

Packing them in

YOUR SHINY NEW BAR IS READY, NOW ALL YOU NEED ARE CUSTOMERS...

Have you heard the one about the bouncer and the building site? Legend has it that during the six-week building works on a new bar in Paris, the imaginative owner blacked out the windows, played music so loud it could be heard from the street and hired a doorman to stand outside with a clipboard. Every night.

Anyone who tried to get in was told that the bar was so busy it was one out, one in, so they could either queue up or they could try again another night.

No one could get in (literally), so everyone wanted to get in. Soon people were queuing round the block and the nightlife grapevine went wild. Gossip columnists, whose job it is to go to these kinds of places, started making up stories about the wild parties and crazy antics that were going on inside – which meant more people joining the queue and a huddle of paparazzi camping outside the door.

When the bar was finally ready to open it was packed every night. Every Parisian hipster came along and the gossip columnists' tales became self-fulfilling prophecies: celebrities hungry for



Marketing your bar intelligently should ensure you fill it up with the right kind of people

titillating tabloid exposure came and misbehaved spectacularly: Jodie Marsh, Girls Aloud, the entire female cast of *EastEnders* and Prince Harry dressed as a Nazi. A tabloid editor's dream come true, and a very happy bar owner.

We made that last bit up, except of course for the happy bar owner, who was laughing all the way to the bank. And the rest of it is probably just bar industry folklore. But we love the story and hope that some of it really happened. Imagine: no expensive PR contracts, no time-consuming marketing campaigns; you end up with the hottest bar on the planet, and all for the price of a bouncer and a clipboard.

But back to the real world, where if you tried something similar your neighbours would complain about the loud music and the council would shut you down

before you even opened. So what is the best way to get people in through the doors of your shiny new bar?

We asked Jo Davies, London's leading bar, pub, club and restaurant marketing expert, to explain the basic principles. Her company, Drink, works on all aspects of marketing and branding, ranging from high-profile launches to roll-out plans and footfall-driving campaigns for clients such as Ignite Group, Paramount Restaurants and Novus Leisure.

Here are Jo's Seven Steps to Success:

1. KNOW YOUR COMPETITORS

Where are they? What are their prices? What products do they sell? Who are their customers? What threat do they pose to you? What can you learn from them? Never underestimate the power of local knowledge. Every GM should aim



Will Beckett and Huw Goff

OPEN YOUR BAR

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to conduct a review of their competitors at least three times a year.

2. KNOW YOUR TARGET MARKET

Define your ideal customer – it is incredibly beneficial. You don't want to be all things to all people, or you will end up being great at nothing. Ensure everything you do is checked against your ideal customer's profile: would they drink this product, pay this price, attend this night?

3. GET THE OFFER RIGHT

There is no point spending money on marketing if what you're marketing isn't right. You wouldn't sell a car if it had a flat tyre, so if you know the menu needs a rethink or if you don't think the service standards are good enough yet, hold off. You only have one chance to impress new customers. A proper mystery customer survey, carried out by an appropriate member of your target market, is a great way to check how good you really are.

4. KNOW YOUR USP

That's sales-speak for knowing what makes you unique. Look at the Underdog sites: Hawkmoor has its amazing steaks and carefully crafted old-school cocktails; Green & Red has an awe-inspiring range

of top-quality tequila and bartenders who know what to do with them; the Marquess Tavern is famous for its Sunday roasts and real ale; and the Redchurch has an atmosphere that makes everyone want to dance and be merry. You will have more than one USP but keep it down to three – that way you will keep your messages clear.

5. CREATE A HIT LIST

This isn't about murdering your competitors but knowing your area. Draw up a list of the local businesses that are likely to have high numbers of your ideal customers – think about gyms, estate agents, hairdressers and retailers who can help drive footfall to your bar. Consider empowering one member of staff to build an ongoing relationship with a particular business. This is a long-term strategy, but it will work.

6. BUILD A DATABASE

This is a must, whatever type of bar, pub, club or restaurant you run. Collecting customers' details gives you a strong and loyal base to speak to and to drive back into your bar. A manager of a pub in Wimbledon we worked with could turn around a slow week with an email inviting customers to an impromptu BBQ



One operator found that sending an email inviting customers to an impromptu barbecue boosted his takings by £5k

on a Friday night. It would add £5K to his bottom line. There are many quirky ways to collect data, the most effective being incentivising staff to collect a set number per week and keeping it fun.

7. KEEP IT SIMPLE

Now you have a brand, you know your competitors and customers and what you do well. The next step is to work on no more than three key areas of the business you want to push and consistently communicate this to existing and potential customers. How? Well, we can't tell you everything or we'd be out of a job! But feel free to get in touch to find out more: www.drink-marketing.com ■



Know your USP: Green & Red trades on its range of quality tequila



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