

by h. buff herr



## this count counts

The bartender meticulously measures one jigger of Woodford Reserve and pours it into the rocks glass. Sensing that I am watching, he lifts the bottle to appraise the remainder twice, finally topping my drink with the balance of the bottle, serving almost a “double” while ringing up a “regular.” As a manager, would you commend, condone, or condemn the overpour?

### OUT OF CONTROL

Let’s agree that “freepour” is a misnomer. Control and management of your beverage program should get as much of your attention as securing the lease for your property demanded. Every ounce impacts your bottom line. Lose control of the liquid assets and you could lose your business. So how do you achieve and maintain control? In a perfect world you could pour every drink yourself—yeah, right!

Your expensive and sophisticated POS system records every transaction the staff enters, but only *when* they enter it and only *if* they enter it accurately. The POS inventory module, the one you neither purchased nor understood, could be activated. But putting the inventory program into play would require extra labor at receiving plus assigning someone to manage it. Discrepancies would be flagged, but you’d get only a “paper” inventory—not the real thing.

CCTV allows you to watch every employee’s move. But unless you’re glued to the screen, the images are proof only after the overpour. Yes, it’s a valuable corrective tool in the beverage-control arsenal; no, it’s not a stand-alone solution.

You can install a speed gun to dispense precise shots of Dewars or Stoli. The system offers perfect control, but your customers may not like drinking from a human-assisted vending machine.

Capton makes an electronic bottle cap that transmits pour data via RFID (radio frequency identification) on every drop to a PC in real time. An expensive option, it provides control while technically maintaining a freepour. It’s a monitor, not a true management tool.

### FULL CONTROL

Real beverage management and control require religiously counting the inventory—correctly! I recently watched the bartender at a medium-size bistro laboriously count a 2,000-bottle inventory. It took two and a half hours with stops and starts during dinner service. He pulled each bottle, located its name on a multi-page alphabetical listing, and entered the count or guesstimated the bottle’s remaining content, working across the shelves, under-bar refrigerators, speed racks, basement storage areas, and walk-in wine cooler. Halfway through, two runners brought up several dozen assorted bottles to restock his wines by the glass. (Did he mentally adjust the totals?) When it was over, there were no smiles and far too many “single points of failure.”

Inventory, by definition, is the count at a specific moment in time. The counter should not be the one whose activity management is ultimately attempting to monitor, and the order of the list should match the layout of the product to minimize confusion and errors. If a restaurant with 8,000 bottles can manually count inventory in three hours, why does it take the bistro two and a half hours to count 2,000 bottles without even factoring in data entry?

### A TECH SOLUTION

There are better mousetraps that bring technology to this mundane repetitive task. After the 2,000-bottle counting ordeal, we counted the same inventory using one such tool: Accubar, a self-contained Palm-based device, which scans the bar codes that already appear on most labels to correctly identify each inventory item and keep the count. You scan, count, and enter, regardless of where the item shows up in the count or how often. Instead of a guesstimate, a patented graphic prompts visual matching of bottle silhouettes, allowing for consistent accuracy no matter who is doing the counting.

You still have to crawl around to find each item and physically count quantity, but once everything is barcoded or “on the list,” speed over the paper-and-pencil method increases almost 300 percent. Most impressive is the software for data entry. Rather than making you manually reenter the totals (single point of failure), the Accubar reader slides into a data cradle, rendering an instant spreadsheet, which can immediately be sliced and diced to meet specific requirements or ported into Accubar’s standard reporting templates.

Counting inventory is time consuming, repetitive, and unsuspectingly expensive. An hour spent counting each week translates into one and one-quarter weeks annually of managerial salary, without an error factor. If technology can shorten the process, embrace it. Accurate inventory is the only thing that allows you to prove what you’ve bought against what you’ve sold against what you still have. In short, instead of underpour, overpour, or freepour—manage profit!