

Boozhooz

Just what are your customers saying about you, *anyway*?

Learning about the all-important “word of mouth”.

BY IAN FOSTER, REGIONAL VICE-PRESIDENT

We all want to think that people are saying nice things about our establishment.

Positive word-of-mouth recommendations are quite obviously a requirement for long-term success in this business. But how can you find out what people are saying about your restaurant or bar?

Dissatisfied guests rarely share their feelings, even when asked how they enjoyed their visit – but they are all too likely to tell all their friends about a bad experience. Unfortunately, comment cards only offer a very small and unrepresentative sample.

There are a couple of very effective ways to find out what your customers are saying about your establishment: by searching out restaurant/bar blogs and by employing Mystery Shoppers.

THE POWER OF BLOGGERS

There is a lot of hype about blogs. Internet web-logs (blogs) are simply on-line journals usually written by ordinary people about topics of interest to them. There are now millions of them and they are widely read. Over 30% of Americans say that they read blogs regularly.

For a restaurateur, hotel or bar

owner, searching out blogs that mention your establishment can give you a wealth of unbiased information. And perhaps more important, these blogs are written by passionate opinion leaders who are not just sharing their thoughts but, due to their growing readership, are influencing and shaping word-of-mouth about your establishment. Thus, it is critical to know what they are writing and what the “word on the street” is about your business.

Here is a pretty good example of the kind of invaluable (and scary) “reviews” that are all over the internet – this one about a restaurant in San Diego (from www.chowhound.com): “Now, on to the ‘service’. After we were seated we waited quite a while before someone greeted our table ...the martini list, which we had to request, arrived crusted with old food ... there was zero description of the menu or recommendations from our server, not what I expect from a restaurant that considers itself upscale... ..our drinks ran out and we were only asked if we wanted anything further 5 minutes after the fact ... we were asked if we would like an espresso only after we were almost completely finished with



our desserts. ...it’s enough to make me not want to go back, despite the fact that the food was fabulous!”

How can you find and use this information?

Start by searching for your establishment on the most influential and important sources like www.zagat.com, chowhound.com, and tripadvisor.com.

Search out local websites that offer reviews and posts on the hospitality industry. Almost every city has at least one, like www.sfsurvey.com in San Francisco, nippers.com in Santa Barbara and louisvillehotbytes.com in Louisville.

Search for your establishment in the “blogosphere” as well. In San Diego, for example, there are at least a

(CONTINUES NEXT PAGE)

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dozen bloggers who share their passionate opinions about local restaurants. The best way to see if you are being reviewed is to search using a blog search engine like www.blogsearchengine.com, technorati.com or Google's Blog Search. When searching, make sure you type the name of your establishment in quotation marks. If it is a very generic name [ie: “Jimbos”], add the word restaurant or the name of your city to your search.

If you find a negative review, be careful how you respond. Most blogs allow an opportunity for a comment, explanation or rebuttal but avoid the

temptation to post a phony review where you do not identify yourself. Chowhound's policy explains it best:

“Those with a relationship to a given restaurant must disclose their affiliation each time they discuss their business (or its competitors). Identifying yourself as an insider will actually garner you MORE serious attention; we LOVE straight, non-hypey talk from restaurateurs and chefs. All we ask is that you talk to us like a civilian; do not consider us a marketing/publicizing opportunity for your business. But restaurateurs who post phony testimonials – or recruit skills to do same – will be uncovered and publicly embarrassed. Any subsequent endorsements of the restaurant will be considered suspicious and deleted. We fight hard to preserve the site's reputation for integrity and the trustworthiness of opinions contained herein.”

USING A MYSTERY SHOPPER

A “mystery shopper” is a third-party evaluator who visits your business for the purpose of analyzing customer service, product quality and store presentation. The ultimate goal is to receive an unbiased evaluation of your operation's quality, service, cleanliness, efficiency and potential profitability.

For a fee of about \$200, a mystery shopper will visit your establishment (without identifying themselves to your staff), and then complete a written report to identify strengths and challenges they observed. Some of the reports are form-based with the client determining the criteria.

A mystery shopper can give you information about obvious things, such as cleanliness, menu knowledge, sales skills and attention to customer service. Many clients want to monitor programs that have been established to ensure consistency in operations. However, it is often the unexpected discoveries that are most valuable. Orilio & Associates (www.OrilioGaming.com), one of the most respected mystery shopping companies, told us about a few things they were able to help their customers discover:

- 1) A server was asked about a raspberry cake dessert. She responded, “I don't like it and I always tell people not to get it.” She wouldn't even describe it to the Shoppers.
- 2) A Shopper asked to substitute the potatoes from another dish for the rice which accompanied his meal. The server said no. She elaborated, “If the chef were here he'd do it, but he's gone for the night and the cooks won't substitute.”
- 3) The Shoppers parked near the back of the building and noticed the back door was open. Several uniformed staff were standing outside talking and smoking. It took six minutes for the server to greet the table. By way of apology for the tardy greeting, he said, “I had a large party in the back.” In fact, he was one of the smokers they had observed.
- 4) Toward the end of the evening, when the restaurant was about cleared, staff congregated around one of the terminals at the side of the restaurant. Some were folding napkins, some were eating, and some were closing out paperwork. All of them, including the manager, were chatting loudly (clearly audible in the dining room): where to meet after work, table

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23 left a lousy tip, did you see the (body) on table 37, my boyfriend is a jerk, etc.

5) Similar situation to #3 [another location]. This time the Manager opened a couple of bottles of wine which the staff drank while closing. Note – this was not a wine-tasting – they were drinking full glasses of wine, including refills. Sometimes it is just as important to report on the management as on the staff.

6) A Hostess having a fight with her boyfriend – in the lobby – as guests were exiting the restaurant.

7) Soufflés are the featured dessert at this upscale location. The Shoppers were never prompted to pre-order. When the dessert menus were deliv-

ered, they asked for a soufflé. The server responded, “You should have ordered it when you ordered your meal. The cooks want to go home. They won’t make it for you now.” [The restaurant was still open for another 30 minutes].

8) The staff were using the guest restrooms while guests are also using them. Some guests observed the staff not washing their hands, not picking up/policing trash and possible drug use [sounds].

In conclusion, people are inclined to listen to what their friends have to say and often heed their advice; so it’s in your best interest to find out what your customers are saying about your establishment, then taking steps to

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address their issues. Remember: retaining customers is much more cost-effective than acquiring new ones, and word of mouth works both ways. **BN**

CORNELL STUDY FINDS OVER-POURING TO BE HIGHER IN ROCKS TUMBLERS

An interesting study published in the *British Medical Journal* with implications for our industry found that bartenders tend to over-pour more heavily into short, wide glasses than into tall, slender ones.

95 Philadelphia bartenders were asked to pour a variety of drinks into either short, wide tumblers or tall, slender glasses. Despite an average of 6.3 years of experience, bartenders poured 20.5% more into the “rocks-style” tumblers than the tall cocktail glasses. Interestingly, when questioned the bartenders believed that they had actually poured less into the short tumblers.

The tendency to over-pour into short tumblers did not improve even when the bartenders were allowed to pour ten practice shots before being tested.

Researchers attributed the results to a widespread optical illusion. Studies have shown that people generally think tall glasses hold more liquid than wide ones of the same volume. In addition, people almost always focus on

the height the liquid reaches in the glass and do not adequately compensate for the increased volume of wider glassware like tumblers, martini glasses, etc.

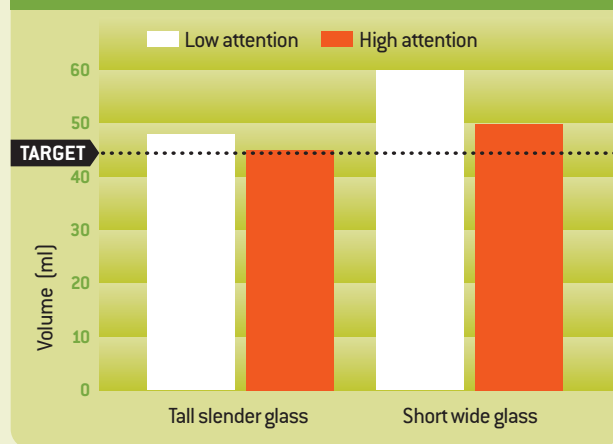
The study confirms 20 years of Bevinco audit data showing that the average bar is missing 15%-28% due to over-pouring and theft. There are serious financial implications to over-pouring. Most over-pouring results in a decrease in sales [i.e.: the loss is at retail]. Although this seems counter-intuitive, it actually makes sense. The reason is that most customers are going to consume drinks until they reach a “comfort level.” For example, many customers who have to drive home from a bar know that when they feel the first “buzz” from alcohol, they should stop

ordering drinks. If that buzz comes after two over-poured drinks rather than three correctly portioned ones, the bar misses out on that third drink’s sale. Thus the cost to the bar owner is not merely the extra alcohol poured but also the full retail value of the lost drink sale [see *Booz Naooz* #14]. **BN**

The study is available from BMJ at <http://bmj.bmjournals.com/cgi/content/full/331/7531/1512?ehom>

Ian Foster is a Bevinco Regional Vice-President.

BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL POURING STUDY



INSIDE:

WHAT DO THEY REALLY THINK?

How you can find out what's being said about your establishment.

BEVINCO'S IAN FOSTER explores two useful ways to get at the invaluable, unvarnished truth.

Drinks made with artificial sweeteners get you drunker.

An Australian study suggests that alcohol is more potent when mixed with artificial sweeteners.

The Royal Adelaide Hospital tested eight men after they had consumed vodka mixed with a sugar-based sweetener containing 478 calories and again after the same drink prepared with a diet mixer containing 225 calories.

The results showed a higher blood alcohol level with the diet drink than with the regular drink. The blood alcohol concentration was also higher with the artificial sweetener than with the sugar-sweetened drink.

The Australian investigators attributed the effect to the fact that artificial



sweeteners cause the stomach to empty 37% more quickly than drinks containing sugar.

There could also be legal implications for those driving home, as well, the study noted. **BN**

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