

“For your customers, this one specific occasion may be a high point to their year”



THE MARKETEEER
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It's Christmas time. There's no need to be afraid

How can operators make the most of the fact that customers want to feel special at Christmas time?

As the days shorten and the nights draw in, I have been checking out some faraway places for some winter sun. What struck me is how so many tour operators now offer all-inclusive holidays, whereas once upon a time it was only the select few who did that. In fact, for some tour companies it's the only type of holiday they now offer. Looking at the casual dining industry, we can see similar strategies to this with the growth and popularity of fixed price or set menus. Although not favoured by everyone, they do seem to come into their own when it comes to Christmas.

That said, looking through the array of festive menus that are now appearing on restaurant websites, I am struck by the relative structured nature of what's being offered. I know that one way that operators are able to hit the various price points that they do is by keeping things simple. However, with a little more thought and creativity there may be opportunities to both enhance the customer experience but also improve your profits.

NOTHING WRONG WITH PRE-SELLING

While fixed and set price menus at Christmas help with customer budgets and, in many cases, are an important part of the decision-making process, that doesn't mean there aren't opportunities to trade them up. With pre-booked tables usually a must in these situations, you should have plenty of time to get back in touch with whoever made the booking to see if they would like to add any extras.

This may be as simple as taking a leaf out of the way theatres handle the interval and give them the chance to pre-order drinks before arrival. Not only will this help add to their experience, but it can also take some of the pressure off your own team at a time when things might be quite hectic.

As well as pre-ordering drinks, there may also be the opportunity to upsell other things. A big thing which we all often forget when we get embroiled in the hustle and bustle of service is the fact that, for your customers, this one specific occasion may be a high point to their year. Our job therefore should be



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to ensure that it is memorable for all the right reasons and make each customer feel as special as we are able.

Depending on what type of restaurant you are running will have a major influence on what you are able to suggest in these cases. All I would say is don't ignore the obvious. Even something as straightforward as olives, or some other simple nibbles, get your customers into a great place as soon as they enter your venue.

Another good way to encourage customers to trade-up before they arrive is to ask the right questions. Is it a special occasion? Is it also someone's birthday? Just because it's Christmas doesn't mean that there aren't other things that warrant celebrating.

IT'S NEVER OVER UNTIL IT'S OVER

Of course, once your guests arrive you have an entirely new set of opportunities to encourage them to build on the base menu they have booked. The same approaches that you may use at any other time of the year need to be even sharper around Christmas. The big challenge is to make sure that, whatever

you are trying to upsell, is in keeping with the style of everything else on offer. It should also sound and feel a bit more special than it would be if it was described in the middle of March! This should help you charge a premium.

Some set menus already have an upselling option built in – two courses for X or three courses for Y. Just because that's already there doesn't mean that you can't look to offer more options, especially towards the end of the meal. I have lost count of the number of times I have almost dismissively been invited to have a coffee and liqueur, when only the slightest encouragement would have had me and my table stay that bit longer. Just because the meal is over doesn't mean that the opportunities to add that little bit extra have gone.

DON'T FORGET YOUR DRINKS OFFER

As well as thinking about food items during the festive season, there is a great opportunity to upsell when it comes to drinks, both alcoholic and non-alcoholic. As I have mentioned in the past, changing your drinks range in

keeping with the seasons is also worth looking at, especially over the Christmas period. While it's fine and correct to keep your core range intact, adding more premium brands and products will usually pay dividends, assuming they are sold correctly and appropriately. As with your food offer, the premium brands you may decide to stock over the Christmas period should be in keeping with your broader offer. If not, then it's highly likely they will remain unsold no matter what you do.

While not everyone will order Champagne, in a lot of cases customers are more likely to trade-up to more premium wines, spirits and even beers during the run-up to Christmas than they are at any other time of the year. The important thing from any operator's point of view is to make sure you have the right brands and well informed staff to let them do it as easily as possible. ☺