

Pub Visiting - UK - September 2010

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What is this report about?

The consumer leisure market has changed beyond recognition, largely due to technology and how it has made the home environment more of a focus. This greater emphasis on spending time and entertaining at home has led to greater competition in the eating out market, particularly for the spending of the all-important 18-34-year-olds. Add to the mix cheaper and more accessible alcohol from supermarkets, the recession, rising tax and duty and a smoking ban and the pub sector has faced what has been termed 'the perfect storm'. The question is not whether the pub industry emerges unscathed from the recession – too late for that – but how it will absorb the punitive tax measures and emerge to compete in a leaner and more 'consumer-centric' pub industry/environment.

What have we found out?

- Supporting the evidence that pub food is a key attraction is the fact that more consumers now go to the pub for a meal than a drink (72% vs. 63% respectively). One key selling point is its relaxed dining environment according to a third of consumers.
- Around 30% of 35-44s go to the pub at least once a fortnight for a drink – compared to 41% who go for a meal once a fortnight. Menus are therefore an ideal way to promote more frequent visits such as 'start the weekend with an after-work drink'. These less frequent pub-goers are effectively 'lapsed enthusiasts' and need a specific reason to venture out.
- One in three consumers feel it is important to have a pub nearby; yet only 17% say pubs are a regular part of their life. This suggests people like pubs to be there even if they don't go there very often – if at all.
- The food market today thrives on communicating authenticity, whether this is by telling a story on its retail packaging or on the menu in a restaurant. Pubs can tap into the storytelling vibe by signposting in the pub their personality and a sense of their entrepreneurship.
- Consumers expect a warm and friendly welcome when they go to the pub (52%); it is their highest priority. One in four enjoy being considered regulars being known by name, particularly those who go every week. However, punters also want a relaxed comfortable experience, so staff should not be too enthusiastic or intrusive.
- Over the past year, 18-24s have continued to migrate away from pubs and towards in-home drinking. Almost two thirds (63%) acknowledge that drinking at home is cheaper, but one in four believe it is less enjoyable.

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