

Though the marketing of Cowan's product seems effortless, he has said that it takes him several weeks, sometimes months to come up with the right sales pitch. He recently told The Onion newspaper, a satiric publication, "For the Genesis 10:10, I was reading the book of Genesis over and over, and reading interpretations and other source material for the last six months before I actually wrote the seven or nine sentences or whatever that are on the beer label."

Despite his working knowledge of Jewish tradition, Cowan admits that he did not grow up in a particularly Jewish neighborhood. Raised in the outskirts of San Francisco, he had a bar mitzvah and was later confirmed.

But, he says, "There weren't many Jews where I grew up. That was part of the fun when I started [He'brew]. I thought it was a good idea to bring in people who weren't connected in the Jewish community."

Cowan's strategy seems to be working. At beer festivals and local bars across the county, secular Jews don "He'brew" T-shirts, with subtitles that read "The Chosen Beer." In 2006 alone, He'brew has distributed over 27,000 cases of all five of its beers. (The other two consistently available brews are "Genesis Ale" and "Messiah Bold.") That is a 40 percent increase in distribution from last year, Cowan says.

The Shmaltz Brewing Company has also done its fair share of mitzvot, too. Cowan says that he often donates his beers to fundraisers, special Jewish events and private parties. A smattering of He'brew's 10th-anniversary brews were given away at this year's Jewish Music Festival, and when his mother —given due praise on the Web site's link to the He'brew "mishpocha" —recently called for donations to a friend's fundraising event, Cowan briskly sent away dozens of cases.

Yet all the Jewish refrains have not forced Cowan's product into an unsustainable niche. "My goal is to make something special, a product that people can relate to on many levels," he said. To that end, he has added decidedly non-Jewish slogans to his product. One page on He'brew's Web site reads: "Christ, that's good beer!"