

# New Zealand Brewing needs a standard

Of the feast of brewers gathered to celebrate at BrewNZ last week, many went home disappointed by a ceremony where judging was the winner on the night and even winners felt like losers.

Richard Emerson received the only standing ovation of the night; Emerson's Brewery a deserved champion New Zealand Brewery. That was the highlight in a night of nadirs.

This year just 23 per cent of 360 beers entered got medals – and of the 82 medals awarded nearly half (44%) went to overseas breweries.

By comparison in 2008, 37% of entries were winners on the night, in 2007 that figure was over 50%.

So what's gone on? Have our beers deteriorated? Is there something wrong with the judging? Perhaps it's a bit of both.

Judges have claimed beer appreciation is a sensory thing that can't be quantified or categorised – that's an opinion somewhat at odds with brewers who know that consistency of product is achieved by measuring, recording and checking back against that standard.

If there are no secrets in brewing then the mystery must be reserved for how it's judged. Any sensory system must be clouded by individual human interpretations (behavioural studies have shown adding people to a panel does not dilute prejudice, wherever judges converse a single dominant or senior individual is easily able to sway the opinions of the many).

Legend has it beer is examined solely against style – gold for world class, silver bronze etc – however, when a significant proportion of overseas breweries entered, New Zealand beers performed poorly. That suggests beers were indeed being judged by the company they kept. In 2008 there were eight gold medals awarded to New Zealand beers (excluding best in class) – in 2009 there were just two that reached the standard. By contrast, 10 overseas beers won gold versus just three the previous year.

And it's not just the standard that appears to be floating.

There's another continually moving bar in the classes themselves. In 2009 six classes disappeared, to be replaced by nine new ones. Available data doesn't allow us to track to the percentage of beers "out of style" and therefore automatically out of contention; anecdotal evidence suggests this figure could be quite high.

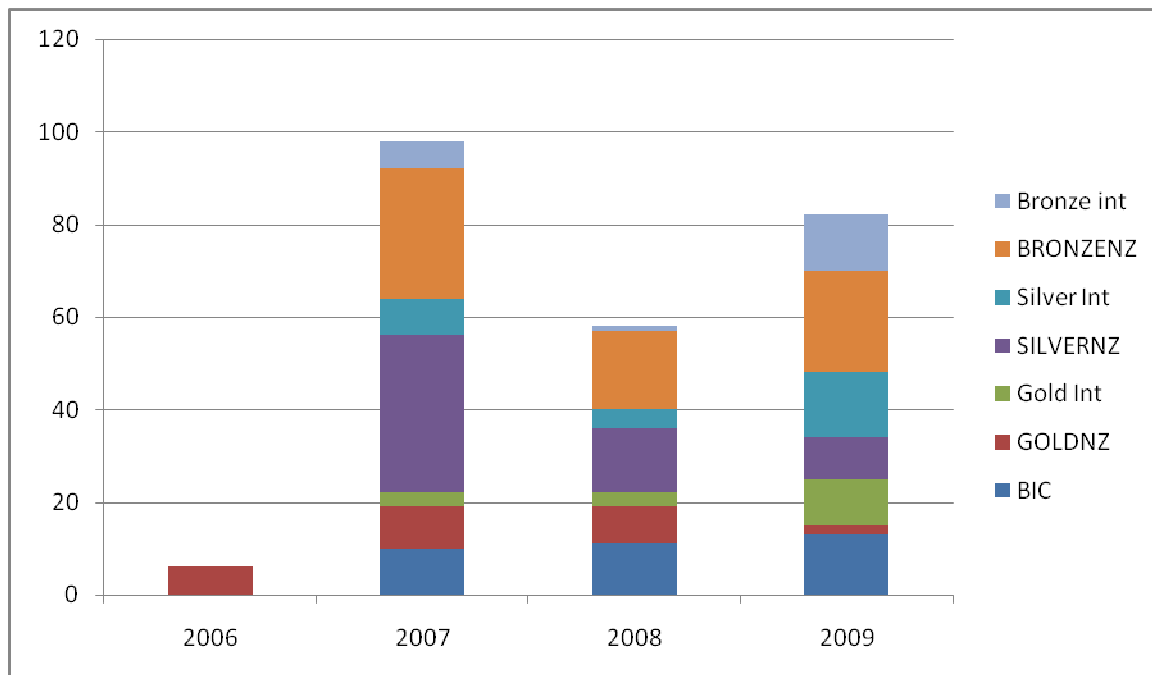
As an industry we chose to get behind one major beer award to celebrate excellence and give us all something to aim for. That's what BrewNZ needs to provide – a single transparent standard, year after year, one we can all aspire to.

We don't want easy medals and accolades where everyone gets a prize. We want honest feedback and to give credit where credits due; if 80 percent of our beers are world class let's celebrate the lot; and just one percent make the grade, let's be inspired by that standard.

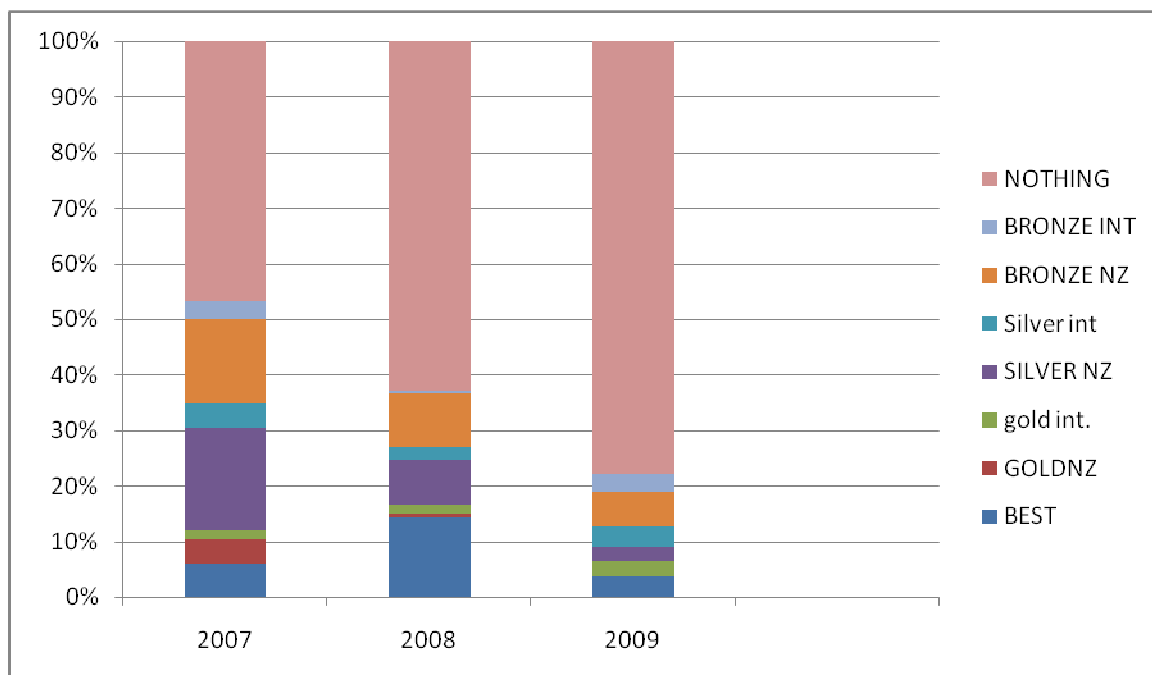
So set the bar. Set it high. Then stop playing with it.

## BrewNZ Results

No. of Medals Awarded



Percentage of entries to gain awards



**Footnote:** Medals and awards in this data have been collated solely for beverages. The number of beverage classes during this period increased from 10 to 13; in order to compare like with like the medals won by best

in class winners in 2007 and 2008 have been excluded, as have champion breweries, packaging and innovation awards.

## In a class of its own - the changing classes of BrewNZ

	Beer Classes		
No	2007	2008	2009
1	Classic Hybrid NZ Style Beers	Classic Hybrid NZ Style	
2	Amber and Dark Lagers	Amber and Dark Lagers	
3	International Golden Lager	International Golden Lagers	
4	French & Belgian Style Ales	French & Belgian Style ales	
5	New World/American Style ales	New World/American style ales	
6	UK and Other European ales	UK & other European style ales	European Ale Styles
7	Stouts and Porters	Stouts and Porters	Stouts and porter-s
8	Strong Ales and Lagers	Strong Ales and Lagers	
9	Wheat and other Grain Beers	Wheat and Other Grain Beers	Wheat and other Grain styles
10	Fruit/spiced/herb/flavoured	Fruit, Spiced/Herb Flavoured	Flavoured and Aged styles (inc. Fruit/spiced/Herb flavoured)
11		Experimental/Low Alcohol	Reduced alcohol/carb/Gluten
12			Speciality Experimental, aged, barrel & wood aged
13			Ciders and Perries
14			Festive Brew
15			New Zealand Draught
16			New Zealand Lager & Premium lager
17			International Lager styles
18			European Lager Styles
19			NZ/US & International

			Ales
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New class

Existing class

Deleted class