

Winning ways

The Mystery Dining Company identifies areas where pubs can improve and reveals which region has the strongest performance

Food sales have helped to transform the fate of many pubs in the past decade. Some operations have chosen to raise the bar by the type of food they offer, while others have sought to perfect much-loved traditional pub fare. But the question remains: are pubs doing enough to impress consumers and win trade away from the rising number of branded chain restaurants dominating many corners of the country?

In a new series of monthly features focusing on customer engagement, we are going to be looking at ways for pubs to up their game and build customer loyalty.

Casual-dining comparison

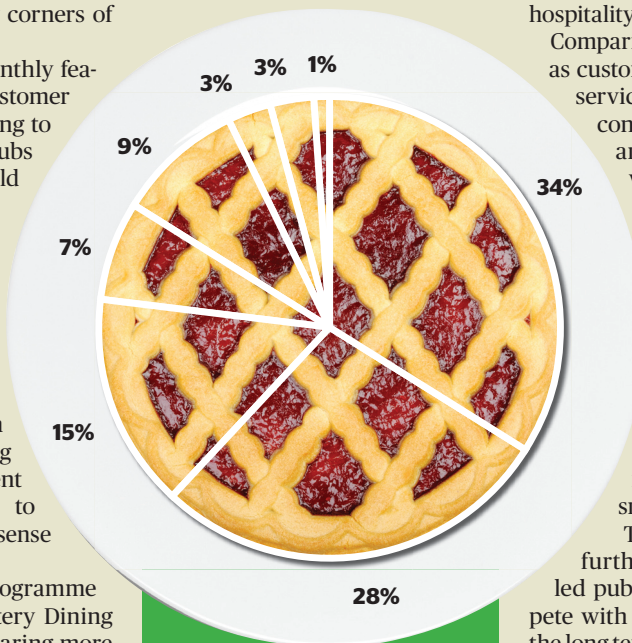
In this first instalment we assess how pubs are performing against restaurants in the informal dining sector, which prides itself on delivering an enjoyably consistent experience and seeks to appeal to the customer's sense of value for money.

In a benchmarking programme conducted by The Mystery Dining Company (TMDC) comparing more than 3,000 different outlets across



Pubs: offer good value for money

“There is opportunity for improvement if food-led pubs want to compete with restaurants



Great pubs

The elements that make a pub great are:
 Friendliness: 34%
 Quality of meal experience: 28%
 Clientele: 15%
 Décor: 7%
 Selection of beverages: 9%
 Food sourcing: 3%
 Entertainment/involvement in local community: 3%
 Other: 1%



Friendliness: warmth of service was rated as the most important aspect of the consumer experience

the United Kingdom, with pubs making up about a third of that figure, it seems that the sector is performing competitively against the rest of the hospitality industry.

Comparing nine key factors, such as customer welcome, warmth of service, staff knowledge and confidence, pace of service and whether or not they would recommend the venue, these benchmarking results indicate only minor variances in the pub sector's performance, both nationally and regionally.

In all but one category pubs performed only slightly under the national average, while regionally there were small differences.

There is opportunity for further improvement if food-led pubs want to seriously compete with restaurants and cafés in the long term. At present it is close to a level playing field when it comes to customer service.

Warmth of service, voted by consumers as the most important aspect of the customer experience, is currently on a par with the rest of the industry. Regionally there is some variance, with the east coming top with a warmth rating 5% higher than both national and regional industry benchmarks. It also performed strongly in the category assessing how welcome customers were made to feel on arrival – this is an important factor that can help to shape

expectations and assessment of an entire visit.

Meanwhile, pubs in the north, although achieving above-average results in the warmth and welcome categories, are being let down on the knowledge ranking, with their performance below both the regional and national averages, suggesting that with more careful training, the overall customer experience could be enhanced.

Attributes of the pub sector

It is surprising that pubs are not performing more strongly in the warmth and welcome categories. Surely these are the attributes the pub sector really needs to stake a claim in, encouraging new custom and enticing people away from the branded restaurant chains.

The London-based pubs underperformed across the benchmarking criteria when compared with the regional averages for other hospitality outlets, while pubs in the south-east exceeded regional industry performance on all counts.

Other data shared by TMDC, which visits more than 1,000 different hospitality outlets every month, indicates that waiting staff in pubs are 8% less likely than restaurants to upsell menu items when ordering, and are also less likely to check back on the table during the meal.

These missed opportunities reinforce the need for better processes and staff training.

The presence of a manager actively managing the team was also lower in pubs than in restaurants.