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AA HOSPITALITY AWARDS 2013-2014

PLUS...

**HOW TO SAVE CASH
WITHOUT COMPROMISE**

**WAYS TO TURN A CUSTOMER
COMPLAINT INTO A COMPLIMENT**

YOUR EXCLUSIVE AA QUARTERLY MAGAZINE
ISSUE 32 AUTUMN 2013

IN ASSOCIATION WITH

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Beacon congratulates all the winners of the AA Hospitality Awards 2013!

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Follow us on Twitter

See @TheAA_Lifestyle, @AAHospitality and @Caterertweets for updates to the scheme, hospitality news, stories from our



establishments, updates on awards events and much more.

Ringling the changes

Welcome to the autumn edition of *In Touch*, your quarterly window on the AA Hotel Services and its member hotels, restaurants, pubs, B&Bs and attractions.

We've produced this issue in partnership with *Caterer and Hotelkeeper*, which has been the hospitality industry's market-leading publication for 135 years. The *Caterer* team has given the magazine a makeover, and added some of the news and advice for which they're famous into the editorial mix. We're delighted that our two brands are working together so closely to help you build a better business.

This issue majors on the 2013 AA Hospitality Awards, which took place in

September at the Hilton Park Lane in London. More than 900 of the industry's leading operators gathered to enjoy a fabulous menu created by consulting chef Sat Bains and to recognise and celebrate the year's outstanding teams and individuals. You'll find details of all of the night's winners on page six.

Elsewhere in this issue, you'll find news, practical guidance and spotlights on high-achieving AA member businesses.

We hope you like the new-look *In Touch* magazine. As ever, we're always keen to hear your views and comments, so please keep in touch with us by emailing HotelServicesCustomerSupport@theAA.com.



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Informed...

2014 Guides

The 2014 editions of the AA *Hotel Guide*, *Restaurant Guide*, *B&B Guide* and *Pub Guide* are available at all good bookshops nationwide or online at theAA.com/shop. These annually updated guides include detailed information about AA star-rated accommodation and restaurants with Rosettes throughout Britain and Ireland, and selected pubs in England, Scotland and Wales. The guides feature directions, prices, room numbers and contact information as well as detailed descriptions of the establishment to help you choose somewhere to stay or eat.

Rosette plates and Red Star certificates

By now all establishments will have received, where applicable, their Red Star certificate and Rosette plate for 2013-2014. Please direct any queries regarding your Rosette plate or Red Star certificate to HotelServicesCustomerSupport@theAA.com or call 01256 844455.



Window stickers for 2014

You have recently been sent the Pub and Rosette 2014 window stickers featuring the cover of the 2014 *Pub Guide* or Rosette/s and highlighting the theAA.com and available mobile apps.



Notable Wine List

Congratulations to those establishments that recently received a Notable Wine List certificate. If you wish to obtain a logo for use on your website or marketing material, please contact AA Hotel Services on 01256 844455 or email HotelServicesCustomerSupport@theAA.com

ANGELA HARTNETT'S NEW RESTAURANT ON PETRUS SITE TO BE NAMED CAFE MURANO



Angela Hartnett's new venture on the site of what was Pétrus in London's St James's Street is to be called Cafe Murano. The new 75-cover site will open in November.

Hartnett (pictured) has appointed Zoe Charlton-Brown, former operations manager at Smart Hospitality, as general manager and Sam Williams as head chef. Williams has previously worked alongside Hartnett at Murano for the past two years. Current Murano head chef Diego Cardoso will also oversee the launch of the new site.

LE MANOIR, CLARIDGE'S AND THE RITZ TRIUMPH WITH YOUNG WINNERS AT THE AAE

The three young winners of the Royal Academy of Culinary Arts Annual Awards of Excellence (AAE) 2013 celebrated their awards at a gala dinner at London's Royal Horseguards hotel in July.

Matthew Ambrose from Claridge's was named Young Chef of the Year, Lucy Jones from the Ritz took the Young Pastry Chef of the Year title, while the Young Waiter of the Year award went to Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons' Adam Willis.

The three winners scored the highest marks in each of their respective categories of the competition. Meanwhile, Ambrose's success means he made

TOP HOSPITALITY STORIES

Each week, Caterer and Hotelkeeper and its website **Catererandhotelkeeper.co.uk** bring you the most important news from around hospitality. Here's a selection of stories about AA members from the past three months



Staff at Dormy House

the final of the Craft Guild of Chefs' Young National Chef of the Year competition, which was won by Ben Champkin from The Elephant Restaurant in Torquay in October.

NEW-LOOK DORMY HOUSE WELCOMES FIRST GUESTS

The staff at the four-star, 43-bedroom Dormy House in Broadway, Worcestershire, are pictured above before the reopening of the hotel in August following the completion of the initial stage of a £10m refurbishment.

New interiors by Todhunter Earle have injected new life into the 17th-century former farmhouse, which for the past 36 years has operated as a hotel, part of the

Farncombe Group owned by the Philip-Sorensen family. Meanwhile, the garden has received the attention of landscape architect and TV presenter Chris Beardshaw.

The hotel, which has been closed for five months, now features an all-day dining pub, the Potting Shed, and the new Garden Room restaurant, both which are looked after by consultant chef John Wood and head chef Paul Napper.

BHA WELCOMES VISA HELP FOR CHINESE TOURISTS

The British Hospitality Association (BHA) has welcomed the news that home secretary Theresa May is seeking to introduce a joint visa

application for Chinese tourists who wish to travel to the UK and up to 26 European countries covered by the Schengen agreement.

If introduced, the process will enable Chinese tourists – whose spend overseas increased by more than 42% to £6.7b in 2012 – to travel to the UK more affordably and simply.

Last year, the rest of the European Union welcomed more than 1 million visitors from China, compared with the UK's 149,000, with an estimated loss to competitors of £1.2b in potential business.

BHA chief executive Ufi Ibrahim said with China set to be the largest outbound tourism economy in the world by 2023, the opportunity for Britain to grow tourism receipts and jobs should not be missed.

"Steps need to be taken now to ensure that we demonstrate a welcome to the Chinese traveller in time to compete for this significant market opportunity on an international scale," she added.

TOP AWARD FOR HERO CONCIERGE WHO SAVED PENSIONER'S LIFE

A Bath hotel concierge is to receive a top national life-saving honour after saving a pensioner's life.

David Mead-Male, on duty at the Royal Crescent Hotel at the time, has been awarded a Royal Humane Society resuscitation certificate for saving the life of 67-year-old John Munday.

The pensioner was walking with his daughter Sarah Smith when he collapsed. His daughter ran to the hotel seeking help and Mead-Male rushed to the scene.

Smith said: "The weather was atrocious and the rain was torrential. However, David went down on the pavement in the midst of it all and began administering cardiac pulmonary resuscitation. He kept it up for 10 minutes until an ambulance arrived.

"Without any shadow of doubt we owe my father's life to David. If he had not been on duty I dread to think what would have happened. David told us that there was no-one else around at the time who could administer CPR – and he'd only come on duty himself 10 minutes earlier. No words can express how we feel about him."

As *In Touch* went to press, Mead-Male was awarded the Extra Mile Award at the 2013 Hotel Cateys.



Winners of the Royal Academy of Culinary Arts Annual Awards of Excellence

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TOM KERRIDGE



AA LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD
HARRY MURRAY MBE



The Winners...

AA PUB OF THE YEAR

England The Elveden Inn, Elveden
Scotland The Sheep Heid Inn, Edinburgh
Wales The Groes Inn, Conwy

AA WINE AWARD

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England Nothcote, Langho
Scotland & Overall The Witchery by the Castle, Edinburgh
Wales The Park House, Cardiff



AA RESTAURANT OF THE YEAR

LONDON RESTAURANT OF THE YEAR SPONSORED BY FOOD & TRAVEL MAGAZINE

England The Artichoke, Amersham
Scotland Ondine, Edinburgh
Wales Ye Olde Bulls Head Inn, Beaumaris
London Medlar



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AA HOTEL GROUP OF THE YEAR

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Macdonald Hotels



AA SMALL HOTEL GROUP OF THE YEAR

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Red Carnation Hotels



AA ECO HOTEL OF THE YEAR

Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons, Great Milton

ECO HOTEL GROUP OF THE YEAR

Accor Hotels

AA HOTEL OF THE YEAR

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AA CHEFS' CHEF OF THE YEAR

SPONSORED BY CATERER.COM

Tom Kerridge, The Hand & Flowers, Marlow



AA LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

Harry Murray MBE

Congratulations to the winners and finalists of the AA Hospitality Awards

The UK's hospitality industry came together on Monday 23 September to recognise the best of the best at the AA Hospitality Awards 2013. The awards ceremony saw some of the top hoteliers in the country mingle with the best pub landlords, hospitality gurus and world-renowned chefs.

The awards, hosted by Krishnan Guru-Murthy at the London Hilton on Park Lane, saw 23 establishments and individuals receiving recognition for outstanding excellence in their field, including a Lifetime Achievement award for Harry Murray MBE and the AA's Chefs' Chef Award for Tom Kerridge.

The AA Hospitality Awards bring together some of the most influential people in the hospitality industry to recognise the outstanding accomplishments of high-achieving AA establishments and individuals. Winners are selected in recognition of excellence and success within their chosen category, having shown a significant improvement in the preceding 12-18 months and proving their dedication to raising industry standards and enhancing both their guest and diner experiences.

Guests were treated to a sensational three-course gourmet meal created by five AA Rosette-awarded chef Sat Bains, in conjunction with the Hilton Park Lane kitchen team, as well as a breathtaking display from members of the *Strictly Come Dancing* cast.

Thank you to all our sponsors who helped make the event a huge success



22 ways to save cash without compromising the guest experience



There's a host of savings to be made if you're prepared to take a closer look at your costs – and all without taking an axe to the guest offer or the back of house. *James Stagg* explains

Years of austerity have taught operators to look at every possible area of their business to create efficiencies. Seemingly simple things can easily be overlooked under the day-to-day pressures of providing memorable experiences.

Peter Backman, managing director of food-service consultancy Horizons, says the recession in 2008 triggered widespread cost-saving measures. "These include reducing the size of main course protein, particularly steak and burgers, and increasing the number of vegetarian dishes," he says. "More dishes are now referred to as 'homemade' or 'local' because they are less costly to serve." In cutting costs, operators are providing homemade dishes using local ingredients and offering rooms that operate in the most efficient way possible.

It's not about reducing portion sizes and penny-pinching – being generous and acting smarter can have a positive effect on the bottom line. So read on for plenty of ideas that will increase profits.

1 TURN IT OFF

It sounds obvious, but getting in the habit of turning equipment off can save thousands of pounds. At the Warwick Arms hotel in London, they estimate to have saved £500 a year just by switching off TVs at the wall in-between stays. Dukes St James in London sets TVs to switch off after four hours if no functions have been activated. General manager Debrah Dhugga says: "Energy is expensive and many guests leave TVs on in their rooms when they go out or even fall asleep while watching it."

At Harrison's in Balham, London, owner Sam Harrison has set a rota. "We looked at the lighting and what we need to turn on at different times of the day," he explains. "So rather than just turning it all on first thing, we now turn lights on only when they're required."



The same goes for beer and wine fridges. They can be turned off for a couple of hours at night without the contents getting warm.

2 CHECK YOUR UTILITY BILLS

If you run an independent hotel or larger restaurant, check your utility bills and water bills monthly and quarterly.

"Seek professional advice or talk to buying clubs as tariffs are often wrong," says Moving Food's Stephen Minall. "Night-rate tariffs can and should be applied."



3 HAVE SHUT-DOWN SYSTEMS

Ensure that each department in your organisation has its own shut-down procedure and make the last person out of the area responsible for completing that procedure, advises Paul Shanahan, operations manager at Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons. "Each area should have its shut-down procedure displayed so that others can see or assist if something has been forgotten," Shanahan adds.

It's also worth labelling the plugs so that everyone knows which can be turned off and which have to stay on.



4 CHECK YOUR SETTINGS

Can you run your equipment on an eco setting? Most computers and printers will have this energy-saving feature under the power options.

Meanwhile, Phil Roker owner and commercial director at contract caterer Vacherin, recommends putting eCubes in fridges.

"It means that the fridge's motor thermostat works on the core temperature of the eCube, rather than air temperature," he explains. "That way, the motor doesn't kick in until the core temperature drops."



THE LONG-TERM VALUE-ADD

BY JANE SUNLEY, CEO, PURPLECUBED



The route to surviving and thriving is less to do with short-term cost reduction and much more about adding value.

Of course, it makes business sense to manage waste and make best use of

everything you have. But instead of cutting corners, think more creatively about value-adds that will promote return business. And ask your service delivery people what they would do if this was their business – the idea flow might surprise you.

Remember, if you are intent on cutting costs, the reality needs to be in-line with guest expectations or those guests won't be back. Appearing penny-pinching does nothing to reassure your guests that you care about them and want them to have a great time.

The 'generosity factor' is an important consideration in buying decisions and also creates trust. Offering a glass of fizz on arrival when appropriate, for example, might cost more in the short term, but it will put guests into a feel-good mood and they will spend more. Be creative with marketing promotions, packages and events to bring people in.

Think first about how you can add to the top line rather than look to cost cutting as a route to recovery.

5 STAY IN CONTROL

According to the Sustainable Restaurant Association and Space Catering, limited changes, such as turning on the hobs, oven, gantry lights on the pass and dishwasher when required, and ensuring that chest freezers are well-spaced to avoid build-up of heat, could save about £20 a day. That may not sound a lot, but for a small to medium-sized operation open five days a week, it works out at more than £5,000 a year – a substantial cash and carbon saving.

6 QUALITY NOT QUANTITY

Having found that guests at the London Capital Club and its sister hotel Bocket Hall in Hertfordshire were using an average of 10 sheets of toilet paper per visit, management decided to undertake some discreet tests.

By switching to a more resilient toilet roll brand, they have seen the level of



usage drop to an average of no more than four sheets per visit, resulting in a saving of at least £2,500 per property.

7 GIVE STAFF RESPONSIBILITY

Especially in smaller operations, staff may need to take on duties outside their core remit. You may be surprised how much extra responsibility people are willing to take on.

"I've taught my chefs to take turns at being kitchen porters," explains chef Nathan Outlaw. "We have a small team, so everyone takes a turn. Washing up is quite therapeutic really!"



8 RATIONALISE THE MENU

In order to keep costs down, two-Michelin-starred chef Nathan Outlaw keeps his menus concise. "Rather than complaining about lack of choice, our customers have more confidence because they realise it means that there is a higher turnover of ingredients, so food is fresher," he says.



9 SHOULD YOU THROW IT OUT?

You might be boiling potato skins for soup, but when you discard packaging you may be throwing away some produce, too. Farokh Talati, chef de partie at Merchants Tavern in Shoreditch, London, advises scraping cream containers to release trapped contents. He says: "It's amazing how much double cream is still in the bottle after you think it's finished. Run it under a hot tap and see."

10 BRING BUTCHERY IN-HOUSE

It's widely accepted that using lesser-known cuts of meat can help keep control of protein costs, but you can take this one step further by bringing butchery in-house.

John Nugent, chief executive of Green & Fortune, says that employing a butcher and sourcing its beef and lamb from its own Northumberland farm has allowed the hospitality company to assure quality and provenance.

"The choice for customers increases and we



can introduce new cuts to the menus that are not traditionally available,” he explains. “On the business side, it helps drive our margin and it also allows our chefs greater freedom when writing menus.”

11 UNDERSTAND YOUR MARGINS

A good kitchen brigade will know the importance of maintaining margins, but sometimes bad habits can undermine that effort. Claire Bosi of Hibiscus restaurant in London says: “Young chefs, in particular, do not think how much money they are wasting when they yank loads of blue paper out of the dispenser to mop up spills, rather than using a cloth and wringing it out. This can be a massive hidden cost.”

By being diligent and relying on the vigilance of head chef Ian Scaramuzza, the restaurant has seen its usage of blue paper fall from 30 to 15 rolls per week, saving £1,170 annually.



12 GIVE LESS, OFFER MORE

Rather than put bread on a table for a guest, offer it to them. If they don't want it, they'll say so. Similarly, servings can be reduced if you offer top-ups.

“We reduced the size of orange juice glasses at breakfast by 25%,” says Isle of Eriska owner Beppo Buchanan Smith.

“The orange juice is served, so there is no issue if a guest wants more, but over the year the smaller size reduces costs by 25%.”



13 USE YOUR CUTS WISELY

Gary Anderson, former co-owner of Anderson & Hill deli in Birmingham, used to strip the fillets from chicken breasts. Nobody misses them from a chicken breast, he says, and they can be used for children's food, salads or staff meals.

Focus on maximising the yield from all the carcasses you use. “It empowers our chefs with new skills, as well as reducing our



10 QUICK COST-CUTTERS

- 1 Use clear bags for food waste to see what people are throwing out.
- 2 Reuse old terry-towels dyed into different colours for back-of-house cleaning purposes instead of buying cloths.
- 3 Make sure housekeepers leave radiators on a 'two' setting, rather than the maximum.
- 4 Instead of brochures, why not just print tariffs with directions to your website for seasonal/weekly offers?
- 5 Use light sensors in public places.
- 6 A glass crusher will reduce the number of pick-ups required.
- 7 Ask your teams to bring ideas to monthly meetings and reward those with good suggestions.
- 8 Offer an envelope to put the bill in on departure rather than automatically providing it. You could even consider asking if a guest would like to view the bill on the screen and have a copy emailed to them.
- 9 Grate extra veg into meat sauces and pie fillings, and add grains or pulses to stews and braises.
- 10 Store things properly and carefully. Carelessness can cost a fortune.

costs and improving sustainability,” says Caroline Fry, chief executive of catering company CH&Co. “A key policy for CH&Co is to source the best-quality meat and then to minimise waste. Our chefs are encouraged to home-cure using meat off-cuts, producing exquisite salami, chorizo and wonderful sausages.”

14 CUT OUT THE EXCESS

At the high end of the industry in particular, there is an expectation that you should offer guests everything. Hibiscus in Mayfair used to offer both salted and unsalted butter, even though few diners went for the latter, creating wastage.

Claire Bosi explains: “For the past few months we have given salted butter and only verbally offered the alternative of



unsalted. Our delivery has been almost halved, saving us £140 per month or £1,680 annually.”

15 LUXURY WITHOUT EXTRAVAGANCE

This can be a challenge, particularly for five-star properties, but it's worth re-examining your service and assessing whether it is a necessity. “An example would be a hotel bedroom with 10 magazines, where maybe one or two would suffice, backed up by a good library of magazines in public rooms,” says Beppo Buchanan Smith. “Or a selection of toiletries, shaving kits and toothbrushes, when a note saying toothbrushes and shaving kits are available from housekeeping and a less extensive range of toiletries would suffice. In both examples the feeling of luxury remains, but the extravagance is removed.”



16 TAP INTO SAVINGS

The Queensberry hotel in Bath used to place 330ml bottles of mineral water in guest bedrooms at no charge, costing approximately £8,000 per year. It now provides filtered water, both still and sparkling, in personalised 750ml bottles.

Owner Laurence Beere says: “From the guest perspective it has enhanced the quality of the offer, and it has reduced our operating cost by more than 50%. This is also a major improvement for our sustainability initiatives.”



17 COMPLEMENTARY DISHES

Before your chef presents the menu, hold a meeting to discuss multiple uses for the potential menu items, advises Stephen Minall from Moving Food. “There's no point in having an avocado salad on the menu as a starter if avocado is not used elsewhere,” he says. “Consider the by-products of all food items you buy and ask your



greengrocer for seconds, as some perceived out-of-date items like apples make a great pie or apple sauce.”

18 SIZE MATTERS

“You don't have to overload the plate to deliver great value and a first-class experience,” says Peter Joyner, food development director at Elior. The caterer has developed an Indian thali concept that offers a selection of small dishes on one plate.

“It delivers a good, balanced meal experience to the customer, despite the protein content being reduced in comparison to a regular one-pot curry, and it provides excellent portion control, reducing waste,” Joyner adds.



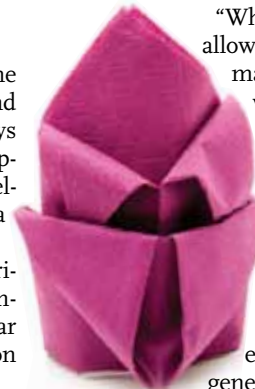
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CONTROL CONSUMPTION

Control the consumption of disposable items such as paper napkins and sachets of sauce or condiments.

“When customers are allowed to help themselves, many will take handfuls, which then get wasted,” says Nigel Forbes, managing partner at consultancy Litmus Partnership.

“Handing disposable items out as part of the service keeps usage under control and still enables you to be fairly generous.”



20

INSTALL A COMPACTOR

Ruth Watson at the Crown and Castle in Orford had been paying £28,000 for waste disposal before installing a compactor and getting the council to remove waste paper and card.

“We now expect to be paying less than £5 per annum,” Watson explains. “We could save even more if pig swill was allowed back into the food chain. It would be very easy to separate meat and other waste potentially harmful to the food chain from vegetable matter.”



21 REUSE YOUR MENUS

This isn't about recycling dishes. Instead, Sam Harrison uses old menus as scrap for printing and waiters' pads.



22 SEPARATE AT SOURCE

With each of its hotels generating about three tons of general waste a week, Shire hotels is piloting a separation at source system at Cottons Hotel & Spa, Knutsford.

Managing director Tony Spencer says: “All food waste is now sent to an anaerobic digester, and general waste is separated into plastic, newspaper, cardboard and glass. The compactor is now emptied once a month instead of three times, saving over £10,000 a year.”



HARRY MURRAY'S 13 WAYS TO ENSURE YOUR BUSINESS IS LUCKY

- Avoid over-discounting. It seriously affects margins.
- Keep a close eye on commissions. They can vary enormously.
- Ensure all business done is charged correctly.
- Engage your team in cost control, and encourage and welcome their suggestions.
- Implement flexible budgeting, including a weekly rolling forecast of business with according amendments to variable cost.

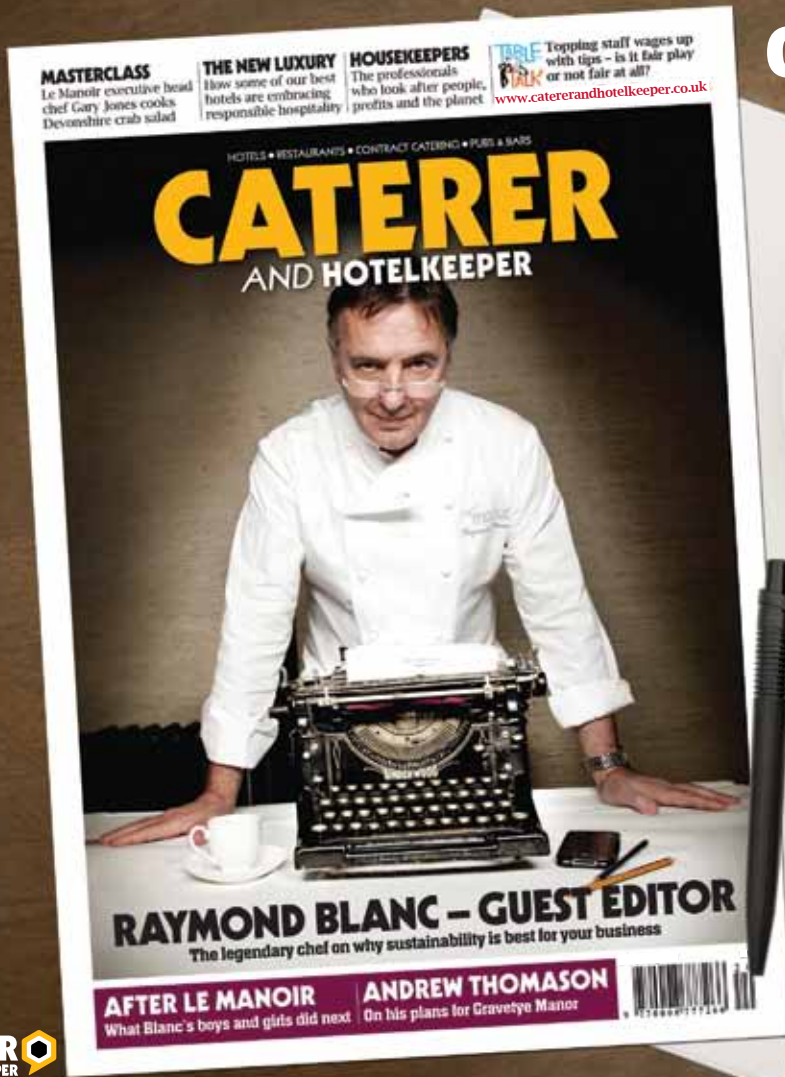


- Keep the team fully in the picture regarding the financial performance of the business.
- Implement a daily profit and loss report to compare with budget and last year. Discuss the results with the team.

- Focus on up-selling to help improve margins.
- Use key performance indicators to help control margins.
- Ensure that all deliveries are carefully checked and signed for.

- Strictly control all purchase orders and monitor them to ensure costs do not exceed the budgeted forecast.
- Identify the high-spend areas of the business and train your team to ask for volume discounts when ordering.
- Identify the main high-cost areas and apply the 80/20 principle – usually staff costs and utilities.

Harry Murray is chairman of Lucknam Park



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TURNING COMPLAINTS INTO COMPLIMENTS



Train your staff to deal with customer complaints so everybody is happy, says Philip Cripps

IMAGE FROM THINKSTOCK

Don't you just hate those customers who complain? You know the type – the ones for whom nothing is ever right. So how do you and your staff deal with complaining customers? Do you ignore or dismiss them, or do you see each complaint as a challenge to overcome?

Let's examine why people complain, as the reasons are not always obvious. Of course, something has gone wrong with a product or service, but anyone who complains is looking for an answer to a series of other emotional concerns, such as, "why did this problem occur?", "how much do you value me as a customer?" or "how will you deal with my complaint?"

In business, as in life, nothing is ever perfect, and things can, and do, go wrong. Therefore, you need to educate your team to treat complaints as opportunities they can capitalise on – not as obstacles to overcome.

Philip Cripps is chief executive of management consultancy Thameside International

SEVEN WAYS TO WIN A CUSTOMER ROUND

1 Act immediately
Whenever possible, address complaints as soon as they are received. Any unnecessary delay in proposing a solution will irritate a customer even more and tempt them to seek greater compensation.

2 Accept their opinion
Complaints are emotional in nature and you cannot address emotional concerns with logical responses – it's like trying to mix oil and water. You need to empathise by accepting the complaint and agreeing that it needs to be addressed.

For example, use such phrases as: "I appreciate you bringing this matter to my attention, and I agree this needs to be addressed quickly", or "I can understand you being upset. I would feel the same way in that situation".

3 Ask questions
When someone expresses a complaint in general or

unspecific terms, ask questions to define the problem.

For example, if your customer says, "I didn't think the service was good", ask questions like, "Which aspects of our service disappointed you?" or "In what ways did our service fall short of your expectations?"

4 Structure your questions
A structured question involves a prefix of what, who, how, where or when, and then your customer cannot reply "yes" or "no". Never ask "why" questions, such as, "why do you think that?" These questions always encourage a customer to dig their heels in and defend or even elaborate upon their complaint.

5 Assess the reaction
Identify the effects the problem has had on your customer. When a customer complains they may describe a problem, but it is the effect

that problem or experience has had on them that creates the emotional reaction.

6 Find a fair solution
When you have understood how your customer has been affected by the problem, invite them to propose a solution. When you offer this invitation your customer has to think carefully about their response and consider the questions, "What would I consider to be an acceptable answer if our roles were reversed?" or "What is a fair recompense for the problem I've experienced?"

7 Ask for feedback
When you have resolved the complaint, ask for feedback. For example, "I'm pleased we've resolved matters. What is your opinion on how I addressed it?" If you have followed this seven-point guideline, don't be surprised when you hear a compliment in response.

UNDERSTANDING BUSINESS RATES

Mary Hardan of the Valuation Office Agency explains the mysterious series of calculations that ends with you receiving a business rates bill

Rates can be a controversial and complex part of life for all businesses, and the hospitality sector is no exception. The Valuation Office Agency (VOA) plays a key part in the rates process and its approach takes into account the diverse nature of the hospitality community.

The VOA, which is an executive agency of HM Revenue and Customs, assesses rateable values – the basis for working out rates bills. But this is just part of the process, as local authorities calculate the bills using the multiplier set by central government in England and the Welsh Government in Wales. Local authorities also collect the rates.

THE ROLE OF THE VALUATION OFFICE AGENCY

The agency has to prepare the non-domestic rating lists for each local authority area and to maintain these lists until the next revaluation, which is usually every five years. These lists establish the 'rateable



IMAGE FROM THINKSTOCK

value' of all non-domestic property in England and Wales, including hotels, pubs and restaurants.

The rateable value represents the VOA's assessment of a property's open market rental value at a set valuation date.

This is normally two years before a rating list comes into force. The last business rates revaluation came into force in 2010, so the current valuation date is 1 April 2008. The VOA uses the same methods to assess rateable value as the

market uses to assess the rental value.

The dates for a revaluation are set in England by the Department for Communities and Local Government and in Wales by the Welsh Government. It's important to note that a revaluation doesn't raise any extra revenue for government. Instead, it redistributes the amount that businesses pay based on rental market changes. The next revaluation is scheduled to take place in 2017.

REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

When considering rateable values for properties such as hotels, pubs and cinemas, the VOA usually requests information about the business – for example, trading receipts – to help it understand the level of fair maintainable trade. This reflects how things work in the rental market, where property owners refer to fair maintainable trade when assessing the rents that businesses pay.

However, the hospitality and leisure market is a diverse world and, in some cases, the VOA may need to apply other valuation approaches.

For example, rents for guest houses factor in the number of bedrooms and the VOA uses this measure when assessing their rateable value. For restaurants, the size of the unit in terms of overall floor space is typically the main valuation driver. This will therefore be key when comparing one property's value with another in this sector.

Mary Hardman is director of non-domestic rating at the Valuation Office Agency

HOW BUSINESS RATES ARE CALCULATED

Local authorities are responsible for calculating rates bills and collecting rates. They normally send out business rates bills every March.

In simple terms, your local authority works out your business rates bill as follows: (rateable value x multiplier) less any reliefs.

For example, if your property's rateable value is £20,000 and the multiplier is £0.471, the total annual bill before any reliefs will be £9,420.

The multiplier, also referred to as the 'uniform business rate',

represents the number of pence payable in each pound of rateable value. It is reviewed by the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Welsh Government every year to reflect changes in inflation. It is also adjusted at each revaluation so that the overall national business rates bill remains the same.

Different rate reliefs may be available from your local authority. Some are automatic but others need to be applied for. If, for example, you run a single business property in England with a rateable

value under £12,000, you may be able to apply to your local authority for small business rate relief.

You can check the property details for your business online at the website listed below. If the details are wrong, or there have been physical changes to your property since 2010, you can ask the VOA to reassess the rateable value as at 1 April 2008.

It's important to understand that a reduction in rateable value may not make any difference to your business rates bill.

www.voa.gov.uk/valuation

Interview



For more information on Ideal Collection, visit www.idealcollection.co.uk

Who is your greatest inspiration?

I got into the whole River Café ethos pretty early on in my career. I love a bit of Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall and Skye Gyngell and what they stand for.

On a more technical and modern approach, I am very much into the homegrown (born in Southampton) talent of Simon Rogan and the gastro-punk spirit of Ben Spalding. I also love the Nordic styles of Magnus Nilsson and René Redzepi as they make very good use of ingredients and techniques that have been forgotten or ignored. I have met all of these chefs, and they have all left a lasting impression on me.

What are your top tips for an aspiring chef?

Be like a sponge; soak it all in. Ask the right questions. Read as many books as you can. Never give up, never think you know everything; we're all commis chefs.

If you weren't a chef, what career would you have chosen?

Anything practical and creative. I couldn't imagine being cooped up in an office from nine to five. Boring!

What has been your greatest career achievement to date?

Gaining a second Rosette in my

JIM HAYWARD

This edition of intouch profiles Jim Hayward, group executive chef at Hampshire-based Ideal Collection

first year with Ideal Collection as head chef of the White Star Tavern, then receiving a cooking score of 2 in the Good Food Guide the following year.

What is your favourite ingredient?

Anything foraged, especially if I manage to find it myself. I discovered pineapple weed last

summer – it's everywhere once you tune into it and is great for sorbet. If I had to name just one thing it would be New Forest penny buns (cep/porcini), which signal a great time of the year, too.

What would be your last supper?

A box of oysters with the family on an awesome surf beach, probably

the west coast of France, and maybe something cold and crisp to wash them down with.

Where do you eat on your night off?

Getting out can be tricky with juggling the hours I work and family life; I'm a father of three – soon to be four. My last amazing meal out was at Roganic, just before it closed. On my wish list to try soon is restaurant Story, Clove Club and Kitchen Table. Other great meals in recent times locally have been at The Pig in the New Forest and the Black Rat in Winchester. Failing that, an awesome proper wood-fired pizza from the end of my road in Bournemouth.

JIM HAYWARD'S SCALLOPS, BUTTERNUT SQUASH, SAGE BUTTER, HAZELNUT CRUMB

Ingredients

- 1 butternut squash
- Butter
- Scallops (diver-caught)
- Hazelnuts (dry roasted; rub skins off with a cloth, crush to crumb)
- Large fresh sage leaves
- Salt & pepper

Method

Cut thick slices from the stalk end of the squash and punch out round discs with a cutter to make fondants.



Cook the fondants in a non-stick pan in foaming butter until they are golden on both sides. Remove from the pan and keep them warm. Add the crumbed hazelnuts and

sage leaves, and gently fry until they are crisp and golden.

Peel and roughly dice the rest of the squash. Season and roast it in the oven until soft, then purée it, adding a knob of butter.

Next, pan-fry the scallops until nicely coloured.

To serve, swipe the purée across the plate, and place three fondants on top, with a scallop on top of each fondant. Dress with the foaming butter, and scatter with the crisp sage leaves and hazelnut crumb.

ENGAGE BEFORE ARRIVAL

First impressions count – and they are formed even before customers reach your door

Making the effort to connect and engage with your customers before they even arrive can lead to an all-round better experience – not just for them, but for you, too.

Customers form their first impressions way before they walk into your bar, hotel or restaurant. From the moment they find out about you, be it through word of mouth, a Google search or just walking past your front door, they will start building an impression.

And the more you can engage with your customer, the more likely it is that you can create a positive first impression (one that might even sway the decision to come and dine, stay or book with you in the first place), leading to a sense of positive anticipation.

Engaging with the customer before they arrive means you're in a better position to anticipate their expectations, start to build a relationship and earn their trust. And that means you are better able to pave the way for a happy customer who is then inclined to stay longer, spend more and return more often.

The converse is when your customer experiences a total lack of communication with your establishment. That leaves them uncertain, prey to 'buyer's remorse' and questioning their

FIVE WAYS TO ENGAGE YOUR CUSTOMERS BEFORE THEY ARRIVE

1 Show your personality
Start to engage by showing your personality in your initial communications. What does your website say about you? That you're stuffy, formal and corporate, or relaxed, welcoming and friendly? Tell your story via your website, e-mails, blog and social media, and help people determine what makes you different, interesting or exciting and not just another vanilla establishment. What do your TripAdvisor responses say about you? Customer-focused and service-oriented, or disinterested, defensive and even aggressive?

2 Switch off auto-pilot
Booking engines and automated confirmations are a godsend, but using them exclusively for customer engagement can exact a price. Rather than relying solely on automated e-mails, aim to follow-up enquiries and bookings

with something that's personal and relevant to the nature of their visit and your existing relationship with that customer.

3 Ask questions
If people are booking in person, train your team to ask questions – in a conversational way, of course – with the aim of finding out more about their visit. Is it a special occasion, are there special requirements, is there something specific they're hoping to see, have or do? The more you can anticipate expectations, the greater the chance you have of fulfilling – and exceeding – them.

4 Add value
What else can be done to help customers get the best from their visit? Can guests pre-book spa treatments, dinner reservations or Champagne on arrival? Can you help with getting them best deals through joint-

venture partners such as taxis and florists, or cheap theatre tickets? Consider offering travel advice, such as the best routes to take, roadworks to avoid and parking.

5 Build anticipation
Once people are booked in, keep the dialogue going to build anticipation. Don't just use direct e-mail or phone calls, but also keep an eye out for what's being said on social media. If someone mentions on Twitter that they're looking forward to their stay with you, tweet back – not just how you're looking forward to seeing them, but giving little teasers on what there is to do, see or experience when they arrive. If someone posts a comment on Facebook, keep the conversation going to build that sense of anticipation. This then starts to engage with their friends too, so starting the cycle for the next generation of customers.

original decision to come to you. And as most of us know from bitter experience, if a customer comes with the expectation that they're going to be disappointed, they'll seize every opportunity to find fault to back-up their perception, which generally becomes a

self-fulfilling prophecy.

The way you engage needs to be right for your target market. You know how sometimes you can read something and sense that the writer is talking directly to you and speaking your language? This is what you should aim for at every touch

point of your customer's journey – on your website, in your marketing messages and throughout the booking and confirmation process.

Caroline Cooper is founder of Naturally Loyal
→ www.naturallyloyal.com



Spotlight

A GRANDE DAME OF THE HIGHLANDS

We profile the oldest hotel in the centre of Inverness, the Royal Highland Hotel



THE ROYAL HIGHLAND HOTEL
INVERNESS

Inverness, the scenic and historically significant capital of the Highlands, is one of the most popular tourist destinations not only in Scotland but in the whole of UK. Visitors can have a varied taste of Cawdor Castle (the castle of Macbeth), the interactive visitor centre at Culloiden Battlefields or the beautiful walk along the River Ness and the mysterious Loch Ness.

Serving the Highlands since 1856, the Royal Highland Hotel (formerly known as Station Hotel) is synonymous with Inverness and is ideally located for both business and pleasure. It is one of the few hotels in the world that has been listed and quality certified by AA for more than 100 years.

The hotel's magnificent Titanic-style staircase greets you, along with a wonderful art gallery, boasting exhibits by local artists Michael Forbes and Andrew Ward. The Gallery Café offers teas and coffees as well as a wide range of homemade hot food, sandwiches and desserts.



The adjacent Ash Restaurant is open from 12 noon until 9:30pm and the lounge bar has an excellent selection of single malts.

Start the day with a sumptuous Scottish buffet breakfast in the recently refurbished Grand Wallace Ballroom, where haggis and black pudding shake hands with the sausage and the bacon. Both this and the Magnus room are also great venues for weddings and corporate events, each with a capacity of 120 people.

All 86 bedrooms are individual in layout and size, and have a tasteful blend of traditional and modern interiors and furniture. Rooms come with complimentary bottled waters, tea, coffee, biscuits, sweets, an iron and ironing board, a room safe and luxury toiletries, as well as an umbrella for those unexpected rainy Scottish days!

Why not sit in one of the wing-back chairs and enjoy the ambience of the cosy reception area. You could read the daily newspapers or books from the carefully chosen library and go back to the



“Once part of the elite group of Scottish railway hotels, this classic hotel continues to welcome guests in the same manner in which it did when it first opened in 1854”

days of easy and relaxed luxury.

You could also plan your day ahead and take in the Victorian market, Inverness Castle or a trip to the Black Isles or further afield to discover the beauty of the Highlands and islands. In case you are interested in activities such as golf, fishing or walking, there can be no better place than this to have as your base.

So, what are you waiting for? Why not enjoy the Royal Highland Hotel when you plan your next holiday or business visit.

For more information on the Royal Highland Hotel, visit www.royalhighlandhotel.co.uk

...INCREASE FOOTFALL AT YOUR VENUE

FIRST IMPRESSIONS ARE EVERYTHING IN THE HOSPITALITY SECTOR AND CUSTOMERS MAKE A DECISION ABOUT WHERE TO EAT, DRINK AND SLEEP IN A HEARTBEAT. MELONY SPENCER AND MARTIN SWINDEN OFFER THEIR TIPS FOR GETTING MORE CUSTOMERS – AND KEEPING THEM

Create clear branding

Having a clear brand will ensure customers know what to expect from your venue. Clients can be put off by a venue with no identity as it's too much of a risk to enter, especially if it's for an important occasion or a business meeting.

Having a distinct brand that's simple but noticeable tells your customers who you are and what you're all about.

Smarten up your frontage

For passing trade, the exterior of your premises can be the difference between a customer and a passer-by. First impressions count, so it's vital that you make your venue as attractive as possible. If you can't afford a complete revamp, some small changes will make a difference.

Clear signage goes without saying, but other details can make a big difference, too, such as colourful plants and shrubs, clean pathways and tidy smoking areas. Little things, such as leaving the front door of your venue open, will also make you seem more approachable.

Think about your offering

Are you entirely happy with the products or services you offer? If you're unsure, think about making a visit to a competitor to see what they're doing – it's fine to take some inspiration from competing businesses operating in your area.



You should also make sure that any displays, special offers and marketing promotions are kept within the season – take seasonal and festive items down as soon as they're no longer relevant. A Christmas display in February indicates that something is seriously wrong!

Address your interior

Some venues tolerate an interior layout that doesn't suit their requirements, but that's not how it should be. Simple changes to the positioning of your furniture or access to your bar can breathe new life into your venue and increase the longevity of a visit, which ultimately puts more money in the cash drawer.

Take it to the streets

One of the key mistakes retailers make is presuming their brand is limited to the four walls of the venue. In reality, there isn't anything

stopping you heading out on to the street in search of customers.

Try offering samples or examples to passers-by – meeting people on the street can be a great way of enticing them into your venue, and creating a rapport with individual customers will help build relationships and generate vocal ambassadors for your venue.

Embrace the virtual world

Despite the increased use of social media over the past few years, retailers are often still hesitant to branch out into the virtual world. Social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook allow your venue to get involved in a new revolution that allows businesses to build personal relationships with their customers. It's also a great way to seek valuable customer feedback, which ultimately helps you improve your offering.

Once you start a relationship with your customers via social media, it's vital to be consistent – it's better to stay off social media than start a campaign that's out of date and out of touch with your audience.

Build customer loyalty

Most customers are too busy to search for offers or discounts related to your venue, so instead of waiting for them to come to you, go to them. Collect email addresses by offering an incentive and use their contact information to expand your mailing list. A monthly newsletter of upcoming events and offers will keep your customers involved in your business and help spread the word.

Returning customers are the foundation of any successful business, so think of ways to encourage and maintain customer loyalty. Venues that cater for passing trade often use

loyalty cards with a free product incentive after repeat visits. These encouragements channel regular custom to your venue.

Broaden your horizons

Explore other avenues that could help bring people through your doors. You may be able to diversify your services by reinventing a space that's always empty – perhaps you could use it as a meeting space or a function room?

If it's food or drink you offer, invest in a takeaway or delivery service for busy workers in nearby offices. These avenues could develop into new services, therefore increasing your reputation and commitment to customers' needs.

Invest in your staff

Your staff are the face of your company as far as the customer is concerned – everything they say or do contributes to the overall image your customer has of your business. Staff training or retraining is imperative. They should be aware of your company's brand and direction, know how to deal with complaints and understand the importance of the "customer is always right" philosophy. Make sure that image extends into the social media sphere, too – bad behaviour online could taint your reputation.

Re-evaluate your demographics

Re-evaluating your business demographic will ensure you capitalise on the ever-changing structure of the local population. The people you once appealed to may not be as profitable as a new market, so make sure you keep on top of the changes happening around you and always keep your eye on potential gaps in the market.

Melony Spencer and Martin Swinden are hospitality design consultants at Spencer Swinden Design
→ www.spencerswinden.com

“Your staff are the face of your company as far as the customer is concerned – everything they say or do contributes to the overall image your customer has of your business”

AA HOSPITALITY SOLUTIONS

Recent testimonials

“New Forest Hotels have used the AA for training for many years now. They have provided a number of courses including the Rosette Academy, Hospitality and Service and Reservations training. Our account manager has always listened to our requirements and is always happy to work with us on any areas that require bespoke training or highlighted issues that we may need particular attention. The courses are always upbeat and informative and always engage the staff throughout the day. Our chefs particularly look forward to the food tasting that we organise on a regular basis.”

CHRISTINE TURNER
Group Operations Manager

“The cycle of continuous improvement based on customer feedback is an essential ingredient to a successful business model. For several years the AA's mystery guest programme has been an important contributor to the Royal Garden's ongoing development. Providing a comprehensive and bespoke dashboard covering all aspects of our business, it helps to identify trends from which training needs can easily be identified”

GRAHAM BAMFORD FIH MI
General Manager
Royal Garden hotel

In addition to our world-renowned hotel inspection, Star and Rosette rating schemes, we offer a comprehensive range of training and consultancy services.

Years of experience has taught us that many hotels have need of a second view from experienced and professional hotel guests who can share best practice and great ideas. This experience has helped many hotels by highlighting areas where a little help and improvement is advisable.

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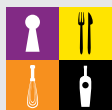
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