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Case Study: Sports Bar

Challenge:

- Rapid expansion prevented timely visits to new locations to check on brand consistency. Another set of eyes was needed.

Solution:

- Implement a monthly mystery shopping program.

Results:

- Decreased time in acting on initiatives.
- Positive change in management mindset.
- Increased sales of higher profit items.
- Increased savings in food sourcing.

Keeping their Eye on the Prize: A Sports Bar's Story of Mystery Shopping Success

Background

When the first location opened in Maryland in 1976, the owners' vision was to be the community hangout that serves great food and drinks in a fun, casual atmosphere built on the excitement and unity of sports. By 1998 they had 5 locations. The owners started franchising in 2002, building to 30+ locations over the next eight years. In 2010 Entrepreneur Magazine recognized them as the fastest growing sports bar franchise. Seven years later there are 46 locations in eight states.

Challenge

Rapid expansion into seven new states and markets left limited corporate human resources. District Managers and Field Trainers were unable to get to locations as quickly or frequently as needed. Service, staffing, and inventory issues could not be identified and resolved in a timely manner.

Franchise owners and corporate restaurant managers would report that all was going well. But senior management knew local management was only seeing what went on while they were there, not what was happening when they were not present.

It was imperative to know if the brand and customer experience were consistent at all locations, at all times. They needed another set of eyes.

Solution

Mystery shopping was identified as a method to gain more frequent visibility to their sports bars. And to obtain the customers' perspective of their business model and service. Management wanted to understand not only if their procedures were being followed, but also how their practices made their customers feel.

The company expected mystery shoppers to observe and report on many factors. Observations including the demeanor of employees, timing, presentation, cleanliness and overall interaction with staff, food, and physical location. They wanted mystery shoppers who understood the nuances of a restaurant/sports bar experience.

Market Viewpoint was chosen because of their experience in the food services and entertainment industries and the focused training provided to their mystery shoppers for specific assignments. Market Viewpoint's familiarity with the Maryland market and proximity to the states in which the company was expanding were another plus.

Implementation

The mystery shopping program was designed to be administered and managed by corporate, but with complete buy-in and financial responsibility at the franchise and store management level.

Market Viewpoint survey specialists and the sports bar company's senior managers designed the reporting instrument. Together they identified the areas of primary importance to maximize actions that could be taken from the information obtained from each visit. Then a team of the restaurant's managers and franchise owners were consulted for their input.

Involving the managers who would be impacted by the results of the mystery shops allowed for complete disclosure and open forum of discussion about the program. Managers at the location level understood the purpose of the program was to provide them with information to make their staff and sports bars better – not to find fault.

Presented as a tool designed for the benefit of management and employees, staff were told mystery shopping was a way to obtain unbiased views that could provide a clear view of customer expectations.

Mystery shopping provided everyone with the ability to keep their eye on the ball...

Results

Monthly scheduled mystery shops provided corporate management with a way to keep ahead of the game as they wanted.



Most important, according to management, is the two to three weeks gained on making changes to initiatives. “The efficient turnaround of mystery shopping reports from Market Viewpoint allows us to quickly identify problems, resolve them in a timely manner, and continue to provide our customers with the service and experience they have come to expect of our sports bars.”



Early on there were excuses from location managers and staff as to why things happened the way they did when the mystery shopper was present.

The pushback decreased quickly as local managers came to recognize the value of the monthly feedback. Consistent and timely reports helped to identify high and low performers. The data showed where training was needed, and which systems could be tweaked. Staff bought in when they were recognized for positive activity and delivery of excellent service.

Overall there was a positive change in management and staff mindset.



Entering the fifth year of the program, the reporting form has become a fluid source of data gathering for the organization. Modifications have been made based on industry changes, employee, management and mystery shopper feedback.

Market Viewpoint’s quick response and flexibility in making changes to the reporting form have helped this organization to capitalize on changing consumer preferences and seasonal adaptations to their menu.

The current version of the reporting instrument allows for changes from month to month on the presentation of specific beers, appetizers, and specials. These same offerings are made at all 46 locations by every waitstaff member.

Ability to monitor consumer reaction to what is offered has allowed corporate management to instruct locations to suggest higher profit items. There is a direct correlation to suggested items and increased sales of these items.

This has also allowed operations and kitchen managers to be better prepared each month. Having knowledge of which items will be suggested allows them to order food and beverage accordingly – decreasing waste and increasing savings in food sourcing.

“Market Viewpoint’s staff are intuitive and responsive. They pick up on exactly what the firm is looking for. They make our job so much easier.”