UNDERSTANDING CUSTOMER NEEDS IN 2022

THE LANDSCAPE OF HOSPITALITY HAS CHANGED, AND SOME OF THOSE CHANGES ARE HERE TO STAY. SO, WHAT WILL YOUR CUSTOMERS EXPECT FROM YOUR VENUE IN 2022? IN THIS ARTICLE, CPL LEARNING LOOKS AT HOW THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE HAS EVOLVED – AND WHAT STEPS YOU CAN TAKE TO MEET YOUR GUESTS' EXPECTATIONS

The challenges we have collectively faced since the start of the pandemic have highlighted the strength and resilience of hospitality as a sector. The practices adopted, at an unprecedented rate to support COVID secure procedures and ensure operators could open under rigorous Government regulations, not only presented significant challenges for businesses, but have caused an irreversible shift in consumer behaviour. What is becoming increasingly clear is that some of those practices are here to stay.

So, what are customers looking for in a post-lockdown world? Here we explore some of those new and adapted practices and their impact on customers, and what your guests are increasingly reporting as important to them when choosing a hospitality venue.

THE CUSTOMER JOURNEY

During periods of lockdown, operators adapted quickly to make viable businesses that could still operate. Whether that was by designing out-of-home experiences, such as at-home cocktail and recipe kits, or by adapting to provide delivery. Operators did an incredible job of exploring a wide range of revenue-generating solutions and increasing their visibility across a breadth of channels – from working with popular home delivery services to reaching out to their local communities to help support free school meals.

The post-lockdown customer journey now starts and ends where many of us spent most of those lockdowns, in our own homes. And the good news is that during the pandemic, operators have made a good start in building the online presence that has since become an integral part of the customer journey.

Three in five customers look online for menus, photos, or reviews before visiting a venue according to the *Access & CGA Tech Report* – meaning a strong online presence is essential. If your guests can't find positive reviews or complete menus ahead of their visit, they could easily turn to a competitor.

Pre-booking online has become a priority for guests:

- **54% say that not having the option to pre-book would actively deter them from choosing a specific venue**

A well-designed website that signposts all this pre-visit information could have a significant impact on your venue's success in 2022. And the customer journey no longer ends when they leave your venue.

Ongoing customer relationship management is now an important part of your guest's experience as well as influencing that all-important online presence:

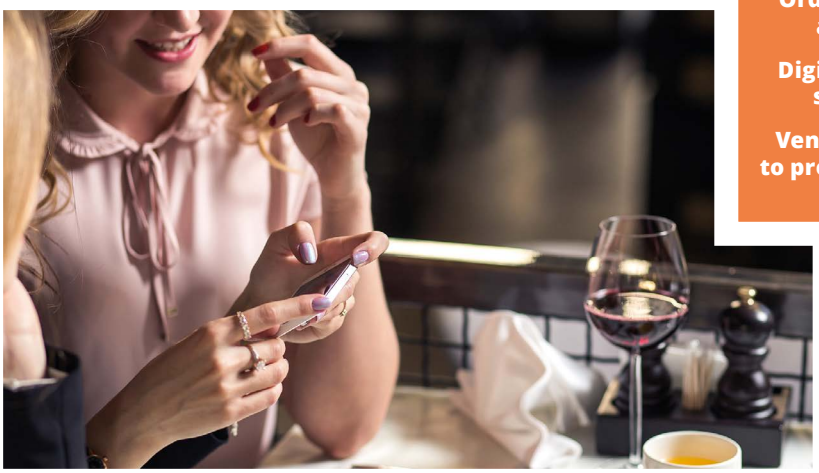
- **53% of consumers said that a post-visit email after their visit would prompt them to leave a review**

THREE HOSPITALITY TECH TRENDS RATED BY CONSUMERS:

Order and pay at table

Digital tipping systems

Venue website to pre-book table



RISE OF TECH

When finding ways to operate safely and in line with Government guidelines, hospitality technology solutions offered businesses some much-needed support, when it came to implementing table service and cashless solutions. And operators and technology suppliers adapted and implemented these solutions with such success that many of them are now becoming preferred ways of working post-pandemic.

Order and pay at table technology is a prime example. Implemented in many businesses purely to accommodate table service only regulations, this efficient way to manage a visit has become a popular feature that younger guests especially look for in a venue. Customers' expectations around the availability of tech solutions have adapted:

• 23% of consumers expect to be able to use order and pay at table tech when visiting a venue

So, now is the time to look at how this technology can work, or be optimised, moving forwards. Guests are adapting well to the use of this technology, but now identify pain points, such as: the lack of reliable wi-fi – they want guaranteed functionality inside the venue; the ability to incorporate vouchers and offers into technology solutions; and to be able to modify orders easily, when ordering through an app.

Adopting technology solutions now will help identify and resolve some of these pain points. For example, having free wi-fi that's easily accessed, finding ways to incorporate offers and vouchers, and being able to communicate with guests about how to manage order modifications – and most importantly,

"ADAPTING IN LINE WITH EMERGING CONSUMER TRENDS GIVES OPERATORS THE BEST CHANCE OF MEETING THEIR CUSTOMERS' NEEDS AND LEADING TO A SUCCESSFUL 2022!"

guests being able to easily highlight dietary requirements, such as allergens.

• 65% of consumers now say they are more likely to revisit a venue if they have a positive technology experience, so operators should ensure they have reliable, functional tech solutions that elevate the guest experience.

SUSTAINABILITY IS THE FUTURE

As consumers become more aware of the impact of sustainability and look to adopt more sustainable practices for themselves, this also is having more impact on choices about where to eat, drink and socialise.

• 72% of consumers now claim that sustainability is an important factor when choosing where to eat out

In 2022, operators will want to focus on adopting more sustainable practices to align with this consumer need in the future – and there are plenty of benefits for businesses as well.

One way to become more sustainable is by supporting local breweries, distilleries and sourcing local produce. With the rising trend, post-pandemic, for supporting local and independent businesses, this will also help your positioning within your local community.

Technology can also help with sustainable business practices, from helping to monitor waste, sourcing suppliers, and adopting paperless administration.

And don't forget to let your customers know.

• 42% of consumers said they didn't know enough about their chosen venue's sustainability practices

So, whether you promote the provenance of your food and drinks offerings or use your CRM system to highlight your paper free communication and booking processes – your customers want to know what you're doing to promote sustainability.

There are still a lot of challenges facing the sector as we look ahead, and while it's important to focus on our operation, revenue building and our teams, we can't forget our customers. Adapting in line with emerging consumer trends gives operators the best chance of meeting their customers' needs and leading to a successful 2022! ■

CPL Learning
an access company
www.cpllearning.com