

ASK THE EXPERTS

## Top 10 tips for successful upselling

By Steven Pike , 16-Feb-2015



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Upselling is the life blood of your business. It maximises average spend per head, increases your turnover, but most importantly, enhances the guest experience. Here, Steven Pike, managing director of HospitalityGEM, gives his top 10 tips for successful upselling.

### Top Tip #1 - Don't be afraid of upselling.

Selling to your guests is what keeps you in business; it's how it's done that matters. No-one likes to feel they are being sold to but most people will take up opportunities to enhance their experience. People have come to you to spend money and they don't usually know exactly how much they will spend. But however much they do, they expect it to be good value. If you can make the meal an experience to remember with great service, the customer will be less worried about the cost.

### Top Tip #2 - Decide what you're going to call it.

The word 'upselling' is the most commonly used term but does it fit with your culture? If it feels too robotic or fills your team with dread, choose something else. 'Suggestive selling', 'Menu guidance' or 'Experience maximisation' maybe? Whatever you call it, make sure your team are comfortable and that it inspires and motivates the right behaviours.

### **Top Tip #3 - Be a great host and read the guest.**

This is probably the most important one of all and it should be a core skill for your front of house team. A host figure should own the restaurant floor, touching all their guests, filling up wine glasses when required and selling that extra after dinner drink. For those who are inexperienced, help them with a few simple questions, such as "What do I know about this guest?", "Are they on a tight schedule?", "Who are they dining with?", "Are there any dishes that may complement what they have ordered?", "Is anyone's glass getting empty?"

### **Top Tip #4 - Engage in appropriate conversation.**

Developing a good rapport will help you read the guests' needs and recognise potential sales opportunities. Showing that you are interested in them makes the whole experience more rewarding, both for the guest and the server. But don't overdo it – you are there to provide guests with a service; you are not suddenly going to be their best friend.

### **Top Tip #5 – Smile and be positive (naturally, that is).**

Show that you enjoy looking after your guests. This puts them at ease and will make them more likely to want to prolong the experience – and in doing so, to buy more. If you are positive and upbeat when engaging in suggestive selling it will encourage your guest to go for that large glass of wine or extra side dish.

### **Top Tip #6 - Keep it natural.**

Will someone please tell call centres to stop asking how I am today! This immediately puts us on the defensive. It may actually be a more appropriate phrase for a dining scenario but try to be original; base conversation on observation. Still, there's no harm in having a few 'seeder phrases' up your sleeve if it helps to relax both you and the guest, and get the interaction flowing.

### **Top Tip #7 - Generate positive word-of-mouth.**

Yes, effective selling can do this – and not only will you generate more sales on the day but you could attract future business too. "I'm so glad they suggested I ordered this side dish – it was gorgeous". "I would definitely go back there – we spent more than we would normally but it was worth it". "I didn't have to worry about making sure my friends all had drinks – the waiter did that for me and we just had a great night!" There is no harm in gentle encouragement; "go on, it's Friday night!" always works a treat.

### **Top Tip #8 - Think about the tip.**

This is an important source of income for many waiting staff. Obviously it should go up in line with how good the guest experience was, but people often base it on a percentage of the bill, so the higher the bill, the higher the tip. A note of caution though – the driver should always be about improving the guest experience, not just selling more, as guests won't tip if they feel ripped off and had a poor experience.

### **Top Tip #9 - Share the best ideas.**

Talking about what works can be a good way for inexperienced waiting staff to learn and to develop their own style. It also helps the more experienced team members to feel more valuable and to reflect on new ideas.

**Top Tip #10 - Enjoy upselling and celebrate successes.**

Once the above actions are established, it will start to flow more naturally. The team will enjoy doing it and feel great when they know they have generated more sales through better experiences. Track the results and enjoy the rewards.

**Upselling shouldn't be about supersizing your offer. Upselling is about maximising the guest experience for the benefit of them, and your business. The monotonous "would you like fries with that?" is gone. Look after your guests and they will look after you.**