

Boost profits through

This month **The Mystery Dining Company** looks at how staff training is key to customer loyalty

More and more pubs are taking the fight to chain restaurants in order to attract customers with an alternative informal dining offer. In order to generate repeat business, pubs must now recognise the importance of replicating the standards of service that customers expect from restaurants.

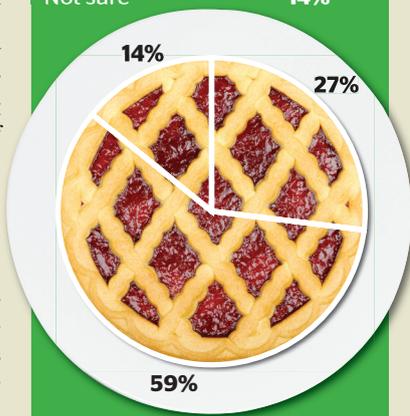
As part of our series of monthly features focusing on customer engagement, we take a look at the important role played by staff in customer service and how well-trained staff will help generate customer loyalty.

Could do better

According to a recent survey conducted by The Mystery Dining Company (TMDC), the pub sector still has some way to go to match the restaurant chains in terms of staff training.

In your experience, are staff in pubs as knowledgeable about the menu, specials and ingredients as those in restaurants?

Response	%
Yes	27%
No	59%
Not sure	14%



Case study: Food & Fuel

Food & Fuel owns and operates seven gastropubs and four café/bars in the London area. The group was founded on the principle that it would deliver 'true hospitality' – fresh, seasonal and delicious food, excellent drink, informed and efficient service, and genuine value in a welcoming environment.

Putting customers – and therefore customer service – high on the agenda has

been paramount to the group's success as it continues to grow and gain both popularity and customer loyalty.

Jo Cumming, Food & Fuel's CEO, explains how a bespoke experience-monitoring programme from The Mystery Dining Company (TMDC) helps the group to improve its customer service by feeding the results into staff training.

"We are actively involved in the experience-monitoring process,

using it to challenge ourselves and learn how we can better meet our customers' needs," she says.

"We view mystery dining as a tool to improve customer service. For that reason we implemented a strategic approach by ensuring that each wave of activity has a very specific focus.

"The whole management team 'mystery dined' each others' pubs in order to gain a better understanding of what a mystery diner experiences.

"Armed with the reports for each of our pubs we analyse the feedback and then look at what improvements we need to make in order to provide a better experience for our customers. We encourage our teams to utilise the reports as a tool and to use them to provide constructive feedback."

Food & Fuel operates a league table with each wave of mystery dining activity and rewards teams that excel, as well as anyone who provides outstanding service. The aim is to ensure the whole team embraces the programme.

The survey revealed that 72% of diners believe it is just as important for pubs to offer the same level of personalised customer service as restaurants. Further digging reveals that pubs haven't quite reached that level of staff service in a number of key areas.

Mind the knowledge gap

It seems that customers still lack confidence in the knowledge that pub staff display when it comes to menu options and drinks. Of the 349 diners surveyed by TMDC, 59% stated that in their experience, staff in pubs tended to be less knowledgeable about the menu, specials and ingredients used than those in restaurants. Even with drinks, where one might expect pub staff to excel, only 17% of diners said that staff in pubs were more knowledgeable about drinks and the wine list compared to those in restaurants.

Turnover and training

The research reveals a perhaps unsurprising perception that staff training in pubs isn't as rigorous as in restaurants and that this is a direct result of higher staff turnover in the pub trade. When asked about their



Mission: Food & Fuel aims to provide fresh, seasonal and delicious food