

Pub Catering - UK - September 2010

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What is this report about?

The pub industry remains in a state of consolidation with many of the big brands in particular rationalising their estates in order to take advantage of acquisition opportunities in other areas of the market, with the main focus on the less volatile food-led sector of the market. Therefore expansion plans are still evident, despite the high rate of pub closures, although the trend is for businesses to reduce the risk associated with high debt levels. As such, the buzzword going forward is 'cautious' progression.

What have we found out?

- Transparency is the key to improving on the fact that only around half of diners think that pub food is good value for money. For example, whilst gastropubs are increasingly using blogs to highlight their foodie credentials, operators in the lower end of the market could advertise a collaboration with a frozen food brand to provide transparency and trade on brand recognition at the same time.
- Special occasion dining still presents opportunities for the pub industry as at present only around a quarter of pub diners eat in a pub for a treat/special occasion. Pubs need to ensure that they are maximising upselling opportunities by offering more flexible menus in terms of pricing, not just in terms of meal occasions (as it the present focus).
- Pubs are arguably playing it too safe with their menus at present. Traditional dishes/pub classics have proved popular with half of all pub diners (especially during the recession when consumers increasingly looked for 'safe bets'), it also means that many pub menus lack differentiation. This is where the use of specials boards (also favoured by around a third of diners) can help a venue to stand out from the crowded marketplace.
- Operators should pay attention to the quarter of pub diners who are looking for something different to the food they cook at home themselves and are interested in dishes that sound unusual and interesting.
- Focusing on seasonal ingredients is an obvious way to bolster a specials board, both in terms of enticing consumers and in regards to keeping chefs motivated, forward thinking and engaged in menu development. It is also a menu label which entices around a sixth of pub diners, particularly those aged 35-54.
- Operators are damaging margins unnecessarily by focusing on driving footfall through discounted theme nights (eg curry clubs) as only one in ten pub diners are drawn to these dishes on menus.

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