

THE THREE SPIRITS CHRISTMAS COMPETITION

WIN A FABULOUS COLLECTION OF THREE TOP QUALITY SPIRITS

These exclusive spirits are specially selected by Bestway and Batleys for their unique flavours and great value. They are distilled in the traditional way and offer a robust and distinctive drinking experience, great when drinking neat or when mixing. These spirits are competitively priced and offer an excellent alternative to the brands.

There are three collections* to be won.

TO ENTER Simply complete the following using no more than 50 words:

The Three Spirits will help my Christmas go with a swing because...

Please email your entry, including your full name, address and telephone number to editor@essentiallycatering.co.uk to arrive no later than Friday 18 November 2011. Prize to be claimed by 31 December 2011 or forfeited.

Please note: the editor's decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into. Full terms & conditions can be found at www.essentiallycatering.co.uk

* Collection comprises one 70cl bottle of: Imperial Stag Whisky, Imperial Czar Vodka and Knightsbridge Gin.



COMPETITION BE A WINNER WITH SAMMIC

The Sammic TR 250 Liquidiser saves precious time for chefs in a hurry. The all-in-one unit is ideal for preparing sauces and can cope with volumes up to 15 litres. What's more, this little number is easy to clean, meaning it can be used many times over without disruption.

Celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, Leicester-based Sammic provides catering equipment solutions covering food preparation, washing systems and snack bar equipment to industrial, commercial, leisure and hospitality markets throughout the UK.

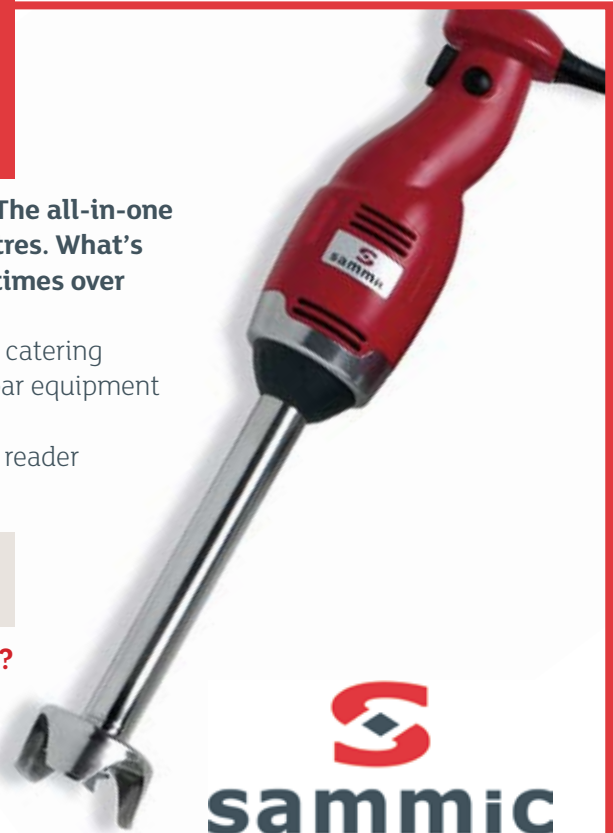
As part of its special birthday celebrations, the company is giving one lucky reader the chance to win a Sammic TR 250 liquidiser.

TO ENTER For a chance to win the handy Sammic liquidiser, simply answer the following question:

How many years have Sammic's products been available in the UK?

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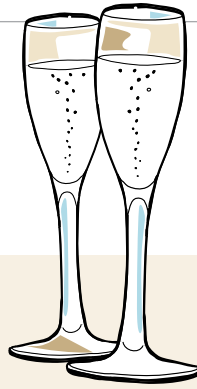
sammic

It's Christmas

Don't forget the customer

Slow service, overcrowding and inferior food quality are diners' biggest annoyances during the festive period, according to a survey conducted by The Mystery Dining Company on dining out at Christmas. While Christmas should be one of the busiest and most profitable times of year for most hospitality establishments, they forget the customer at their peril





In spite of the fact that belts continue to be tightened, Christmas is a time when people are more prepared to throw caution to the wind and choose to eat out. Of course the positive impact on the hospitality industry is that tills ring and profits are made, but some establishments may be tempted to squeeze too many pennies from this festive season with the downside that customers suffer and good will turns to bah humbug.

"Profitability should always be measured against the ability to give the customer an experience they will remember," advises Sally Whelan, director, The Mystery Dining Company (TMDC). "Shoehorning in extra tables so that you can fit in an additional 10 covers per sitting is dangerous if you don't have adequate space or capability: it's not just the extra guests whose experience will be affected; there will be a knock-on effect for other customers, as well as your staff in the kitchen and on the floor who will need to cope with the additional pressure."

Instead, Sally suggests, venues should look at where they can improve on spend per head while still delivering an experience worthy of the establishment's reputation.

Train to upsell

"The importance of staff training really comes into play in peak periods. If staff are encouraged to offer genuine recommendations at appropriate times they can generally improve the value of an order, especially at Christmas when people are a bit more inclined to indulge. More than half of the respondents in our 'Dining Out at Christmas' survey said they were prepared to spend more on beverages, both alcoholic and non-alcoholic, at this time of the year than any other. Likewise, three out of five consumers said that they would be more likely to order an aperitif or digestif as part of their meal out if it was offered."

Menu planning

When putting together a set menu, Sally stresses the need to consider customers' expectations. "If you are renowned for a particular dish or style of cooking then you should make sure a limited menu reflects this otherwise you're likely to disappoint loyal customers and fail to make the right impression on new ones. Also with the majority of consumers eating out on multiple occasions it is important for venues to deliver some variation in their menus – this will help ensure the experience stands out against customers' other meals out."

Other survey results

- **Six out of 10** said that they eat out between three and five times during the Christmas period
- **Nearly all (96%)** dine out as a group of five or more during December
- **31%** said limited menu choices were the most annoying element of eating out. Noise generated from other patrons, over-crowding and not getting value for money also featured highly
- **35%** sought out a venue based on its atmosphere while **31%** made a decision based on the menu on offer
- **43%** favoured traditional Christmas dishes while **37%** wanted to see a menu with lighter or more modern options, reinforcing the need for caterers to offer something to suit all tastes
- **56%** of participants said it was the kitchen's failure to cope with the volume of orders that generally resulted in a decline in performance, while **33%** suggested that it was issues arising from either having poorly trained or an inadequate number of staff.



Don't forget

Staff training

Obviously the best marketing comes from word of mouth and returning customers. Therefore make sure that all staff are trained – and regularly reminded – to give exceptional service.

Database building

With so many customers visiting your establishment throughout December, it's a great opportunity to build your customer database. You want to make sure that you get the email address of everyone booking – it could be under the pretext of emailing a receipt for a booking deposit. Other methods include competitions and customer comment cards.

Cloakroom

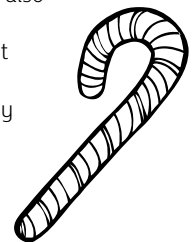
More people mean more big winter coats and bags, which can cause problems if left on the back of chairs or in walkways. If you don't have a cloakroom have you thought about putting more hooks on the walls?

Bounce Back vouchers

Bounce Back Cards are a great way of boosting trade throughout January. They are business card sized and enable the bearer to benefit from some kind of special offer throughout January. Make sure that the waiting staff give them out to all customers after the bill has been paid.

Preparation

Plan to be very busy so you can cope with anything. Make sure that you have enough stock, glassware and ice – if not, do you have suppliers who can deliver quickly? You'll also need a bigger float in the safe with lots of change. Try and get groups and large parties to pre-order their food – preferably by email with the names of who is having what so there is no confusion.



Tips provided by Captivate Hospitality, which specialises in the marketing, graphic design, PR and website design for the hospitality industry.
www.captivatehospitality.co.uk

Top tips from Restaurant of the Year

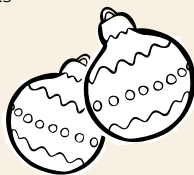
Lindsey Johns co-owns with her husband the award-winning 16-seater East Yorkshire restaurant, Artisan, which was named the *Which! Good Food Guide* 'Restaurant of the Year' 2011. Responsible for front of house, Lindsey shares her top tips on how to ensure your customers have the best time possible and leave wanting to return again and again.



Co-owners Richard and Lindsey Johns

Make it personal

It's important to make customers feel special when they enter your establishment so smile. If it's a return visit I try to look back to when they last visited; remembering names and small details from past conversations is a wonderful way to put customers at ease. If it's their first time dining with us, I try to make them feel as comfortable and at home as possible.



Be natural

Sometimes front-of-house staff can appear robotic in their welcoming and conversations throughout the meal; customers will pick up on this instantly. If you and your staff genuinely enjoy what you are doing, your good nature and wide, open smiles will ensure this problem does not arise.

See things from a customer's point of view

This is not the same as saying 'the customer is always right', but if you do have a difficult guest try to understand their problem and provide a solution.

Be confident and know what you're doing

Always make sure that you and your staff are equipped to answer customers' questions about the food and drink you offer. Customers need to have faith in you and confidence in your answers to their questions is a must.

Have an eye for detail

Look out for small things such as dropped cutlery, clothing stuck under chairs, creased napkins and so on. Sorting things out quietly and quickly will make your guests relax and trust you. If you're putting up Christmas decorations, always remember to ensure they don't look old and tired.

A sense of humour is a must

Being able to laugh with guests (and at yourself if things are going a little pear shaped) is an absolute must if you want to stay sane in the hospitality industry. I often find at Christmas that customers are really ready for the holiday and their spirit and humour is on top form – take advantage of this and give them a great atmosphere to remember.



www.artisanrestaurant.com