

Review of the Good Beer Guide

Commercial Committee

Version 1.0
March 2025



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Context

At the 2024 CAMRA Conference the following motion was debated and carried:

This Conference instructs the National Executive to implement a comprehensive review of the Good Beer Guide. The review shall report to Conference in 2025 to ensure all relevant recommendations are implemented for the 2027 or 2028 edition, whichever is the more practicable.

This motion – proposed by members – was strongly supported by the National Executive given the Good Beer Guide's prominence and commercial importance for the Campaign AND the clear need for changes to address the sales decline.

The review required was entrusted to the Commercial Director & Commercial Division, with the oversight of the Commercial Committee.

In our preparatory discussions there was clear recognition of the importance of the Guide to CAMRA, the beer-drinking public and volunteers.

After a discussion as to how best to conduct the review, Commercial Committee concluded the most objective way would be to appoint an independent body who would consult with people across the Campaign, for the Committee to make recommendations from the findings of the review, to seek support from the National Executive, and to make a report to Conference in 2025.

This document includes those recommendations, other considerations and, as an appendix, the independent review itself.

The review was conducted in the second half of 2024 and the report compiled in the first quarter of 2025.

Executive Summary

Good Beer Guide - The current situation

- The Good Beer Guide is our flagship publication.
- It is strong brand asset for CAMRA.
- It is commercially important.
- There is high engagement of volunteers.
- Sales of the book have been declining over a prolonged period of time.

Our vision for the future Good Beer Guide

The Good Beer Guide will be a hero CAMRA brand presented online and via a flagship annual publication.

Joined-up management of the new CAMRA website and the book will deliver the results required to build and sustain the Good Beer Guide brand and deliver an outstanding tool for members and drinkers.

Motions to Conference 2025

While many of the proposed changes to the Guide are operational in nature, it was agreed that two aspects required motions to be debated at Conference 2025, in order that changes can be made from the 2027 Good Beer Guide onwards.

These are the motions that were proposed and accepted by the Conference Procedures Committee:

Motion 6 2025

This Conference instructs branches to use the National Beer Scoring System as a significant factor when determining which pubs are considered for inclusion in the Good Beer Guide, from the 2027 edition onwards.

Motion 7 2025

This Conference instructs the National Executive to reduce the number of pubs in the Good Beer Guide from the 2027 edition onwards, to ensure only quality pubs are featured.

The independent review body

After a tender process, **Think Publishing** were appointed.

Think is the UK's leading membership content agency. Working with more membership organisations than any other agency – communicating with a combined audience of more than 4.5 million members each year – they have a proven track record of delivering award-winning content in print and online. The print and digital prowess was crucial to our decision.

Think know CAMRA well having worked on Beer Magazine since its inception in 2008.

The brief as agreed

This is the brief agreed with **Think** with a requirement for them to deliver by December 2024 in order that Commercial Committee might consider any necessary motions (as proved to be the case) in early 2025, according to the Conference timetable.

To complete a review of The Good Beer Guide, and identify a series of recommendations

Core deliverables are:

- What content should feature in the guide.
- How many pub entries should there be in the guide, this includes what role should geographical locations play.
- What are the entry criteria and how would they be presented and quantified.
 - The pub scoring criteria must be considered.
- What is the relationship between the book and the digital offering.
- What is the price point for the guide based on the recommendation.
- How should the guide be structured.
- Review the process from branch submission to print.

NB: Developed by researching both members and non-members.

In their response, Think proposed to cover.

- Wider industry context: best practice from other membership organisations and commercial book publishing trends.
- Observations on the current Good Beer Guide: how does it compare to other Guides and how can it attract new target audiences?
- Content: what should we be including in the Guide? How can we make it the Michelin Guide to pubs?
- Channel mix: where do you put the content? How do the print and digital editions support each other? What are the other marketing opportunities with 'paid' and 'earned' amplification?
- Identify quick wins and a timeframe for implementation: ahead of the formal presentation of the review at conference, are there any quick wins for 2025 ahead of the bigger changes for the 2026 Guide?
- Measures of success: confirm what 'great' looks like when thinking about what the Guide can do for members, pubs and new audiences.
- Establish new ways of working to keep everything on track: this will include looking at internal processes, working with pubs and volunteers, responsibilities, and measures of success (with tracking and reporting).

The review process

Phase 1 – Immersive fact finding

Phase 2 - Conduct the review and make recommendations

Phase 3 - Present findings

Consultation

To facilitate the agreed phases, **Think** were given data and the names of individuals with who to consult.

In summary the individuals consulted were:

- The two proposers of the motion.
- Four National Executive members – chairs of other national committees.
- The Chair of Regions and Branches Committee.
- Two members with extensive expertise in beer publishing.
- Two members of CAMRA publishing staff.

A quantitative survey "Have your say on the future of the Good Beer Guide" resulted in more than 5,000 member responses – 57% of who buy the guide.

Finally, there was a focus group of eight members, some who are loyal annual buyers and others who no longer buy it.

The Commercial Committee was kept up to date throughout the process.

The Review and Findings

In summary the Commercial Committee agreed that the printed version of The Good Beer Guide has a strong future and we want to retain loyal buyers, while remaining commercially successful.

However, we want to enhance the appeal of The Good Beer Guide by creating the Good Beer Guide brand and to create deep integration with the CAMRA website.

This will encourage dual use of the book and the website.

Leveraging the brand, we want to create strong interest amongst prospective members and festival goers.

At this point we recommend that readers review the Appendix at the bottom of this document, which is Think's report to CAMRA, before continuing to our recommendations.

Key recommendations accepted by Commercial Committee

The Committee accepted the majority of Think's recommendations, while agreeing the appropriate sequence of implementation, and reserving others for future consideration.

Our recommendations also apply more familiar CAMRA language and terminology than the independent report.

1. Develop the Good Beer Guide as a brand.
2. Create a content strategy for the Good Beer Guide.
3. Create a governance structure to support the new content strategy.
4. Reduce the size of the printed Guide*.
5. Recognise the importance of the Privilege Club and loyal buyers.
6. Enhance the standard of the pubs in the printed Guide by reducing the number of entries*.
7. Improve the consistency of the selection criteria of the Guide with NBSS scoring as a significant factor.
8. Add a 'try also' element for the Guide.
9. Develop regular digital content linked to the Good Beer Guide including seasonal features.
10. Position the CAMRA website as the source of up-to-date Good Beer Guide information throughout the year.
11. Enhance development of the digital experience and encourage members and users to provide more content on pubs.
12. Increase the frequency of updates of the data and text.

* Recommendations four and six are reflected in the Motions to Conference 2025 numbers seven and six, respectively.

Implementation

Notwithstanding the 2024 motion's requirement *'to ensure all relevant recommendations are implemented for the 2027 or 2028 edition, whichever is the more practicable'*, the Commercial Committee agreed we should aim is to implement as many of the recommendations as possible by the publication date of the Good Beer Guide 2027 book.

Therefore, we propose that work should commence shortly after Members' Weekend 2025.

Guiding principles

- The Good Beer Guide is not just a book – it's much more than that!
- The Good Beer Guide will in future be a 'Hero' sub-brand of CAMRA, sitting alongside The Great British Beer Festival.
- The printed Guide will continue to respond to the needs and wants of members who want to consume content in the way that they want it.

- Our digital presence will offer more engaging content to bring to life the wonderful selection of pubs and beers our country has to offer.
- Quality is more important than quantity.
- Recognising the importance of volunteers in all branches and working with them will remain an essential aspect of the change process and The Guide ongoing.
 - to ensure the best pubs are recognised in their area and
 - to keep the pub entries on the website up to date

Methodology

The work will continue to be overseen by the Commercial Committee and we propose two new groups to drive the process forward.

1) Good Beer Guide Change Group

The remit of the group will be to take all aspects of this report, to finalise the changes to be implemented, set the timescales and recommend any further volunteer or staff groups with whom to consult, and to oversee the implementation.

- **Volunteers**

- Regional Directors: Two (including co-leader)
- Pub Data Advisory Group: Two
- Beer Scoring Advisory Group: One to two
- Tasting Panels Advisory Group: One to two
- Publishing Advisory Group: One

- **Staff**

- Commercial Team: Two (including co-leader)
- IT Team: Two

The volunteer members will work interactively with colleagues in their ongoing groups to ensure continuity and speed of change.

2) Good Beer Guide Content Strategy Group

In parallel we will create a cross-functional Good Beer Guide Content Strategy staff group, led by Commercial Division.

This will be an ongoing cross-function group charged with, initially, aligning the Good Beer Guide presence online with the Book and, thereafter, to create ongoing content to encourage users to come back to the website regularly and buy the book each year. This will build awareness of CAMRA and the Good Beer Guide brand and bring to life the diverse beer and pub industry.

Content management will consider what users are searching for, interesting articles on pubs / breweries and content which could pique the interest of non-members.

The two groups will work closely together. It is also expected that some research will be undertaken to fill any knowledge gaps.

Key Timelines

| Milestone | Date |
|---|----------------------|
| Create Good Beer Guide Change Group | May 2025 |
| Create Good Beer Guide Content Strategy Group | May 2025 |
| Agree selection criteria & pub allocations per region | August 2025 |
| Agree Good Beer Guide Content Strategy | December 2025 |
| Implement new content strategy and brand | February 2026 |
| Deadline for Breweries submission | February 2026 |
| Deadline for branches to submit pubs | March 2026 |
| Final pub edits | May 2026 |
| Announce launch of Good Beer Guide 2027 Book | June 2026 |
| Licensee packs sent to branches | August 2026 |
| Copies sent to Privilege members | Early September 2026 |
| Publication Date | Late September 2026 |
| Further steps | Ongoing/TBD |

Appendix: Think's review document follows.



Good Beer Guide Review

Redefining the purpose and
future of the Guide

December 2024



CAMPAIGN AWARDS: WINNER BEST PLACE TO WORK 2023

PPA AWARDS: WINNER CONTENT AGENCY OF THE YEAR 2022, 2024

MEMCOM: WINNER AGENCY OF THE YEAR 2017, 2018, 2020, 2022





CONTENTS AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CONTENTS



Contents and Executive summary

Good Beer Guide Review:

- 1. Objectives
- 2.Context
- 3.Audience
- 4.Strategy
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- 6.Appendix

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Think was asked by CAMRA to review the Good Beer Guide (GBG) in its entirety, from its purpose, to commercial opportunities and how its produced. With a long history and strong brand, the GBG is integral to the CAMRA membership offer, but in our digital-first world, the commercial publishing of the GBG is at an important juncture.

In order to provide a robust set of recommendations for the future of the Guide, we conducted:

- 11 stakeholder meetings across CAMRA.
- A quantitative survey of members with 5,011 responses.
- Interviews and qualitative research with 11 members.
- One focus group.
- A review of CAMRA and GBG strategy and documentation.
- Analysis of statistics and performance metrics.

We have distilled our findings into this report. In order to ensure the GBG remains relevant, commercially viable and attracts the CAMRA members of the future, our key recommendations include:

- Introduction of a content strategy and regular cadence of content with a three-tiered approach to the delivery:
 - Streamlined printed Guide for the traditional members
 - Continued investment in the digital offering to make it the go-to resource for good beer AND good pubs
- Enhance the standard of pubs and improve the selection criteria (while bringing the volunteers on the journey).
- Streamline the production process to allow the CAMRA team to focus on the success of the Guide rather than the production.
- Create a new content governance structure to capitalise on the brand – and content – of GBG.
- Make GBG a strand in CAMRA marketing.

CONTEXT

THE CHALLENGE & CONSIDERATIONS

- The Good Beer Guide is produced annually and is the best-selling independent annual UK Guide to pubs. However, sales and revenue are declining year on year.
- The Guide is produced through the support and hard work of CAMRA volunteers, representing their commitment to the CAMRA cause. It has been published as a printed book for more than 50 years.
- This review was instigated following a motion at the 2024 Members' Weekend and has been commissioned to address the Guide's content, format, target audience, approach and process (both for how pubs are selected and the production of the publication).
- There was a separate motion at the 2024 Members' Weekend which called for the reduction in the number of pub entries in the Guide to 4,000. This motion was defeated, however, a strong argument against the motion was that the subject on how many pubs featured in the Guide should be part of the overall review.
- There is concern about the long lead time between entries being submitted and the publication date.

CONSIDERATIONS:

- What is the best content mix for the Guide?
- How many pub entries should there be in the Guide (and how should it be organised geographically)?
- What are the entry criteria for the Guide and how should listings be assessed and presented?
- What is the relationship between the book and the digital content?
- What is the ideal price point for the Guide?
- What's the ideal the process for gathering branch submissions?



RELATIONSHIP WITH THE GOOD BEER GUIDE

WHO BUYS THE GOOD BEER GUIDE, AND WHY?

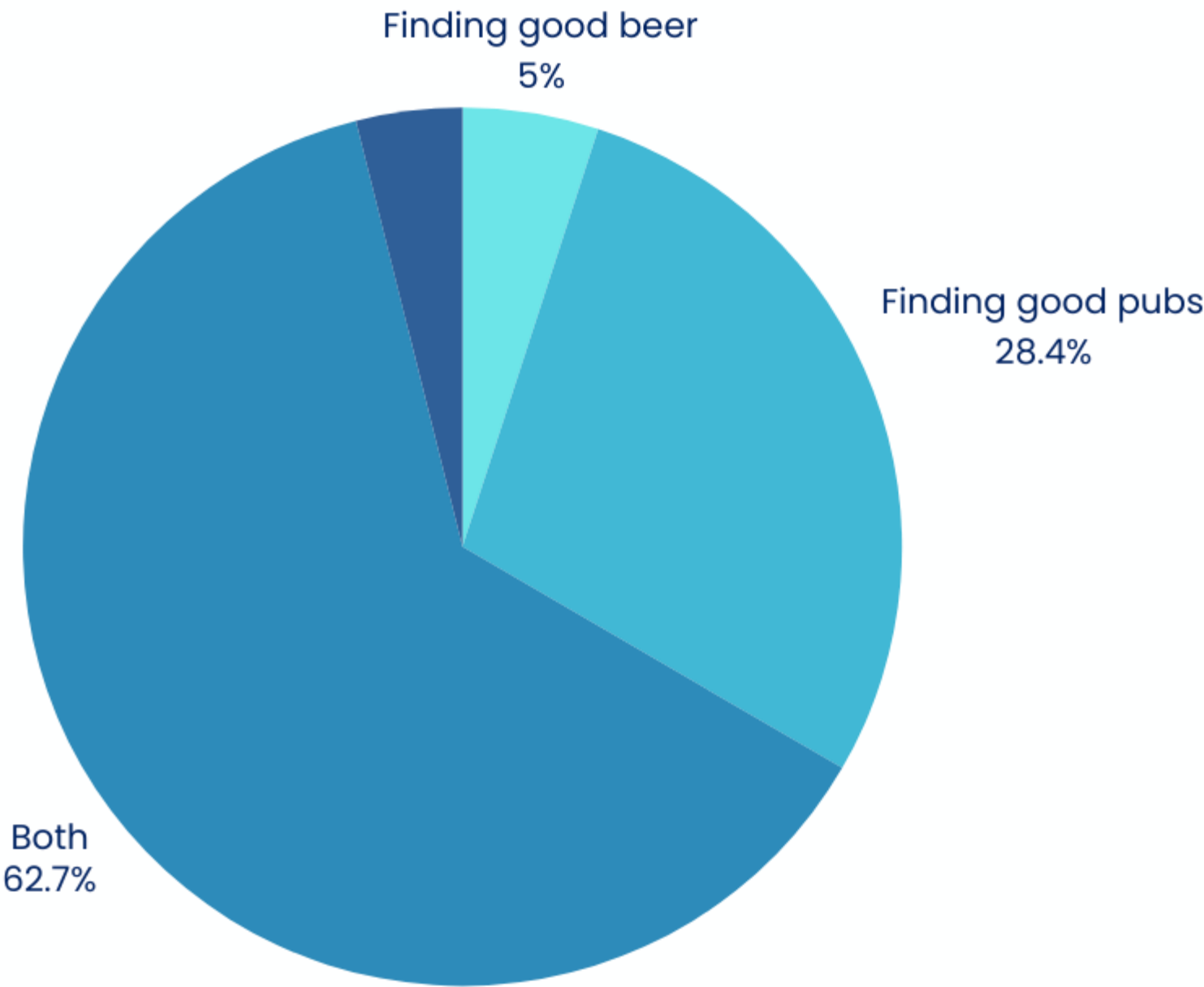
63% of respondents to the survey said they use the Guide to find both good beer and good pubs. But in the individual comments, there was a wide range of reasons as to why people buy the Guide. The most common were that it's a useful reference Guide for travel, it's something they like to collect, and buying the book shows support for CAMRA.

While sales of the Guide have been declining year-on-year, in the last 15 years, sales have peaked at 45,000 copies – just under a third of members.

57% of respondents buy the Good Beer Guide

73% think it should be part of the membership offering

27,480 in reality less than 28,000 people bought the 2023 Guide



HOW DO THEY LIKE TO ACCESS THE GUIDE?

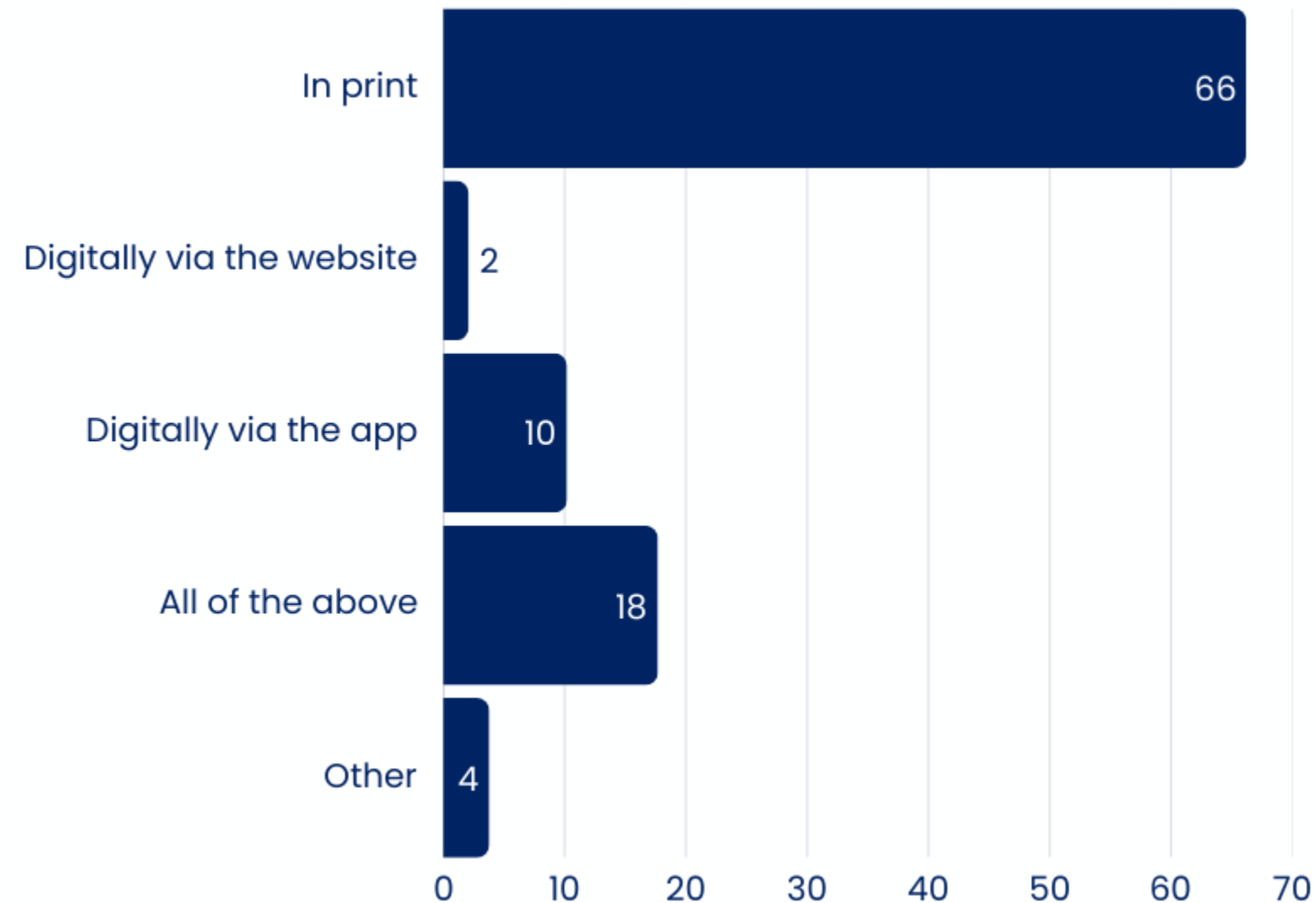
When asked **how the CAMRA website and What Pub.com compare to the printed Guide**, the most popular responses included:

- Includes all pubs (“Even if a pub doesn’t make GBG, its listed on What Pub and could be worth a visit”)
- Clunky
- Complementary
- Easier to access on the go
- More up to date
- More information
- Provide wider coverage
- Prefer the Guide
- Search functionality is good.

While some felt they were ‘about the same’.

For those who **don’t use the website, their reasons included:**

- Access and technology
- Didn’t know about it
- Prefer print
- Use the Guide
- Use other websites.



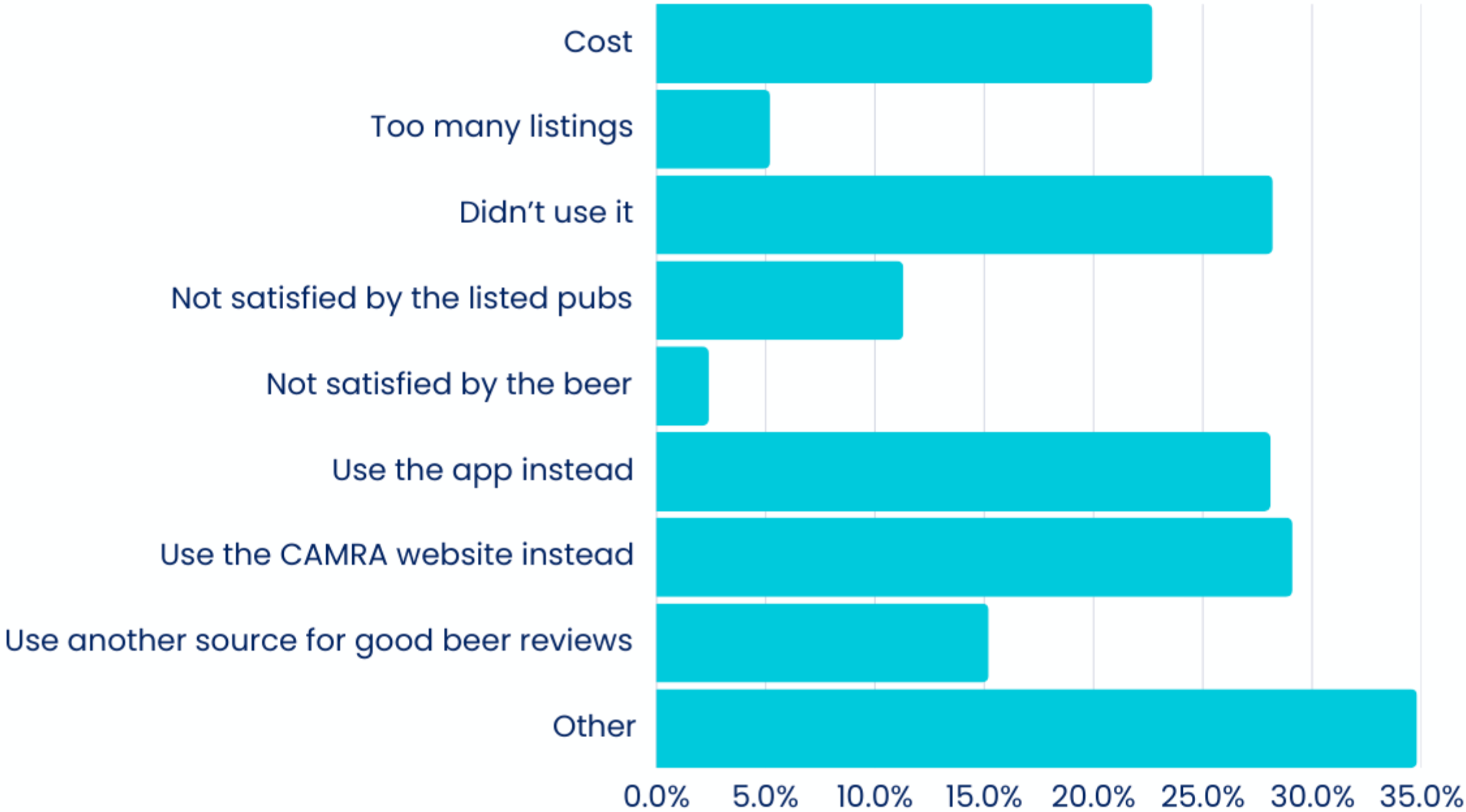
69% also use the CAMRA website or What Pub.com to get information about pubs

WHY HAVE PEOPLE STOPPED BUYING THE GUIDE?

The shift to digital consumption is clear from the respondents that have stopped buying the printed Guide. Cost also is a factor.

‘Other’ reasons included:

- Don’t ‘need’ to buy it every year
- Don’t travel as much
- Information is out of date
- Listings don’t change
- Sustainability
- Too bulky to carry around.

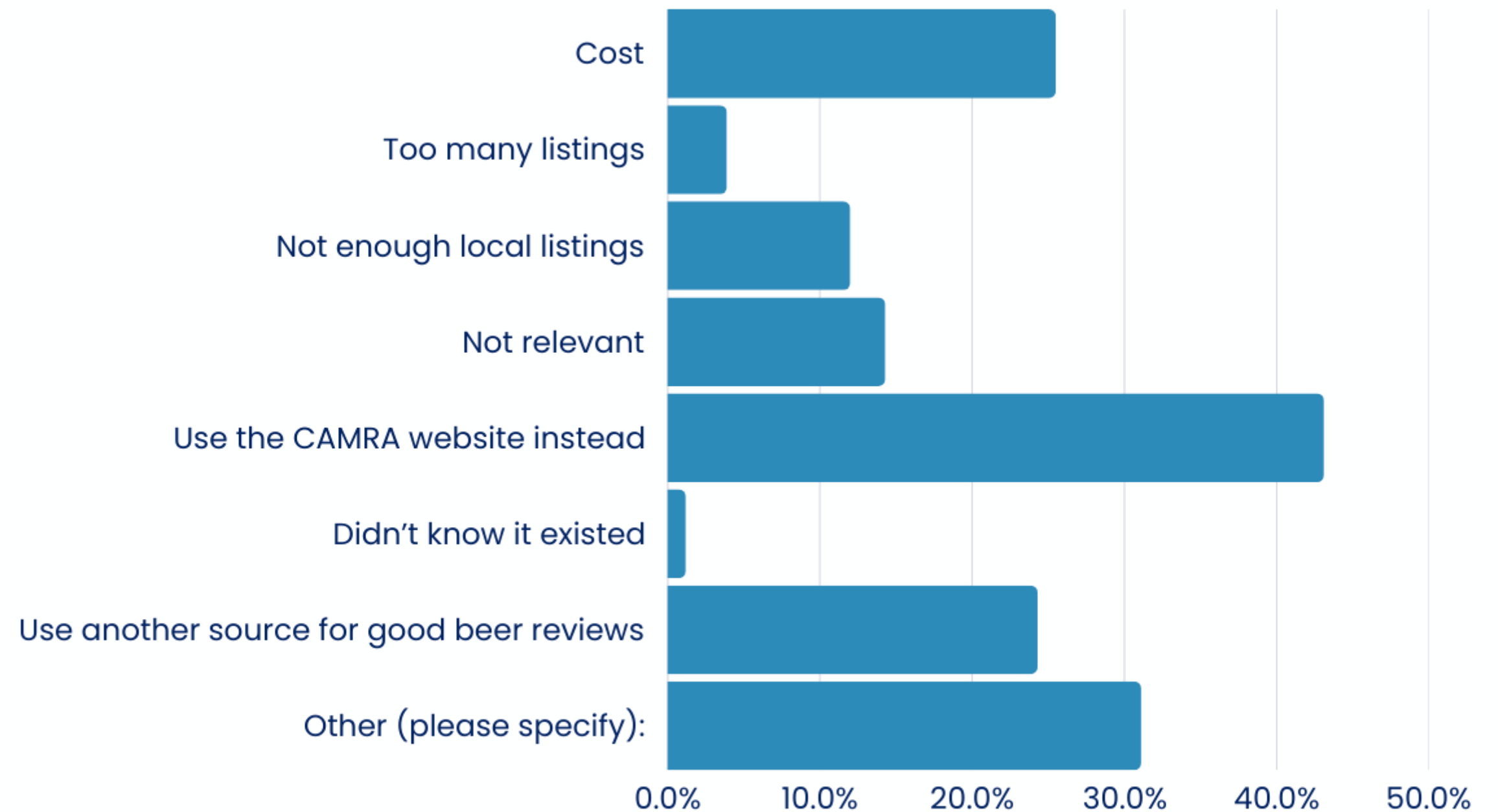


WHY HAVEN'T PEOPLE BOUGHT THE GUIDE PREVIOUSLY?

Those who have never bought the Guide painted a similar picture, with the majority utilising the CAMRA website or other sources. Similarly cost was also in the top 3 reasons.

'Other' reasons included:

- Borrow copies if needed
- Information is out of date
- Don't travel outside of local area
- Use the app.

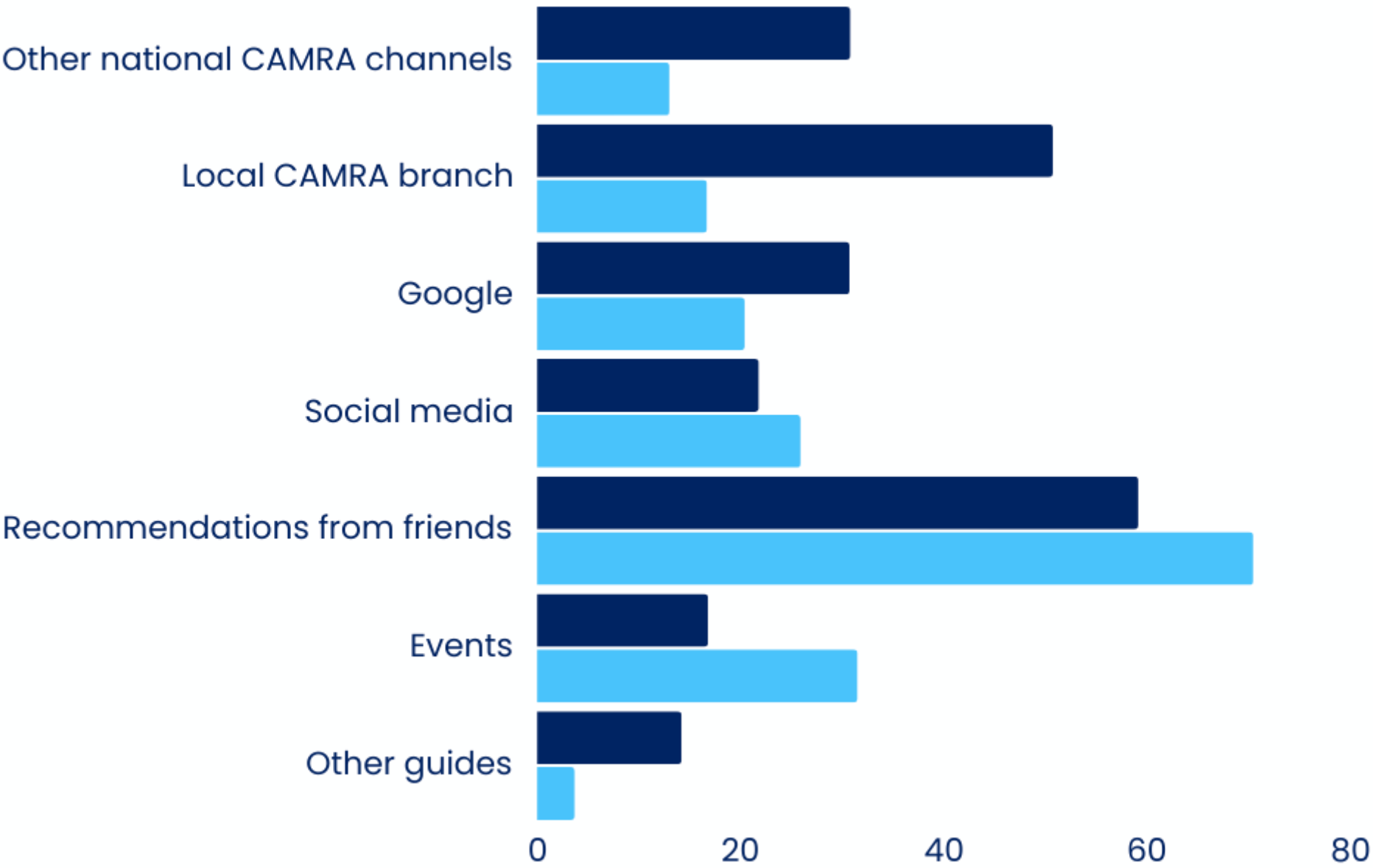


WHERE ELSE DO THEY GO FOR GOOD BEER RECOMMENDATIONS & CONTENT?

174 of respondents who buy the printed Guide listed What Pub.com as an alternative resource for sourcing good beer. Interestingly respondents didn't automatically consider it as another CAMRA channel.

Other popular sources included Cask Marque, Untappd, Scoopgen, Good Pub Guide (although no longer published), Real Ale Finder app, London Drinker and local Guides.

Respondents who have never bought the Guide painted a similar picture, with a handful also using Trip Advisor and YouTube.



- KEY:**
- Members who have bought the Guide
 - Members who haven't bought the Guide



HOW ARE OTHER MEMBERSHIP ORGANISATIONS APPROACHING CONTENT?

MEMBERSHIP PUBLISHING: PRINT – FREQUENCY

Print continues to experience a decline across membership organisations, driven primarily by increased costs and a preference for more sustainable alternatives.

There has been a reduction in the total amount of print created as well as the frequency of regular print titles. Many membership organisations are recognising that if something is to be sent to members in print, it needs to justify the additional cost and it should be used where it can help engage the audience about the right topic, in the right way.

69% of membership organisations produced print content in 2022 (was **92%** in 2018)

70% of membership organisations cite sustainability as justification for reducing print

Consumer

-

27% Biannual

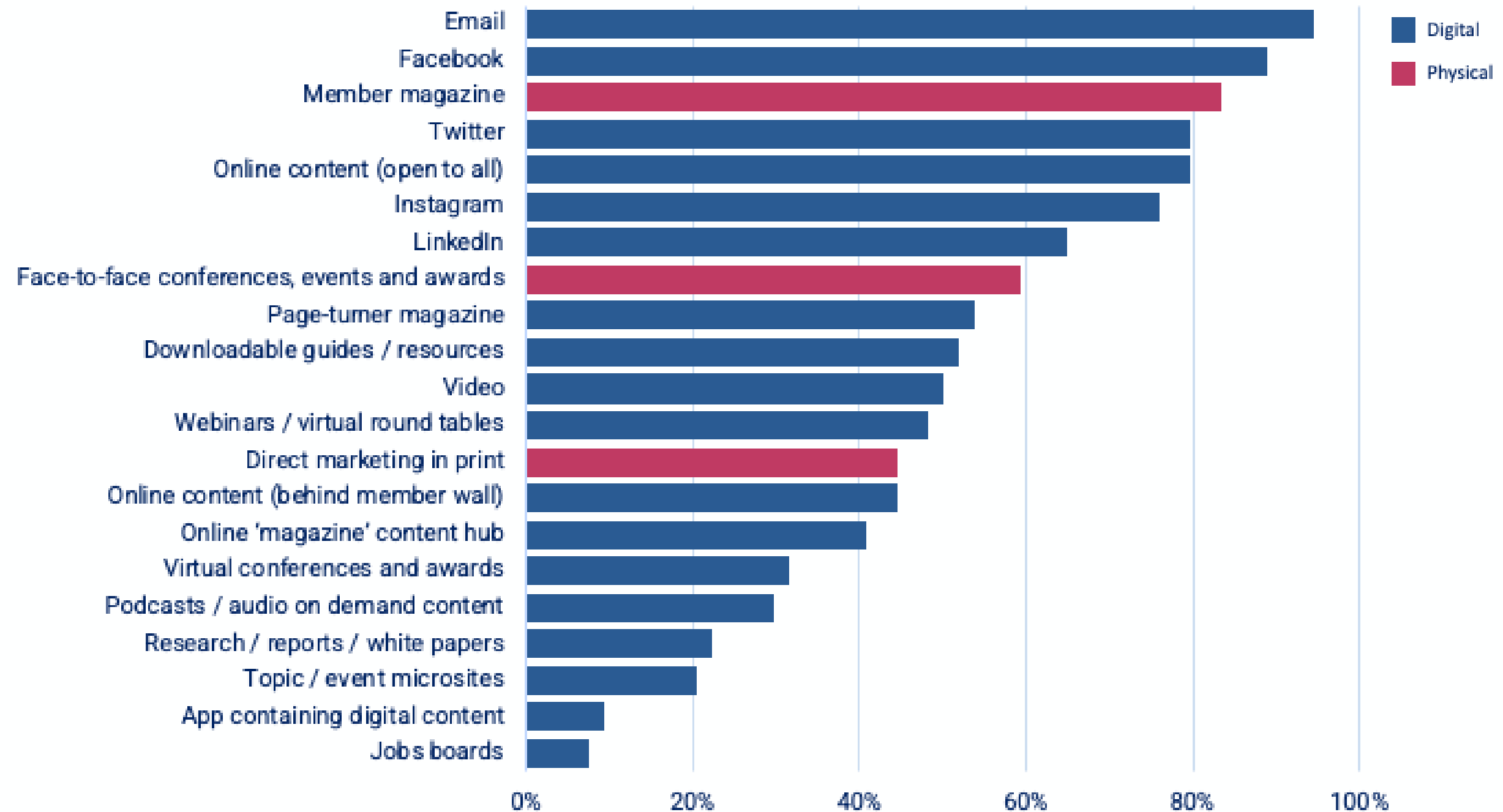
27% Quarterly

4 Average

CHANNELS USED TO ENGAGE MEMBERS

Membership bodies are using an extensive range of increasingly digital platforms to communicate with and engage with their members.

There remains a question over value, with 75% of organisations finding it hard to measure the return on investment of content. Some of this reflects challenges with data – what value does an unattributed pageview really have? – alongside questions about how content supports member renewals and acquisition.





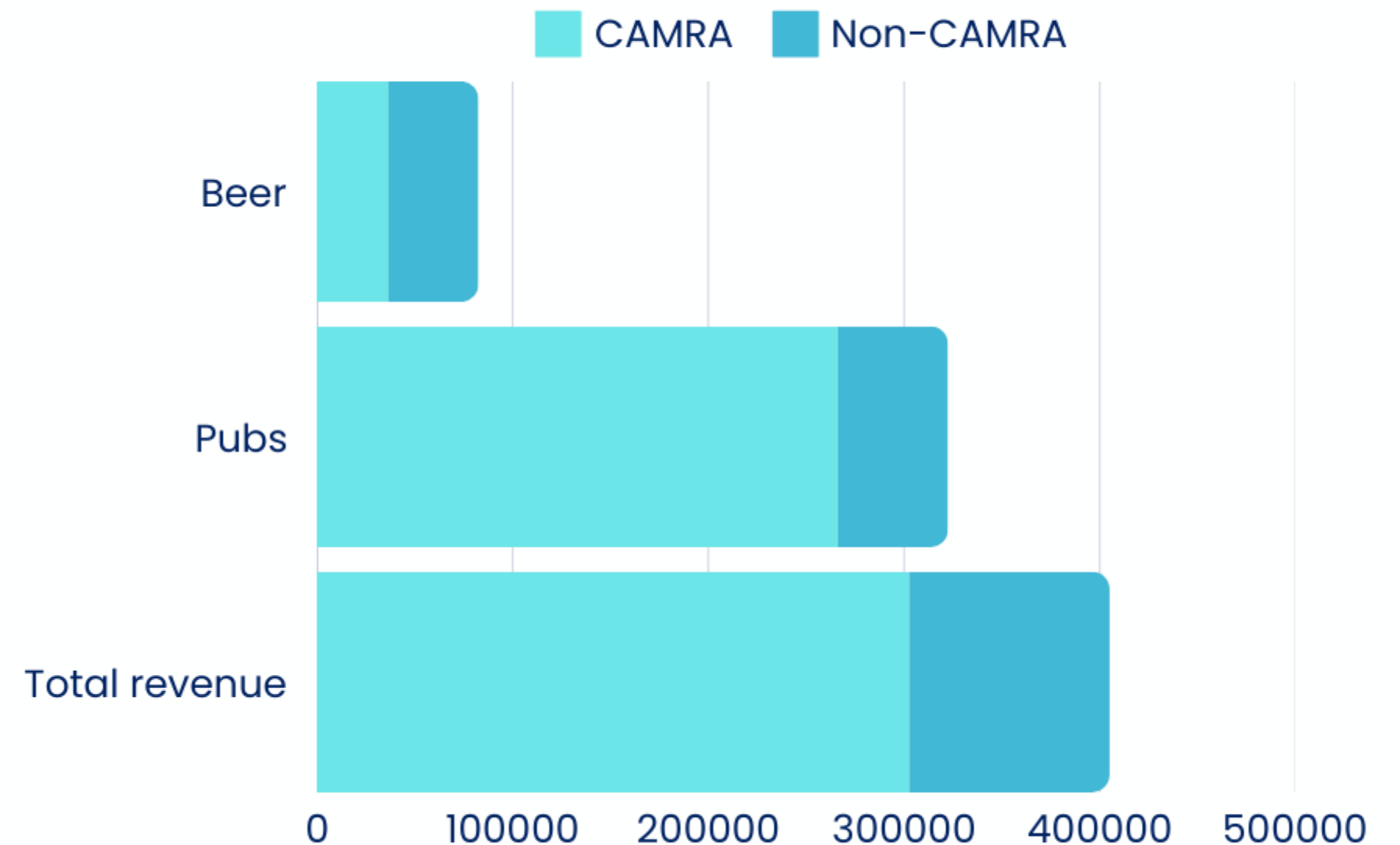
WIDER BOOK PUBLISHING TRENDS

UK BOOK MARKET OVERVIEW

The traditional chain bookshop market is now controlled primarily by Waterstones, which also owns Foyles & Blackwell's, and WH Smith (WHS). While Waterstones remain the chain for middle England, WHS is more mass market. The Independent sector continues to grow slowly as neither of the chain stores offers much in terms of range creating opportunities for shops that are community-focused and relevant. The other sector that continues to grow is book sales through non-bookshops, such as Oliver Bonas & Urban Outfitters.

The market is dominated by the big publishers (PRH, Hachette, Harper Collins) and the big authors brands and licenses. However, this creates opportunities for Independent publishers and brands who offer something more boutique and unique to consumers. There are a small number of gatekeepers who make buying decisions across the industry and ensuring that your books are seen and considered is one of the major challenges. However, where the chains will tend to play safe with tried and tested brands, the rest of the trade are looking for a point of difference and help to set the trends. A lot of this is driven by the need to not compete with Amazon, supermarkets or WHS who are all driven by price offers as their main USP.

The market for drinks books in general has moved towards the DIY at Home, cocktail making, sharing/parties, high-end and aspirational. This can be seen in either the branded high-priced Instagram-friendly trend-led drinks/lifestyle books, or the more 'giftly' pocket/impulse formats. The beer market is leaning into the Craft trend and we are seeing more games and gift products from publishers in this area with products like the Craft Beer Sticker Book or card games relating to brewery and beer brands.



Sales Performance of the Guide

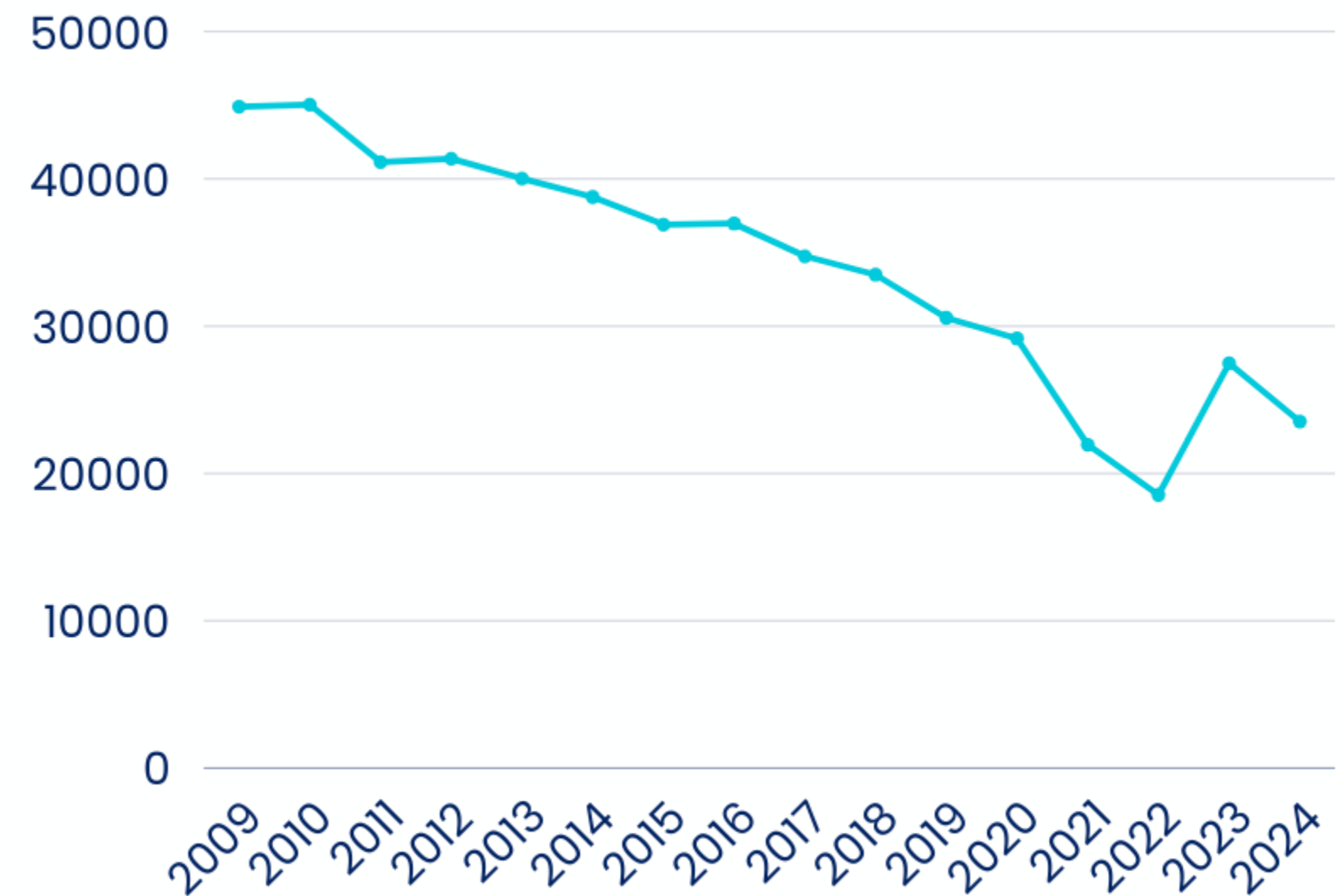
Sales of the print edition of the book have also been in steady decline. There is a core traditional buyer of the Guide that is resistant to change, and likes the Guide as is because that is what they are familiar with. However, the overall market for beer is clearly moving more towards craft beer, micro-breweries, bespoke and boutique.

While the GBG is widely respected it doesn't represent the fastest growing part of the market. In fact the core market sees Craft as a 'dirty word'. Nonetheless, 28,000 copies were sold of the 2023 edition, representing a sizable figure and an important market to support.

The launch of the 2025 edition of GBG on Amazon was successful with the book still listed as the number one book on beer three weeks after publication. This points to where the focus should remain – and there is little point in chasing sales through bookshop chains through discounting and promotions.

The money spent on AMS Amazon Marketing is money well spent to build on the discoverability of the book through this key sales channel. More could be done to post reviews on Amazon more quickly as that is a key driver for Amazon to raise the profile of the book. For the 2024 edition, there are 94 reviews of which 80% are 5 star, but many of these reviews were posted after Christmas. One focus could be getting reviews on the site within the first 2-3 weeks to help drive discoverability.

Year-on-year sales





SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS (INTERNAL & EXTERNAL AUDIENCES)

THE INTERNAL VIEW (VOLUNTEERS & STAFF)



What’s the purpose?

Is it a Guide to good beer? Is it a Guide to cask beer? Or is it a Guide to good pubs?

An ageing membership

While the current Guide appeals to many traditional members, it offers little to modern, younger beer enthusiasts. The membership is ageing. Where are the new members coming from?

Feelings run high

For many active CAMRA members, contributing to the Guide is an important part of their life. They are understandably protective of their approach, and changes will provoke heated debates.

CAMRA is rich in content

The Guide is not just a book, it is a brand, a set of data, a historical archive and a wealth of content. These are assets that can be developed across a variety of platforms to the benefit of CAMRA members, present and future.

*One quote from one-to-one interviews:
 “We’ve got to deliver linked-up digital experiences. That’s where the market is. That’s where people are. And in that world, a paper-based Good Beer Guide looks quite out of place. So, I think any strategy for the Guide has to deliver a robust argument about why we should continue producing it.”*

THE MEMBERS' VIEW IN SUMMARY

Nobody *really* reads it

Nobody that we are aware of reads the book in any great detail. Of the CAMRA members that buy it, many say that they occasionally use the Guide for reference; others regard it primarily as a collectible and place it on a bookshelf next to previous editions.

What's it for?

Many commented that the Guide has an identity crisis in terms of whether it should focus on beer or pubs.

Too large... and inconsistent

Most people that we spoke to wanted the Guide to be reduced in size. And several voiced dissatisfaction at what they perceived to be an inconsistent approach to selection across branches.

Moving online

Many members that we spoke to (even those most wedded to the existing printed Guide) accepted that the future for this type of content is online.

“Digital is the future, but CAMRA must make the digital offering attractive, modern, and consistently maintained.”

QUOTES FROM INTERVIEWS

"The Guide has integrity. It's independently researched by thousands of beer-loving volunteers."

"It brings active members together and creates a sense of purpose."

"Publicans and licensees are excited and appreciative when their pubs are included in the Guide."

"It's a strong brand that carries weight and recognition with beer enthusiasts."

"The brand should be attractive to a much wider audience, not just a silo within CAMRA."

"It's very big and unwieldy publication."

"It's not quite delivering to casual buyers."

"Is it really just a directory of pubs that serve real ale?"

"Because of the process we have, the quality control isn't that good."

"It's the same volunteers every time. Let's get other people thinking about how they can contribute."

"The Guide is not performing commercially."

"The future has to be digital."

"If you think back 50 years, members needed the Guide to help them find real ale because it was scarce. Now real ale is everywhere. Today's challenge is different: where is the best pub, and what does that mean for consumers? Pubs are now experiential—people consider things like surroundings, ambience and amenities, not just beer quality."

FREE TEXT QUOTES FROM THE MEMBERS' SURVEY

“Is it a Guide to the ‘best of’, or just a directory of pubs that serve real ale?”

“It’s disingenuous. It purports to be something that it isn’t.”

“A grotty pub with fantastic real ale should be in the Guide but described clearly.”

“The Guide’s too big and includes pubs that have no business being in there.”

“Descriptions often don’t get updated. They’re eerily similar from year to year despite the fact that pubs change and often improve or decline.”

“Some branches only use beer scores; others don’t touch them at all. It’s very inconsistent.”

“The brewery section should be a separate publication.”

“CAMRA members are very traditional and they don’t like change, but we need to appeal to non-traditional audiences.”

“There are an awful lot of very good bars out there that aren’t traditional CAMRA pubs. We need to reflect that.”

“If you’re looking to do something that builds on what you’ve got and does something new, it’s inevitable there will have to be TWO publications.”

“The printed Guide is great, but we should be paying equal, if not more, attention to the digital side of it.”

“The Good Beer Guide is too bulky and quickly goes out of date. We need a dynamic, live, online platform.”

THE SURVEY SAID...

There are contradictory messages on the right number of pubs

66% of respondents said that there are “the right number of pubs in the Guide”. While only 28% thought there were too many, this contradicts many of the 1-1 interviews and those free text responses in the survey that deemed the Guide “too bulky” to use on the go.

Respondents stressed the importance of featuring quality pubs (with good beer) in the Guide, and moving away from filling quotas with sub-par pubs. Couple this with the fact that there are 8,500 less pubs in the UK (Source: Statista), a serious consideration should be given to reducing the number of pubs in the guide.

Reduce the size

A large majority of respondents felt that the Guide is too big. Respondents were keen to see shorter descriptions, fewer pages, and the removal of the brewery section. However, it is clear that if the brewery section were to be removed, CAMRA would be making a fundamental shift which may not sit well with all loyal readers. We know from other recent research that 83% of readers felt that the brewery section was an integral part of the guide.

Improve the selection process

There was a strong call here for nationally consistent guidelines across all CAMRA branches. There were also calls for greater transparency, a crackdown on filling quotas and stronger communication about the selection process. Some also felt that rural areas were under-represented.

Split views over good beer vs good pubs

Does a good pub automatically mean good beer? And what constitutes a good pub? Respondents were undecided about whether the future Guide should focus more on ‘good pubs that serve good beer’. The focus group was adamant it should retain its heritage and only feature good beer (sawdust or no sawdust on the floor) but the wider survey was more mixed, with some keen to retain the focus on beer (many citing other publications provide insight into pubs). Others felt it was time to shift and ensure the Guide articulates the overall quality of the pub – and the experience.

The website is widely used

69% of respondents said they use the website to access information about pubs.

Print and digital are complementary

The printed Guide is valued because it is a curated selection, the website is valued because it is comprehensive in listing all pubs. Many regard the two as complementary, using the Guide for initial planning and the app/website for checking info while out and about.

WHAT DO READERS LIKE ABOUT THE GOOD BEER GUIDE?

Many positive responses praised the independent, reliable and comprehensive content, created by enthusiastic and knowledgeable volunteers. The layout was also popular. The Guide is seen by many as a well-structured reference Guide and travel companion for beer enthusiasts.

A word cloud centered around the word "Pubs" in a large, dark blue serif font. Surrounding "Pubs" are several other words in various colors and sizes, all in serif fonts. The words include: "Breweries" in large orange letters above "Pubs"; "Travel" in dark blue letters to the right of "Pubs"; "Quality" in pink letters above "Breweries"; "Listings" in dark blue letters to the left of "Breweries"; "Reliable Guide" in pink and dark blue letters to the left of "Pubs"; "Independent" in orange letters below "Reliable Guide"; "Real ale" in dark blue letters below "Pubs"; and "Comprehensive" in pink letters to the right of "Real ale".

WHAT WORKS LESS WELL IN THE GOOD BEER GUIDE?

- The Guide has become too large and heavy.
- The brewery section should be cut back or removed.
- Pub descriptions are inconsistent and not always accurate.
- Some branches employ 'personal bias' in selections or fill their allocations with sub-par pubs.
- The focus on cask beer ale has become outdated.
- The focus now should be on digital rather than printed content.

Criteria
Heavy
Allocations Quotas
Confusing
Inconsistent
Outdated
Bias Bulky Design

RECOMMENDATIONS

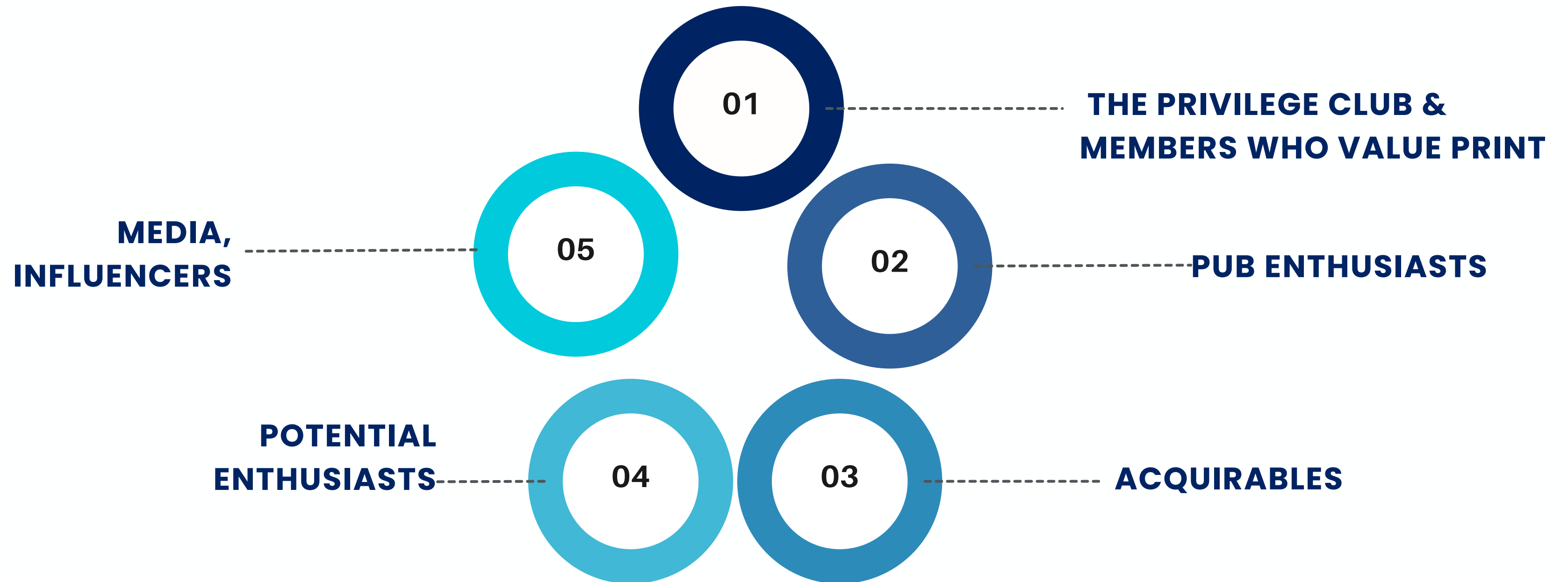
THE GOOD BEER GUIDE SWEET SPOT

What sets the Good Beer Guide apart is its history, integrity and unique ability to bring CAMRA volunteers together to celebrate good beer and pubs in the UK.

There is a core market for the Guide that is resistant to change and the presentation and content delivers an important service and information. While there can be tweaks made to the presentation, the core should remain the same.

Developing the digital offering provides an unrivaled opportunity to secure the members of the future.

1. FOCUS ON YOUR PRIORITY AUDIENCE GROUPS



KEY AUDIENCES

2. CREATE A JOINED-UP CONTENT STRATEGY

Rather than starting from the point of ‘how many pages do we need to fill?’ or ‘how many boxes do we need on the website?’ we need to think more broadly about the Guide’s point of difference. What do key audiences need (and want) to know and how best to deliver that message? How can it help tie in with wider CAMRA campaigning and hero moments in the year (like the Great British Beer Festival)?

Changing the planning process is the first step to creating more targeted and relevant content for the CAMRA members of today and tomorrow.

We know there is strength in the GBG brand and an appetite for content on the best beer (and pubs) in the UK. An overall content strategy will help steer what content should be created on what channel and when.

This would ensure that the membership enjoys maximum value, while communication is clear and consistent across all platforms.

3. DEVELOP A REGULAR CADENCE OF CONTENT FOR THE DIGITAL GUIDE

- Create a calendar of planned evergreen content for key audience segments.
- Practical guidance for first-time beer scorers – build on the NBSS Guide pages and share examples of high scoring pubs.
- SEO-friendly content that could tie in with the seasons and high search terms (The best dog friendly pubs to visit this autumn, eight pubs to visit in Suffolk, nine Best Beer Gardens in the UK, the best pubs for cask beer and roasts in Yorkshire etc).
- To manage change we recommend that CAMRA creates an outreach campaign to celebrate the achievements of volunteers in everything they do to put the Guide together. This could include personal and ‘inspirational’ community-based content (can we follow volunteers from the different regions and ask them to share their experiences or their favorite pub and pint?). The focus group liked the idea of ‘live updates’ on what beers were on tap at local pubs every day, but rather than trying to take on Untappd, could this be facilitated via social?
- Trends in cask beer.
- Opinion pieces from brewers and key CAMRA figures on the latest campaigns.
- Repurpose content from Beer magazine – be that food, Last Orders or travel .

...VARY CONTENT TYPES, TAILOR IT FOR KEY AUDIENCES AND CROSS LINK!

4. EMPLOY A THREE-TIERED CHANNEL APPROACH

- Many traditional members like the Guide as it is. And while the Guide remains financially viable, it makes sense to retain it in a smaller, improved format.
- However, the book is delivering diminishing returns in terms of external sales and attracting younger beer enthusiasts to CAMRA. As a result, we believe there may well be scope for creating a new book targeted primarily at non-members.
- At the same time, it's clear that the CAMRA website should now be the key platform for communicating to both members and potential members. The pub and beer database that has been developed through What Pub should become the go-to source for regularly updated info on good pubs selling good beer across the UK.

5. PRIORITISE THE DIGITAL EXPERIENCE

— A vibrant, mobile-optimised website renders an app redundant and great strides have already been taken in relaunching the CAMRA website to deliver stronger content and a better experience.

Ultimately, the future of The Good Beer Guide lies online and is a key lever for member-acquisition. Using the precedent of What Pub, visitors to the CAMRA website can look up details on all UK pubs (which should be regularly updated by volunteers). And over time, the quality and depth of information on pubs can be developed with increasingly interactive features and user-generated content.

Pubs included can be badged as appearing in the printed Guide as appropriate, and CAMRA members visiting the site can be provided with (further) additional features and benefits.

The website needs to be a major focus for investment for the foreseeable future.

6.THERE IS A PLACE FOR PRINT, BUT IT DELIVERS DIMINISHING RETURNS

Members want to retain a printed Guide, but there's no indication that anyone is reading it in any depth. Many consider it a collectable but its size limits its use as a 'Guide', and it's quickly out of date. Why carry it around when you can have all the info you need on your mobile?

With CAMRA's fresh digital offering we believe that the website should be developed into the future hub for The Good Beer Guide for CAMRA members (and subscribers), with the printed version a smaller collectible. There are two broad options for reducing the size of the Guide:

1. Simply reduce the amount of content – e.g. remove some pubs (see next slide), remove the brewery section and edit listings back.
2. More radically, one option that emerged was to (in addition) cut the listings way back so the Guide is more like an annual directory of the best cask beer pubs, but add additional content such as opinion pieces, features on key trends, interviews with members etc. As one person said, turn it an almanack for members.

However, there is a core market for the Guide that enjoys consuming content in print is resistant to change and the presentation and content delivers an important service and information. Keeping the essence of the Guide as is serves a purpose for the loyal (and still significant) customer base.

7. ENHANCE THE STANDARD OF PUBS IN THE PRINTED GUIDE

A significant number of people felt that the book has become too large and bulky, with feedback that some of the pubs aren't worthy of their place.

As a result, we recommend reducing the number of featured pubs by around 1,000. This would address concerns about the inclusion of 'below par' pubs, and reflect the fact that there are around 8,500 fewer pubs in the UK today than there were 10 years ago (Statista).

There were also some calls to remove the breweries from the printed Guide. They could be published online, to reduce the pagination further. They could also inform an editorial-led piece in the Guide such as the Latest trends in breweries or What to expect from breweries in the next 12 months.

8. SELECTION CRITERIA

Branches differ in their approach to scoring for the Guide, making the selection process inconsistent. We recommend:

- **Survey branches to confirm how they currently select pubs to be included in the Guide.** This could be used to inform a national set of criteria that all branches are encouraged to use for their selections. The volunteers need to be taken on the journey to ensure they become ambassadors for the Guide of the future.
- **Reduce the pub allocations in line with the new size of the Guide.** Smaller allocations would limit the inclusion of below-par pubs, but branches should also be reassured that their allocation numbers will be preserved even if they don't fully use them each year. (Or perhaps, based on a new set of criteria, the full regional allocations are listed online but the printed Guide is presented as a UK-wide selection.).
- **Allow each branch the option to include a 'See also...' box** alongside their selections that lists five pubs (one-line description for each) that also merit a mention in the Guide.
- **Ensure scoring results are reflected consistently throughout the printed Guide and online** – it should be clear what score each pub has to help inform future scoring.

9. STREAMLINE THE PRODUCTION PROCESS

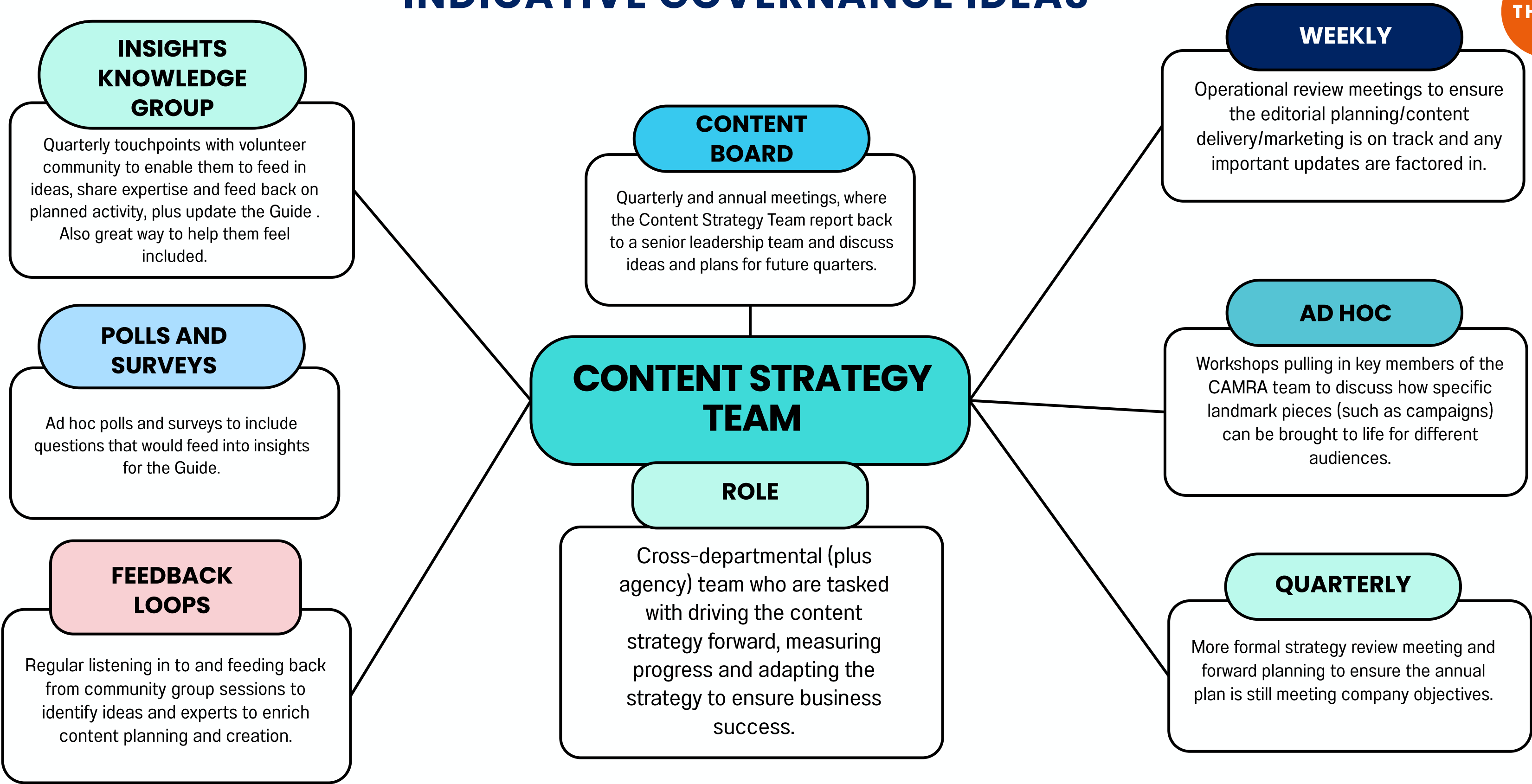
The logo consists of an orange circle with the word "THINK" in white, uppercase letters.

— The process for the Guide is considered cumbersome due to the scoring that is involved, the reviews required of branch committees and the submittal, editing and production. This results in a year-long process that means the Guide can be out of date by the time it is printed (although the editor does carry out a lot of late updates).

By moving to a more streamlined printed Guide and focusing on keeping the digital version up to date, we would recommend:

- Focusing the volunteers on scoring and updating the digital Guide on a quarterly basis online. A digital or AI tool could help with initial checking of the entries, with branch committees/chairs/CAMRA staff being involved in final sign-off.
- The updated listings would then be utilised for the printed Guide.
- By keeping the information in the printed Guide to a minimum (if you went down the more radical route, our starter for 10 would be name, location, website and phone number), it would be much simpler to lay out and would reduce the sub-editing time involved.
- This would free up the team to focus on the content marketing strategy, deliver multi-channel content and maximise engagement.

INDICATIVE GOVERNANCE IDEAS



10. MAKE GBG A CENTRAL STRAND IN YOUR WIDER MARKETING

THINK

A new direction for the Guide would require a clear marketing campaign to ensure existing – and future – CAMRA members understand the offering. More than 80% of respondents to our survey were not aware of the digital evolution of the Guide that was launched last summer.

We recommend that the printed Guide is predominantly marketed to CAMRA members as an annual of the best beer in the UK. Given the success of AMS Amazon Marketing, it is worth continuing this activity to ensure discoverability of the Guide but to dial down any other expensive book promotions that have not delivered ROI historically.

The focus should be on promoting the CAMRA website as a destination hub, with members accessing all of the information they need to source the best beer (and pubs), while also making the wider public aware that this great database of ALL UK pubs is available on their phones/desktops, driving them through the marketing funnel to access more via a subscription or membership. A focus on SEO-led content will deliver on that all-important earned media, while the Guide should form a key part of your paid campaigns and align more closely with wider CAMRA campaigning and member comms,

Most importantly, CAMRA needs to deliver a clear, value-led message.

11. PRICE POINT

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Even with a smaller version of the Guide, we believe increasing the RRP to £17.99 for 2026 is feasible, and then increasing to £18.99 for 2027 and up to £19.99 in 2028, before reassessing the market.

If you were to cut it back to a much more basic directory, we would suggest a RRP of £14.99.

12. MEASUREMENT IS EVERYTHING

- Everyone needs to get to understand what success looks like and measure against that success.
- Suggested KPIs for the future success of the Good Beer Guide include:
 - Consistent revenue for the printed Guide (albeit slowly declining year-on-year)
 - Number of subscribers to the digital Guide
 - Annual conversion target for subscribers to the digital Guide to full membership
 - Increased revenues linked to the higher membership fee, as part of the new digital Guide offering and value proposition
 - Reduction in number of pubs online and in the Guide that have subsequently closed down.
- Plans needs to be informed by data and agile enough to change.

QUICK WINS

The new proposed process – and outputs – for the Guide will take at least a year to set up and action. Not to mention, the volunteers, branches and committees will need to be taken on the journey to buy into the new proposition.

In the short term, CAMRA can look to employ the following quick wins:

- Roll out new digital offering for the Guide so members are clear on what is available on the new website.
- Work with branches to determine new criteria for scoring.
- Identify a volunteer committee that would take ownership of final review of listings that would go into the printed Guide in 2026.
- Explore the tech capabilities to enable the production team to pull the listings for the printed Guide.