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Customers follow heart, not wallet when choosing hospitality venues

A study by Feed It Back and DataHawks has shown how customers have dramatically changed their reasons for visiting hospitality venues and are no longer influenced by price, but are, instead, seeking out places they know and trust.

On Wednesday 13 January 2020, Feed It Back and DataHawks presented customer data to operators in an exclusive webinar to help drive hospitality's recovery in 2021. The findings revealed not just how price was no longer a consideration when going out, but additionally how choices had become intrinsically linked to trust and former good experiences.

Only 0.1% of people chose their Christmas celebration venue based on price in December 2020, showing that customers' primary reasons for deciding on places to visit are not being shaped by their finances.

Over a third (33.4%) of customers revealed that loyalty from previous visits was the core reason they selected venues, giving hope to pubs, bars and restaurants that have an established relationship between their brand and their customer base.

Customer responses suggest a boost in a new post-experiential trend in hospitality where, rather than seek out exciting new experiential venues, customers are drawn towards their favourite places. Compared to data from the same time last year, customers went from 19% looking for something different to just 0.7%, showing that customers want to visit hospitality venues that they trust and know well as opposed to seeking out the quirky, zany or different.

Location also became important to customers (20.2%) as all hospitality visits, amidst the pandemic, needed to be within close distance to people's homes, rather than workplaces during a time when working-from-home-culture had already begun to shake up people's usual daily schedules.

Most customers (62.1%) sought out venues offering a main menu with festive specials compared to venues only offering a standard main menu (31.9%). Only 6% of customers wanted a singular festive menu showing that, overwhelmingly, the majority of customers were expecting operators to have their main menu available, which they had come to love and cherish, with a few festive additions.



Although customers would like to see Covid-measures in place, the data shows that is not the driving force behind why they choose a venue. In fact, it is still gastronomy, atmosphere and service that will keep people coming back. 28% of customers will be looking out for good quality food and 18% believe that atmosphere will be a crucial factor when deciding where to go, followed closely by good service (17%). Having strong Covid-safety measures being in place (11%) follows these other elements, but does not usurp them in importance in the mind of the customer.

Interest in wellbeing trends such as vegan options (2%), good vegetarian options (4%), healthy menu choices (4%) and low and no alcoholic drinks ranges (2%) has dwindled and become less important of late, while two in 25 customers (8%) are still on the look-out for offers and promotions it has not been at the forefront of people's minds when going out..

The basics are what matter the most - good quality food and good quality service are still the most important factors. The data reveals that brand operators would do well to reduce menu adaptations and re-invest into atmosphere-enhancing touches and service efficiency boosting technology in venues to generate better rates of sale.

Victoria Searl, Founder, DataHawks advised: "Only 8% of people mentioned pricing or promos so invest the spend you would have spent on discounts, offers and early bird specials into targeting and retargeting your previously happy customers. By targeting them hard with Facebook, Instagram and Google adwords campaigns, not only will you see strong conversion but you'll be able to prove a measurable ROI. Also, start to think about investing in order-at-table technology - it can drive spend per head because people who are left to their own devices like to press buttons, but it also captures very real proof-of-presence data - enabling you to identify your most valuable customers."

Carlo Platia, CEO, Feed It Back added: "Christmas 2020 saw the hospitality industry rise to meet each challenge it faced. Customer loyalty towards favourite venues has been paramount to survival, but it is also beginning to shape a new customer trend for seeking out post-experiential venues - places where they return time and time again because they have had good experiences. Food quality, service and atmosphere were the biggest things that customers are looking for from venues in 2021. Covid-measures were not the be all and end all though and people clearly showed that what they truly want is an experience that they cannot get in at home and from the operators they know and trust."

"It is also evident that menu additions, rather than adaptations would see better Rol during special occasions and customers are seeking the things they miss - being made to feel special. Food quality was the number one complaint and had increased 2% YoY,



showing customer expectations have definitely been raised after so much ordering in. In truth, people are desperately craving a better experience from dining out.”

“Looking beyond Covid-related concerns there are opportunities to sell more by being attentive. The word ‘more’ kept cropping up in our responses and it shows that customers want venue owners, food and drink servers and all staff in general to be more attentive to their needs. The word ‘table’ also became prevalent showing that when dining out people are beginning to feel that their table and the space they were hosted in is extremely central to the experience.”

“2020 was a year of survival within the hospitality industry, but 2021 will be the year where the sector paid much closer attention to the customer in order to attain repeat business.”

See a recording of the live insights presentation here: <https://feeditback.com/#get-insights>

Feed It Back

Feed It Back is the customer experience dashboard for hospitality operators. It will gather the data to tell you how customers are feeling about your business and shows how you’re performing across your estate, by region, by venue, in absolute detail. You can see what customers love and exactly where they think you can improve to keep them coming – so they recommend you to others. Feed It Back’s experts become part of your team, highlighting trends, making sure you don’t miss subtle details and sharing insights to help you build your reputation.

It currently boasts a range of clients including: Loungers, Boston Tea Party, Tenpin, Marston’s, Friday’s and Paul UK, to name a few.

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