



MARKETING MATTERS

This month Angie Petkovic looks at whether your restaurant is delivering as big a return on investment as you deserve

Do you know that feeling when you think all is well with your hotel but something is missing? When did you last look at it as a cost centre in its own right? Maybe you've seen a drop in occupancy or people coming in off the street. I know many of you will put it down to the recession but it's worth considering if it is time to look at your current food offering.

Not so long ago, all guests automatically booked the dinner B&B rate and it was the done thing to dine in the hotel restaurant. These days with all of the voucher deals, loyalty cards and rising popularity of the big restaurant chains via heavily marketed campaigns, more and more guests are using establishments for just the B&B facilities and not dining in their hotel restaurant.

The first stage is to look at your offering. Decide if it is current enough and whether you are delivering an experience that is right for your demographic and geographical position. Ask yourself – is it competitive? Does it pander to your chef's ego but not to your diner's demographic? Spiralling sugar fantasies and exotic starters are all very well, but if they don't fit with your clientele then they will never sell and entice people in.

A successful hotel restaurant starts with how you market it to the public at their first customer touchpoint. Does your website have great pictures of your current food? In my previous column, I alerted you to the need for good quality images. I am seeing more and more fantastic videos on hotel websites that convey ambience and gorgeous dishes. These do a very persuasive job at making guests want to dine with you. British produce is very much in vogue, and so is good quality and provenance, hence these should be reflected on your website. The web is the perfect place to talk about local farmers, local cheese, your favourite suppliers. It doesn't have to be all bunting and British; you could reflect the nationality of you, as the owner, or your chef in your menu choices.

Next up, look at your menu – is it too big or too complicated? Over sophisticated menus frequently fail in favour of wholesome, good quality, simple descriptions. Reassure your guests on the menu with how flexible and easy it can be to perhaps mix and match options in case someone doesn't like a sauce or ingredient.



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Nowadays, we all demand what we want on the plate, rather than what the menu enforces.

Think about information in the bedroom – the talker card can shout about this week's specials. When I had my hotel, our chef let our guests try tasters of his latest starters or pies, actually at the bar. His famous 'plated tasters' of roast potatoes and latest steak cuts were wildly popular in the bar and soon got the crowds wanting to eat in our restaurant that evening. This simple act was such a great way to get guests really engaging with the food. On that note you have to ask yourself, do YOU love food? If you don't then fair enough

but work out how you market your chef's love of food!

On the confirmation email or letter, why not add on a meal offer 'flash' to get people thinking about using your restaurant. Showcase your proud food offering to the local community. A scheduled evening once a month could be a regular 'event' so people can come along and try the food. This preview with drinks and food samples will celebrate your latest menu. Attendees could leave with a voucher to use mid-week and go home being fully reminded and educated about the great food and other facilities you can offer. Through wine and nibbles, you can get them in, out and thinking! Invite your foodie reporter from the local paper or lifestyle magazine and invite them in for a meal. A local press review goes a long way, provided when they arrive at reception they do get what has been promised. My final tip is to formulate a questionnaire to see what your guests have to say about their restaurant experiences and likes/dislikes.

To recap, here's this month's checklist:

- Is your menu right for your demographic?
- Is the menu right for your chef's strengths?
- Is provenance promoted?
- Are you engaging effectively to let people know you have a restaurant available?
- Are you marketing it in a way to get people returning?

I hope this helps you and gives you some 'food' for thought (literally). Guests coming down your staircase for their evening out should witness a well-lit and enticing restaurant area with a buzzing atmosphere and great looking food; not empty chairs.

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