

latest hospitality news

Personalisation is the key to a positive first impression, HGEM reveals

Tuesday, 31 January 2017

New research has revealed that 83% of diners consider the welcome to be an 'important' or 'very important' factor in their overall enjoyment of a restaurant visit. So much so, that three quarters of diners (79%) would be deterred from making a return visit to a site if they received a poor welcome, according to a report from HGEM.

Incorporating an element of personalisation to the welcome, such as creating additional conversation or going above and beyond role requirements, was the most highly rated factor in delivering a memorable welcome. The importance of human interaction was emphasised, with almost half (44%) of diners considering staff to have the greatest impact on their first impression of a restaurant over decor or speed of service. Furthermore, more than one third (33%) of respondents cited employees who exceeded expectations as essential for a great welcome.

Diners aged over 55 were most prominent in suggesting an 'impersonal or generic greeting' had a negative impact on the welcome, with almost a quarter of this age group (24%) citing these reasons. Furthermore, almost half (42%) of respondents claimed that not being greeted with a smile or a lack of eye contact would make them feel unwelcome when visiting a restaurant. This contrasted with 28% who cited the speed of greeting would deter a return visit.

When considering which outlets led the way in making guests feel welcome, those surveyed identified hotels (31%) and casual dining restaurants (29%) as the most memorable with only 7% and 1% of consumers stating pubs & bars and quick service restaurants (QSR) as delivering the best welcome, respectively.

Steven Pike, managing director of HGEM commented: "The results are indicative of the demand for personalisation within the hospitality sector, a continuation of a trend that we expect to see more of throughout 2017. While personalisation has been gaining popularity recently in the context of products, it will always be important in a service context and particularly as diners look for a move from a routine or disingenuous greeting to a sincere and personalised welcome. A focus in recruiting the right people and investing in their development will encourage genuine welcoming behaviours and memorable guest interactions to encourage repeat visits and convert customers into brand advocates.

"As consumers become increasingly perceptive to what makes a great welcome, with personalisation becoming the norm, there are lots of examples of creative practice throughout the industry. At HGEM, we encourage guest experience managers to seek inspirations from other businesses across a variety of foodservice outlets whether or not they are considered a direct competitor. Given that the welcome represents such a small proportion of the experience (in terms of time), focussing attention on nailing greetings every time will pay dividends."