

# eat out

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July 2013 issue 100

SERVING THE RESTAURANT & PUB BUSINESS

Presenting our  
**100th ISSUE!**





# GEM

Restaurant, pub and hotel operators, faced with increasingly competitive trading times, often need an outside professional assessment of their business and advice. **Les Leonard** met the leaders of an established company that can provide all the answers

## of a business





**F**ounding director Sally Whelan and managing director Steve Pike of Bath-based HospitalityGEM – guest experience management – have developed a system to help operators improve their business.

And proof that this formula is working is shown by company figures growing by 25% to 30% each year over the past four years. But there's no sales force. It's just a case of clients hearing of their reputation through a network of contacts and recommendations.

"For every one of our clients, from individuals to major chains, we can carry out mystery visits and other aspects of operations to assess what is best for them and give them the best support. We compile around 1,500 to 2,000 reports each month," says Sally.

"Since we began working with clients we have seen a rise in the percentage of their performance, suggesting that we provide answers to aspects of the business of which they had not previously been aware. »



“ La Tasca, Geronimo, Wagamama and Prezzo receive our direct customer feedback which is **integrated into their management framework highlighting a restaurant's performance.** If they know what is measured they have a better chance of achieving improvements. ”

### Getting the results

*HospitalityGEM has worked closely with Peach Pub Company's senior management team to deliver a mystery guest programme that delivers tangible results for the business.*

*Lee Cash, one of the founders of the pub group, shares his view on why working with HospitalityGEM has helped Peach establish its niche in a competitive market...*

"Starting with one venue means you can generally be intuitive about what you do but as you begin to expand you need to work out a way to help bottle that intuitiveness to replicate it across a number of different pubs. Monitoring customer service is crucial.

Having systems in place is important and we see the work we do with HospitalityGEM as a management

and improvement tool. There are so many influencing factors that make a difference between good and great service. You can't ever have too much information about your business. Even a bad report is a good one because every single person in the team can learn from it. The feedback from the mystery guests – both those eating in our pub as well as those using our accommodation – reminds us to always look at things through the customers' eyes, in turn making us focus our attention on improving service on a day-to-day basis.

The biggest sin would be to have access to feedback and not act on it. We don't necessarily judge performance on one-off results – we want consistency across all the areas that we monitor and measure. We've found it really

useful to review the mystery visit results over a longer period of time to identify common trends and particularly recurring weaknesses across specific pubs and the whole group. For example, we discovered a proportionally high number of bar tabs were incorrectly added up amongst our mystery guests. We presumed this may also be the case across the board so we've implemented measures to tighten this up, making sure neither we nor our customers lose out.

Our staff are ambassadors for our brand, therefore sharing of the feedback we receive is important. Asking customers to highlight what we are doing, good or bad, or where they feel we could do even better, really works to our advantage. There's no finger pointing."



Steve Pike

“For independent operators it is difficult for them to get honest feedback from a friend or family member. We can see

how they perform against the industry while for those with a range of sites it may be difficult to keep a close reign on every one and we can provide an overall vision.”

The mother of three has an impressive background in the industry beginning by training as a chef at Westminster College; working in event catering; and involved with food and drink operations with Virgin Atlantic and M&S.

HospitalityGEM has around 2,500 ‘everyday’ people across the country to visit venues and

they are different from mystery shoppers who have a short tick-the-box mentality.

“Our people are not paid but get expenses and their meals, helping to make their visits more realistic. Their feedback is checked by our head office validators to ensure the report makes sense with no glaring errors before being released to the client within 24 hours.”

Steve, who began with the business five years ago and has spearheaded the software development, says: “Our visitors are awarded bonuses taking them from training mode upwards so the visits can be structured to a client’s needs, covering family diners to all other loyal supporters. La Tasca, Geronimo, Wagamama and Prezzo receive our direct customer feedback

which is integrated into their management framework highlighting a restaurant’s performance. If they know what is measured they have a better chance of achieving improvements.

“A lot of what we do is all about putting managers in control, making sure that the questions asked match their brand expectations and whether it fits in the market place and if not what needs to be done.

“Those who do their jobs well are reaping the rewards.”

Sally and Steve say it was difficult to give the price of company reports covering a range of different sized operations and their individual requirements, although there is a fixed monthly fee for direct feedback. ●

## Helping 1,000 businesses

HospitalityGEM uses performance measurement and customer engagement tools to help businesses to grow sales and build their reputation. It is the business-to-business trading brand for The Mystery Dining Company which has been working with leading hospitality businesses for a decade.

Today the company helps well over 1,000 restaurants, pubs and hotels to monitor their operations, listen to their customers and learn from the results, based in the UK, with a network spanning 20 countries. A professional 30-strong team based in Bath, works to help clients to grow sales and build their reputation. Every

day they talk about real experiences in the sector, collating a substantial database of measurements and industry insights.

HospitalityGEM says that it is immensely proud of the team that has been built up over the years and the dedication and flexibility shown to its business and those of its clients. For operators running a front-of-house hospitality business, they probably know that what gets measured gets done. Reports can be used to engage staff to deliver the right behaviours and standards consistently.

Everything is handled from scheduling, briefing and follow-up to reimbursement - leaving operators to



concentrate on running their business and learning from the reports. Businesses wanting to explore how the company can help, can call 01225 470999.