

(POST COVID) CHRISTMAS.....**THE MOST WONDERFUL TIME OF THE YEAR!**

In anticipation of our much beloved Festive season, I am going to answer some of those crucial questions hospitality operators are asking themselves:

All we want for Christmas is..... customers?

Will the tills be ringing out for..... everyone?

Do they know it's Christmas?

Please read on, even though I won't promise that's the last of my Christmas puns. I can – however - promise you that what you learn is vital and anything but frosty (sorry!).

Believe it or not, I have been in the Christmas 'zone' since September last year, so I've had a lot of time to think about my festive references. More importantly, I've also had time to gather those thoughts and experiences which I know are crucial to the success of any restaurant, bar or pub needing to exploit their sales strategy for this year's festive period.

We will all be asking ourselves if the customer feels the same way. Have they, with much anticipation, been waiting for Christmas as much as we have? Are we optimistic that this year's festivities will not be a repeat of the devastating events of 2020 when Christmas was put on ice?

NOW THE GOOD NEWS FROM THE CHRISTMAS FAIRY!

According to my very good friends and 'insight' superstars at KAM Media, we know that a whopping 9 in 10 UK adults intend to celebrate Christmas in the same way as 2019. We also know that around 27% more UK adults intend to visit a restaurant compared with the same period last year. A boost for all of us in hospitality if we can get ahead of the competition!



Fear not if you are still slightly behind on announcing your Christmas merriments. Estimates suggest that around 97% of UK adults have still to plan their activities. Now whilst I would never advocate leaving Christmas to the last minute, there does appear to be a significant window of opportunity still available for you to attract customers to your own glittering array of food and drink offerings. So, it's not too late!

So, what should you be doing this year? Let's look at the latest forecasts to put you in the festive driving seat. Firstly, Christmas 'out' in hospitality will be a younger person's party, typically under 55. Secondly, corporate driven events are likely to be smaller affairs, driven by individual departments within the company rather than the large scale 250 private hire events of the past. Good news for pubs, bars and restaurants who will capitalise on cover turns and smaller groups but not so good for larger event and function spaces. Thirdly, all customers will be seeking reassurances about their visit together with high expectations for a warm and receptive welcome on the day or evening itself. Obvious, but not always understood or applied by venues in competition with one another!

Attracting corporate bookings requires a focus on gaining multiple contacts from multiple businesses who will now book via smaller departments, requiring a different approach to sales. The reality is that most companies are now taking their corporate social responsibilities seriously, and working to ensure that their staff members feel valued and appreciated through flexible working arrangements and more employee benefits (fantastic news if you sell meal kits by the way!). Corporate enterprises are keen to attract many of their employees back to offices, and building social opportunities seen as a good way of doing this. Christmas for many companies becomes the new 'back to normal'!

We also know that Covid has concentrated six-years of consumer behaviour change to a period of just six-months, and that change has put unprecedented pressure on employers. Our own industry has been affected in such a dramatic way that we see new venues having to close daily due to lack of staff.



This is partly due to a new generation who will not accept anything other than first class working conditions with greater flexibility, which for our industry of habitual workaholics is a huge cultural shift. Don't worry I am not intending to go off on a tangent discussing the perils of recruitment and labour shortages for hospitality operators (although I could quite easily go on until snow settles across the UK), but that isn't what this article is all about. It is about Christmas and understanding why all these elements feed into my overall advice about what you must do to secure customers during the most vital trading period for all of us in the industry.

HOW TO WRAP UP CHRISTMAS!

1. Excellent communications with our customers through all channels. Think you already do it?
My experience is.....probably not!
2. Flexible with all your spaces, for example by planning to turn tables for smaller groups of up to 30.
3. Detailed with your corporate database, cleaning it through digital means, and not forgetting good old fashioned telephone conversations as you will need multiple contacts per business now.
4. Bold with your messaging and value-added offers offering multiple choice at every opportunity.
5. Confident and transparent with your packages and price points focused on value-added rather than discounts, and always advertising premium options to upsell.
6. Operationally efficient through simplicity of offer, price, and crucially, delivery.
7. Focused fully on the customer experience (your customer's perception of you) and how to ensure loyalty through repeat visits.
8. Broaden your reach and be a destination of choice as smaller groups will travel further and 50% of offices are still working remotely.
9. Super-fast response time to all enquiries and queries or you will lose sales.
10. Rapport Rapport Rapport is 70% of the reason customers will choose you, so ensure this is at the top of your marketing communications (customer profiling and segmentation) and that your staff are all re-trained.

This advice is my Christmas gift to you all. Bums on seats is also here to drive your Festive sales if you need to translate these ideas into effective and deliverable action. Just ask!