



# Coaster Communication

Networked beer coasters become a useful spirit – for guests, innkeepers and the industry.



COPY — Roger Homrich

Germany's beer industry is stuck with a hangover and thirsts for good news. The beer sales of the first half of 2019 did not bring that good news unfortunately. Not once in the last three decades have the breweries between Flensburg and Berchtesgaden sold so few cold ones. The bottom line: the drop in sales amounts to 13.4 million fewer crates of beer sold. The competition is tough, and the price war is fierce. "Basically, breweries hardly know anything about their customers' consumer behaviour. When do they prefer to drink which variety? How do special campaigns and advertising really work?" Ralf Krippner, Managing Director of Hoffmann + Krippner GmbH shares.

## BEER COASTER WITH SIM CARD

As part of the HK Group, Hoffmann + Krippner builds highly specialized touch systems and sensors for machine builders and medical technology companies. The medium-sized company came up with the idea of bringing a smart beer coaster onto the market due to the strong increase in demand for IoT solutions and the glass manufacturer Rastal, which has developed an intelligent countertop and smart glasses. "Somehow the matching beer coaster was still missing," thought Krippner and began to breathe intelligence into the beer coaster, or BGU as they call it.

The "Smart Coaster" is equipped with a fixed SIM card and a film sensor. The smart beer coaster records the weight of a glass and thus determines the current fill level. The data on how fast the pilsner, ale or stout is running low is sent to the IoT cloud via mobile radio and made available to the users in processed form. Thanks to the Narrowband IoT radio standard, this works right down to the last corner of a dining room. Customers no longer have to install anything on site. The devices register themselves – even abroad –



and are immediately ready for use without configuration. A real plug & play solution.

## IOT PROMOTES SALES INCREASE

The idea was well received by the brewers. First tests show that sales can be increased by 10 to 20 percent with IoT. "In addition, the brewery and restaurateur can better adjust to the drinking habits of their customers," explains Krippner. "They now know which type of beer is being had and in what quantities and when. And given more information such as weather data, manufacturers and restaurateurs can tailor special promotions to the current situation." For example, if temperatures rise above 30 degrees, lighter beers may be more popular. Then price reductions could further fuel consumption or allow restaurateurs to use the data from beer coasters to provide better service.

Krippner now uses the Microsoft Azure IoT hub as a backend system for communication between IoT applications and networked devices as well as the development of new IoT cloud solutions. Hopefully, the smart beer coaster will hopefully help brewers out of the slump in beer sales. Especially because "they secure jobs in rural areas, are an important economic factor and trading partner for farmers and other suppliers and stand for a worldwide unique variety of beers," as Beer Ambassador of the Year and former Federal Foreign Minister, Sigmar Gabriel, points out.