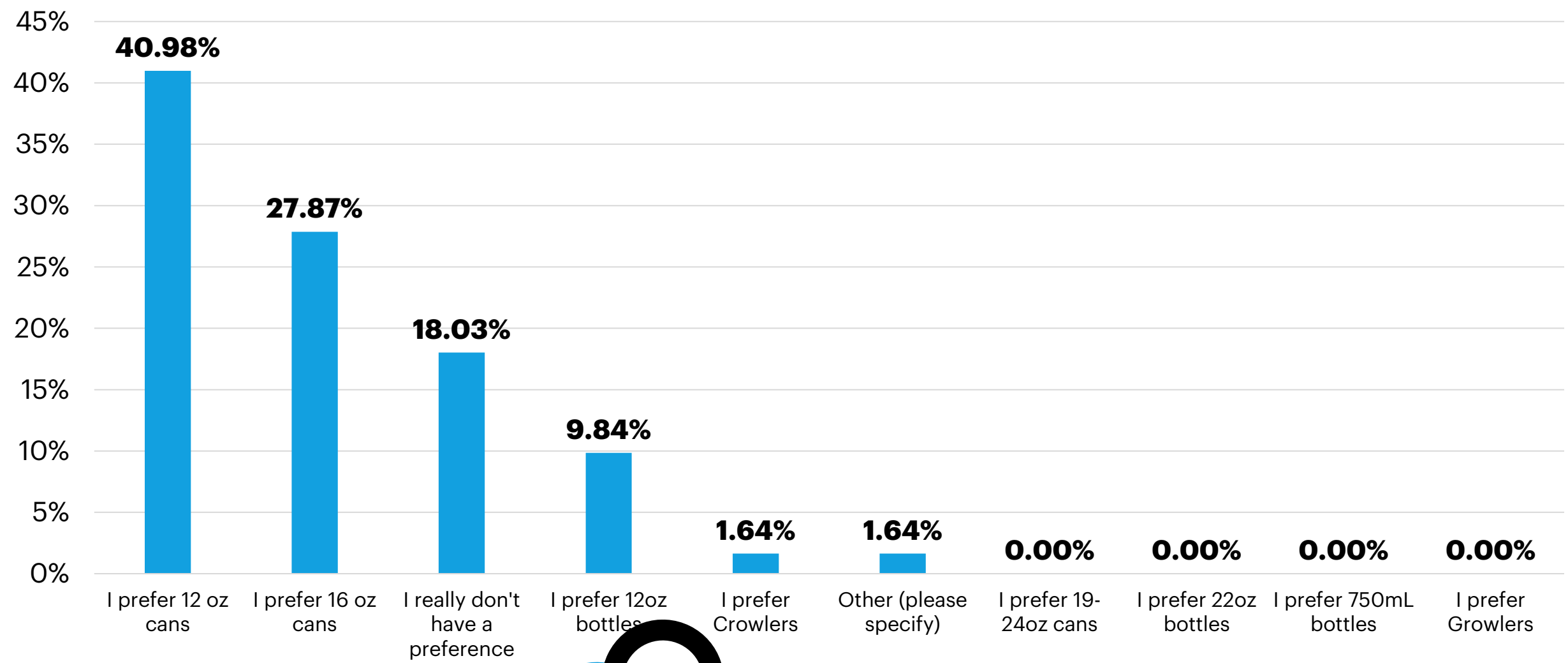
■ Once or twice a week ■ A couple times a month
■ Once a month ■ Once every two months

How many beers do you usually purchase at one time when you are buying craft beer to drink elsewhere?

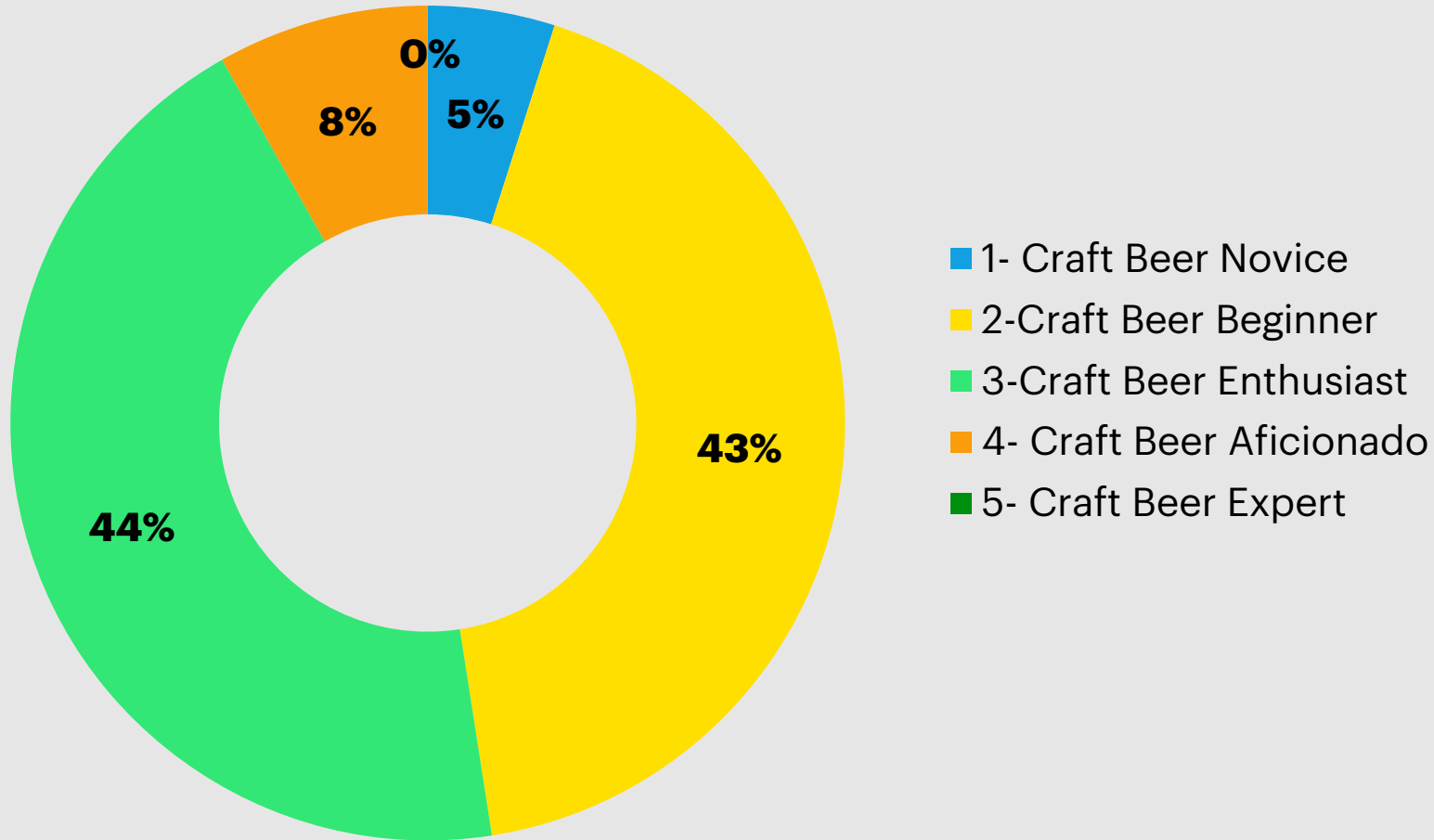


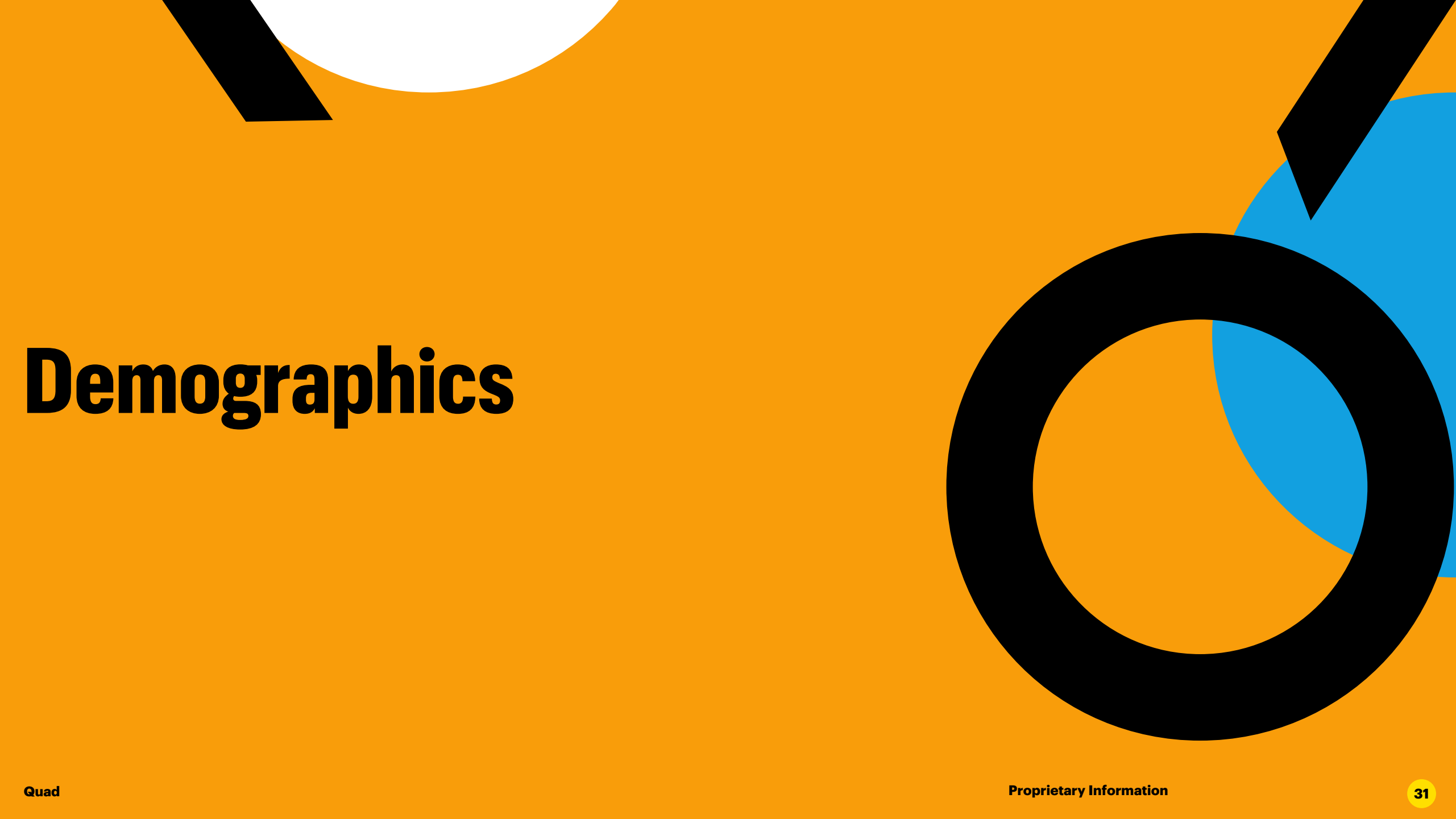
■ 1-2 beers a time ■ 3-5 beers a time ■ 6+ beers a time

Do you have a preference of packaging type for craft beer?



How would you evaluate your level of Craft Beer knowledge?

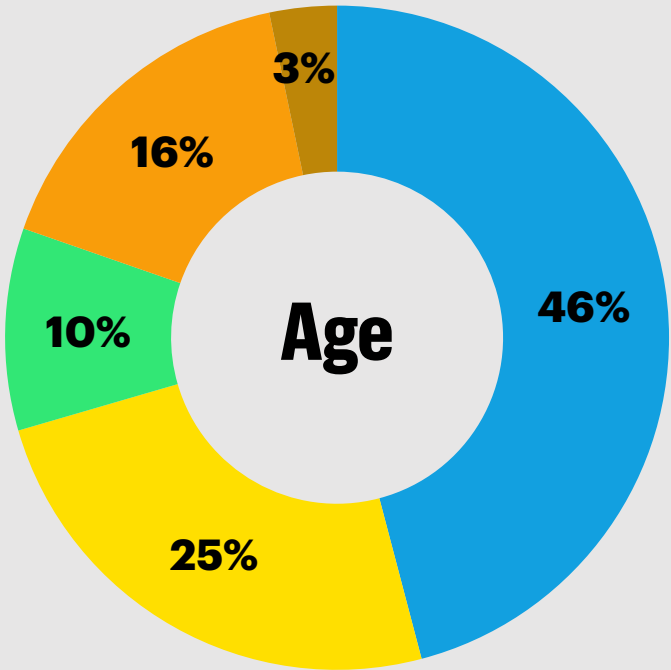




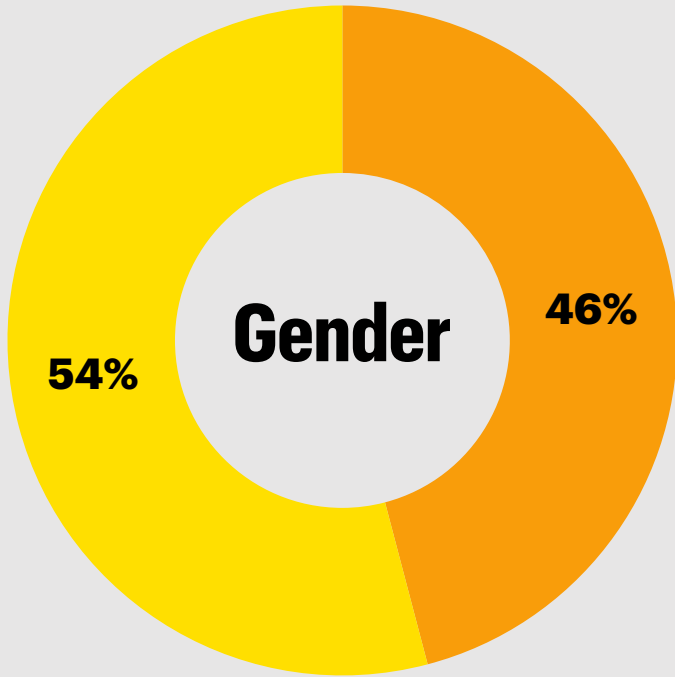
Demographics



Demographics

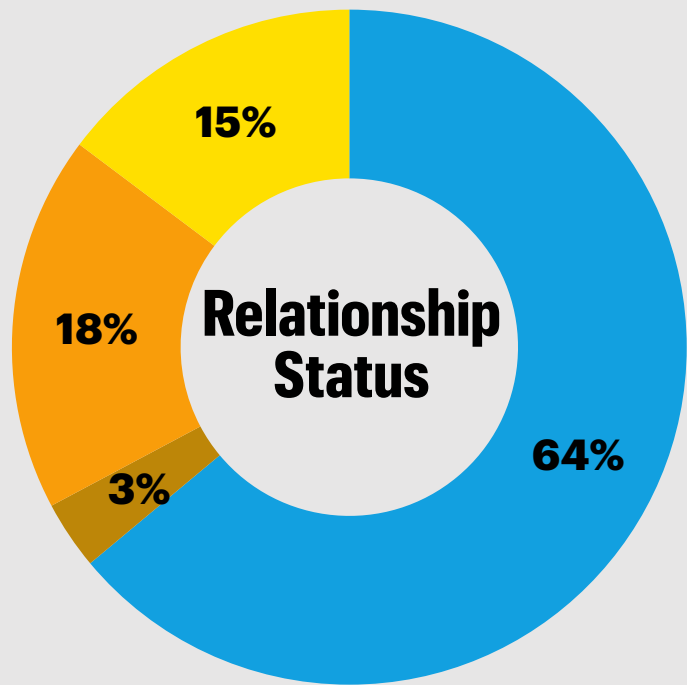


■ 21-30 ■ 31-40 ■ 41-50 ■ 51-60 ■ 61+

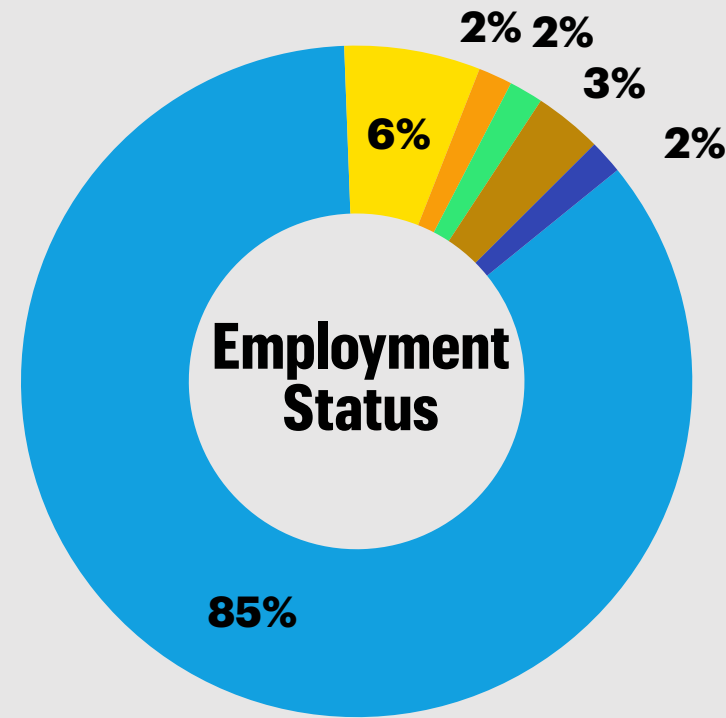


■ Female ■ Male ■ Non-Binary

Demographics

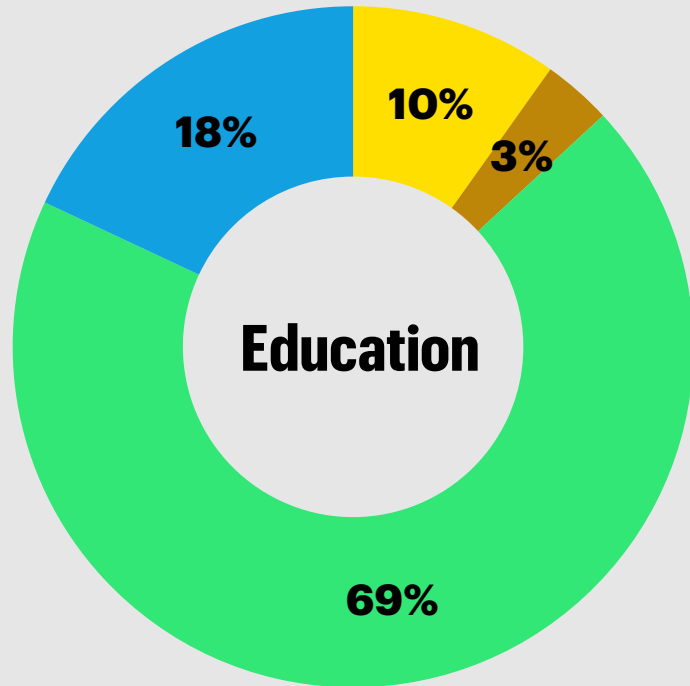


- Married
- Divorced
- Separated
- Single, but cohabiting with a significant other
- Single, never married



- Full-time employed
- Self-employed
- Stay-at-home Parent
- Full time Student
- Part-time employed
- Searching for a job
- Retired

Demographics



- Less than high school degree
- High school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED)
- Some college but no degree
- Associate degree
- Bachelor degree
- Graduate degree

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About Quad

Quad (NYSE: QUAD) is a marketing experience, or MX, company that helps brands make direct consumer connections, from household to in-store to online. The company does this through its MX Solutions Suite, a comprehensive range of marketing and print services that seamlessly integrate creative, production and media solutions across online and offline channels. Supported by state-of-the-art technology and data-driven intelligence, Quad simplifies the complexities of marketing by removing friction wherever it occurs along the marketing journey. The company tailors its uniquely flexible, scalable and connected solutions to each clients' objectives, driving cost efficiencies, improving speed-to-market, strengthening marketing effectiveness and delivering value on client investments.

Quad employs approximately 11,000 people in 11 countries and serves approximately 2,100 clients including industry leading blue-chip companies that serve both businesses and consumers in multiple industry verticals, with a particular focus on commerce, including retail, consumer packaged goods, and direct-to-consumer; financial services; and health. Quad is ranked among the largest agency companies in the U.S. by Ad Age, buoyed by its full-service media agency, Rise, and creative agency, Betty. Quad is also one of the largest commercial printers in North America, according to Printing Impressions.

For more information about Quad, including its commitment to operating responsibly, intentional innovation and values-driven culture, visit quad.com.

