PROMOTIONAL OFFERS SET TO DRIVE IMPULSIVE EATING OUT OPPORTUNITIES THIS CHRISTMAS.
TMDC research reveals 7 out of 10 to use vouchers

71% of consumers say they intend to use discount vouchers when eating out this December a new survey from The Mystery Dining Company has revealed. The study of nearly 300 people also confirmed that the majority of consumers intended to eat out without a reservation on more than half of occasions during December.

6%said they were unlikely to make a reservation at all before eating out, while 58% said they, or someone in their group would make an advance reservation for up to half of their meals out during the festive season. Only 14% thought they would dine out with a reservation on more than three out of four occasions.

With around half of the respondents expecting to eat out in a restaurant between 3 and 5 times and at a pub 1 to 2 times [1] during December, and a third saying they were likely to eat at restaurants 6 or more times during the same period, operators who appeal to customers' notion of 'good value' will benefit from last minute trade according to Sally Whelan, director at The Mystery Dining Company.

"We know that it is perceived value for money that is a key behavioural driver when it comes to choosing where to eat and in terms of evaluating the overall experience so with so many customers saying they are unlikely to book ahead this may be something that operators hoping to attract walk ins may wish to consider. But, do so with caution.

"It's vitally important to remember that customers are increasingly savvy when it comes to assessing value for money. Making portion sizes smaller, putting fewer staff on and charging more for drinks to help improve margins will not go unnoticed. Cheap meals and an experience that offers value for money are two very different things and if your promotion is not executed well, a discount offer actually has the potential to undermine a restaurant's reputation with loyal customers and leave a damaging first impression with new ones, which will have a long term impact on the business."

Whelan also warns that while many operators will focus on their menu, their drinks offer can fall by the wayside during the Christmas period.

"Only 52% of the survey respondents said they would stick to their regular drink of choice throughout the Christmas season, while 8% said they would be actively looking to trade up to more premium beverages and 35% would be uncharacteristically and actively varying their drink selection during out of home social occasions. It's important that staff are properly briefed and are able to make suitable suggestions – offer a good value festive bubbly as an aperitif, if customers seem to be hesitating over wine lists, make sure staff are able to point out that the venue can also do a range of cocktails, mixer drinks and beers as well as non-alcoholic beverages. Customers will be seeking small indulgences and often the power of suggestion – such as "would you like to begin with a nice glass of Prosecco or a Gin and Tonic perhaps?"– can often be very powerful at this time of the year," The Mystery Dining Company director adds.

Operators should note that when it comes to customer service and food quality, this year, diners may be less than forgiving of poor service, with 96% saying, in both instances, that their expectations in December remain equally high as at other times in the year.

23% of consumers surveyed also said they were likely to choose independent restaurants and pubs when eating out, while 16% intended to stick exclusively to chain outlets. The remaining 61% said they were likely to visit both during December.

ENDS

Notes to Editor:

1. When asked how many times they would eat out in a restaurant between now and New Year
   - 1% said none
   - 19% said 1-2 times
   - 48% said 3 – 5 times
   - 24% said 6 – 10 times
   - 8% said more than 10 times

   When asked how many times they would eat out in a pub between now and New Year:
   - 4% said non
   - 42% said 1-2 times
   - 38 said 3-5 times
   - 12% said 6 – 10 times
   - 3% said more than 10 times