

Spring into action for the change in seasons

HospitalityGEM advises shaking off your winter blues and preparing for sunnier weather as spring approaches

The evenings are starting to draw out and at the end of the month the clocks will be moving forward an hour, giving us that all important bit of extra daylight at the end of the working day.

Post-Christmas austerity is forgotten by many, and it's a time for pubs to throw open their doors ready for the new season, welcoming tourists and locals alike. It's important to get off on the right foot, so make sure you and your staff have a spring in your step to cash in on spring/summer 2013 from the outset.

Step 1: Analyse your customer feedback

Customers leave feedback these days whether you want to hear it or not. Facebook, Twitter and, most importantly, TripAdvisor will be the places where both praise and grievances are aired. Be sure to have a thorough look through these sites, as well as your suggestions box, and act on any recurring themes where possible.

Customers will help to flag up areas of your menu, service, and venue as a whole that they either like or dislike, and the changing season is the perfect time to take action on their recommendations.



Customers like to have their opinions sought and it helps operators build rapport



TripAdvisor: where praise and grievances get an airing

HospitalityGEM tip: How do you collect feedback from your customers? Take time to consider how your customers could easily send feedback directly to you and how you will analyse that data when you receive it. If asking for feedback it is important that you can respond to customers and show how you are listening to them. HospitalityGEM helps its clients to engage with their customers, collect feedback and analyse the results with their GEMdirect scheme.

Step 2: Spring clean your venue

An obvious place to start in



Revitalise your entire offer

- Get the winter stodge off the menu until the autumn – light bites and salads are back.
- Summer is coming earlier every year – get that outside area ready.
- How about a staff refresher building day, with tasting sessions from the menu.
- Listen to your customers and feed what they say into your staff training.
- Make hay from the horsemeat scandal – source your meat locally and sustainably.

getting ready for spring and summer is the spring clean. We know it can be tricky to find time to do a thorough deep clean everywhere, but it won't go unnoticed by your customers.

HospitalityGEM tip: Brighten up your pub both inside and out – don't forget that in recent years the warm weather has come early, so, if you have one, make sure your outdoor area is tidy and fresh, ready for those early sun worshippers.

Step 3: Freshen up your menu

It's nearly time for those winter warmers to come off the menu as you look ahead to the new season. It's important that menus are regularly updated, so there's no better time than the spring to add a few new dishes – but ensure you don't lose your best sellers.

Winter stews and soups can be put aside until October, and instead you should look at summer soups such as rocket & goats' cheese, or carrot & coconut, and don't forget seasonal salads. Main meals such as lighter pasta dishes, fish options, plough-



Spring is in the air: and pubgoers' thoughts turn to beer gardens, salads and other lighter bites

mans and quiches will help give your menu that fresh feel for the spring.

HospitalityGEM tip: Some fresh fruit desserts, ice creams and sorbets will help to round off the menu.

Step 4: Polish your service

In the same way that it's good practice to give your venue a deep clean and revamp your menu, it's a good idea to brush up your service to ensure you're getting the most out of your staff. There's no point in promoting delicious new food items in your spotless venue if your team are under-performing.

HospitalityGEM tip: Use a staff tasting session as both a team-building activity and a focus group for your new menu. The kitchen can learn from the staff's objective views on the new dishes and changes can be made before anything is finalised. Staff can also talk more knowledgeably and enthusiastically about a menu when they've had the opportunity to experience it themselves.

Step 5: Brush up on your knowledge

Linked closely to the last point, and something more relevant now than ever, is the knowledge of your staff. The recent horsemeat scandal has led many people to question the origins of their food, with traceability being the buzz word. Make sure you, and your staff, know the origins of the products you are using. This will help to reassure customers that they will know exactly what is on their plate.

HospitalityGEM tip: Knowledge of local suppliers and appropriate accompanying wines will also help to give your customers faith in you and your team.



Put a seasonal slant onto your menu

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It's important to look at all areas of your business at this time of year, but the changing season gives you a great opportunity to refresh your menu and consider how it is presented to customers.

When considering your menu for the coming season it's important to take into account sales history, levels of customer complaints, consistency of ingredients and supply with each of the dishes on offer.

Get to know your customers and understand what is important to them, whether it's quality, value or seasonal dishes.

Remember, these factors may change at different times of day or even on a particular day of the week. Talk to them directly about what they'd like to see on the menu at this time of year – generally, customers really like to have their opinions sought and it helps operators to build rapport and encourage loyalty. Social media can be a useful tool to help you gather this feedback.

In addition to this, you could

ask your suppliers to show you new products and ideas – this can help to inspire you and your kitchen staff in keeping things fresh for the sunny season.

Finally, when updating a menu, remember to think about how you can increase spend-per-head by taking into account the different requirements of your guests. For example, if your pub attracts an after-work crowd you might benefit from adding sharing plates or a few small tapas-style dishes. Desserts can be another good area to target. The idea of sharing a pudding can be extremely attractive to diners who are reluctant to indulge or beginning to think about summer diets, so remember to consider this when writing your menus.

Unless you are pitching at the hardcore healthy eater or dedicated foodies who are passionate about seasonal produce, a well thought-out range of dishes on the menu will cover most needs.



Spread your offer: lay on a range of dishes to cover most needs

About us: HospitalityGEM is the new business-to-business trading name for The Mystery Dining Company. HospitalityGEM helps restaurant, pub, hotel and catering businesses to grow sales, build brand reputation, analyse performance and develop people through a range of Guest Experience Management services and software. www.hospitalitygem.com

