



# Bridge and Tunnel Brewery's Hyperlocal Marketing

By: Rachelle Nones

**R**ich Castagna, brewer and proprietor of the Bridge and Tunnel Brewery and Taproom in Ridgewood, Queens, tapped into a nostalgic mother lode when he selected Bridge and Tunnel as his brewery's name. During the late 80s and 90s, the phrase "bridge and tunnel" was often used to describe the residents of Queens, Brooklyn, the Bronx, and Long Island, because a train or tunnel was required to access Manhattan from those outlying regions. Nightclub patrons understood that affluent and fashionable Manhattan residents drew a discerning line in the sand that ended where New York City's outer boroughs began. If you used a train or tunnel to enter Manhattan, the odds of brushing past the bouncer guarding the door of an exclusive nightclub or bar was equivalent to the odds of getting struck by lightning.

Since names are such an important element of branding, why did Castagna name his brewery after an expression that was once viewed as a way to stereotype and divide people? Castagna has been asked

that question so many times that he decided to post the philosophy behind his naming decision on the brewery's website: "Bridge and Tunnel Brewery—because it's the bridges and tunnels that unite this city, not divide it."

## Growing Pains

When Castagna operated a brewery out of his garage, the setup worked well while the brewery remained in its nano stage. But when it morphed into a micro brewery, Castagna started scouting out a larger operating space in Western Queens, an area flush with new breweries: Finback Brewery, Rockaway Brewing Company, Big Alice Brewing, Transmitter Brewing, Queens Brewery and the LIC Beer Project.

"A few years ago, Queens was the first borough to begin launching craft beer breweries and it put Queens on the map for craft beer enthusiasts. Queens breweries have a lot of pride in represent-

ing the borough and New York City in general. We throw our own Queens Beer Week each year in the spring, which also serves to pull us together.”

The Bridge and Tunnel Brewery is presently located in a heavily industrial area housing warehouses and car repair shops. Situated on a gritty urban block, its low profile exterior reminds one of the trendy 80s nightclubs that were discretely tucked away inside unmarked, shabby exteriors located along New York’s Lower East Side.

To fund the brewery’s expansion, Castagna launched a successful Kickstarter campaign, raising \$16,682 from 146 backers. The campaign posted more than 12 different pledge levels, ranging from \$5 to \$5,000, and a diverse range of pledge rewards. “We had everything from stickers on the low end—to a Mug Club membership—to a full swag package.”

## Shifting Into Marketing Mode

As the craft beer marketplace expands in New York City, there has been a significant change in the way beer is marketed. Castagna noted: “The mar-

keting challenge currently seems to be a shift away from the concept of supporting your local producers toward either flashy label designs or the status of being the newest brewery or producing the rarest or quirkiest beer. It’s a shift that I suspect is not the norm in other parts of the United States where craft beer has grown strong roots from its early introduction back in the 80s.”

At the present time, the brewery’s main distribution is in the “bridge and tunnel” neighborhoods of Astoria, Long Island City, Sunnyside, Bushwick, Williamsburg, and Greenpoint. To date, the Bridge and Tunnel brand can also be purchased at three Manhattan locations: Jimmy’s No. 43 in the East Village, and at Malt and Mold and Eastwood, both of which are located on Manhattan’s Lower East Side.

“Breweries in other cities with deeper craft beer roots can focus on the basics. Whereas here, I feel New York City breweries have the extra task of educating and acting as a gateway to the craft beer world—starting right in our own neighborhoods. We have to make that extra effort, which was the same effort breweries in other states were making 20 years ago.”



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## Crafting a Local Narrative

So, how does Castagna market an edgy brewery and taproom in a high rent city while operating on a tight budget? One of the most endearing ways the Bridge and Tunnel Brewery differentiates itself is with its colorful hyperlocal beer names. Local lore, customs, and colorful neighbors and events have all inspired the Bridge and Tunnel Brewery's beer names. For example, the name Junior's Clean Glasses Irish Red Ale was inspired by the antics of Coffey, the owner of an Irish bar named Coffey's Corner, once located in Astoria, Queens. A funeral home and a church were located a short distance from the bar. Coffey's nephew Francis, who often helped out behind the bar, quickly learned that his uncle spied on the funeral home to determine if a wake was being held. When his uncle noted that the funeral home was filling up, he'd turn to Francis and say "Junior—make sure all of the glasses are clean. Tonight's gonna be a busy night."

Did you know that cattle were once herded down the cobblestone streets of Brooklyn (Slaughter House Stampede Black Rye IPA) or that Dutch settlers living in Maspeth, Queens, used birch, sassafras, Cluster hops, and spruce (1642 Mespeatches

Ale) to brew ale? Maspeth was named after the Mespeaches Indian tribe, a tribe that settled on the high ground of what is presently Mount Zion Cemetery.

Again and again, the uniquely local story behind every beer's name effectively reinforces the brewery's hyperlocal branding. Here, is a summation of the uniquely local stories behind more names in the Bridge and Tunnel Brewery's product line:

- **Angry Amel Dunkelweizen**—inspired by Castagna's childhood memories of angry Amel, a hostile and obsessively neat neighbor who threatened violence whenever Castagna and his childhood friends accidentally hit a rubber ball behind Amel's well-trimmed hedges.
- **Red Bird Express Belgian Red IPA**—This reddish hued beer is named after the handsome Red Bird 7 train that once charged down the elevated tracks of adjacent Queens neighborhoods. In loving memory of the Red Bird's daily passage through the most diverse neighborhoods in America, Castagna incorporated the Red Bird 7 Train as a major element in the Bridge and Tunnel Brewery's logo.

- **Pickin' Up The Change Chipotle Porter**—inspired by a New York City 80's dance move associated with the legendary New York Hardcore (NYHC) music movement represented by hardcore bands such as the Mob.
- **Bone Orchard Vanilla Porter**—inspired by the 29 cemeteries established along the “Cemetery Belt” in Queens. On the brewery’s website, Castagna discusses intriguing local folklore, trivia, and startling facts about cemeteries in Queens, Brooklyn, and Manhattan.

When I visited the Bridge and Tunnel Brewery, Castagna was busily preparing the brewery’s modest taproom for the Rock’em Sock’em Fighting Robots Boxing Event taking place that evening. During the event, registered patrons are paired with robots at separate game stations to box it out from one round to another until two contenders remain to battle for the title. The winner receives bragging rights and use of the brewery’s coveted championship belt whenever he or she visits the taproom.

In addition to holding special promotional events like the Rock’em Sock’em Fighting Robots Boxing Tournament, the brewery also promotes an annual membership program called Mug Club. Enrollment benefits include: a personal beer mug stored at the taproom, a Mug Club tee, exclusive early access to limited releases, discounted brewery merchandise, a celebratory birthday mug of beer, and invitation-only access to entertaining Mug Club parties and owner-guided brewery tours.

“We welcome our local patrons like friends and they become friends and the same goes for our wholesale accounts. We work hard for them and they recognize it. But every now and then, one of our patrons will say something along the lines of ‘but if too many people start coming, then this place will change. You won’t be a cool underground brewery anymore.’ I’ll usually point out that being underground doesn’t help pay the bills, followed by pointing out all the stuff that we built in the brewery—soup to nuts. We built it and continue to build it. We grow organically with our community. We are a part of it and seek the best for it.”

To learn more about the Bridge and Tunnel Brewery, watch the Bridge and Tunnel Brewery on Decatur Street, a documentary short by Raul Hernandez: YouTube: [https://youtu.be/X\\_VBzZfPJoA](https://youtu.be/X_VBzZfPJoA)



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