# Independent breweries in decline as market pressures mount



The brewing landscape in Britain faces significant challenges as the number of independent breweries experienced its most dramatic decline in 2024, with recent figures indicating a drop of 100 breweries, leaving the total at 1,715. This statistic, released by the Society of Independent Brewers (Siba), marks a stark contrast from the previous year's minimal closure rate of just eight breweries. As the sector grapples with various economic pressures, the implications for market strategies and growth opportunities are substantial.

Declining Numbers and Historical Context

Siba's brewery tracker has provided a crucial insight into the brewing industry, comparable to data from the Campaign for Real Ale (Camra). Since the introduction of tax breaks for small brewers in 2002, the industry had seen a considerable boom, resulting in a so-called "craft beer revolution". However, 2024 stands out as a year of unprecedented decline, overshadowing previous downturns. Other than initial pandemic impacts, this downturn represents the sharpest contraction in the independents segment, signalling a potential shift in consumer behaviour and market dynamics.

Adverse Market Conditions

A multitude of factors has converged to challenge independent breweries. The competition from larger brewing corporations has intensified, employing aggressive tactics that often involve acquisitions. These corporations not only purchase smaller breweries but later market them as “craft”, consequently inhibiting the market share of genuine independents. In addition, recent consumer trends, tied to rising living costs, have made it increasingly difficult for consumers to engage with more expensive craft offerings, which typically feature higher-quality or imported ingredients.

The broader economic backdrop includes rising operational costs impacting margins, as well as lingering debts from loans secured during the pandemic. A recent increase in alcohol duty, which targets higher-strength brews favoured by craft beer enthusiasts, further compounds the challenges faced by smaller producers.

Local Demand versus Market Access

Although demand for independent beer remains robust, as emphasised by Andy Slee, chief executive of Siba, independent brewers are struggling to penetrate local pubs effectively. “Given the demand for independent beer isn’t being met locally, you have to wonder whether more local beer in community pubs would help pub closure rates as well,” Slee articulated, highlighting the disparity between supply and local demand.

Notably, several noteworthy breweries have succumbed to these pressures, including Wild Card, Top Rope, and Little Monster. Others have been absorbed into larger entities through acquisition strategies, such as the purchase of Brew by Numbers and Brick by the private equity firm Breal Group, which has since rebranded its operations under the Keystone Brewing Group.

Emerging Strategies

In response to the shifting landscape, Siba and its affiliated members have rebranded the “craft beer” designation to “indie beer”, a move made to combat what they deem as 'misleading' representations in the market. This change aims not only to differentiate genuine independent breweries from those acquired by larger corporations but also to reinforce their commitment to authenticity in production and community engagement.

Conclusion

The independent brewing sector in Britain is navigating a turbulent period, marked by the swift decline in the number of operational breweries amidst heightened competition and rising economic concerns. As strategies evolve in response to market pressures, the emphasis on community engagement and clarity in branding may provide pathways for rejuvenating the sector amidst adverse conditions. For industry stakeholders, these insights underscore the importance of adaptive strategies and the necessity of understanding local markets to remain viable in an increasingly competitive environment.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.thedrinksbusiness.com/2024/05/british-craft-brewery-numbers-drop-at-the-start-of-2024/> - This article supports the claim that the number of active brewers in Britain has declined, with a 2% drop in the first quarter of 2024, and highlights the challenges faced by independent breweries due to rising costs and legacy Covid debt.
* <https://www.morningadvertiser.co.uk/Article/2024/07/26/number-of-breweries-decline-in-the-second-quarter-of-2024/> - This article corroborates the ongoing decline in brewery numbers, noting a net decline of 29 in the second quarter of 2024, and discusses the financial pressures faced by small independent breweries.
* <https://wb.camra.org.uk/2024/10/18/brewery-closures-slow> - This piece from CAMRA highlights the slowing rate of brewery closures in the third quarter of 2024 and emphasizes the challenges of market access and profitability for small breweries.
* <https://www.noahwire.com> - This source provides the initial context and statistics about the decline in independent breweries in Britain, although it does not offer specific corroborating details beyond the article itself.
* <https://www.siba.co.uk/> - The Society of Independent Brewers (SIBA) website would provide more detailed insights into the challenges faced by independent breweries and their efforts to rebrand and differentiate themselves in the market.
* <https://www.camra.org.uk/> - The Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) website offers additional context on the historical growth and current challenges of the brewing industry in Britain, aligning with SIBA's data on brewery closures.
* <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2025/feb/21/britain-lost-100-indie-breweries-last-year-says-trade-body> - Please view link - unable to able to access data