

# Case study



**sodexo**  
and Ascot Racecourse

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Gary England, Director of Ascot Hospitality



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## Clients - Sodexo and Ascot Racecourse

Sodexo is a world leader in food and facilities management services. Established in 1968 as a small family business, it is now a global market leader employing 43,000 people in the UK and Ireland, across more than 2,000 client locations.

Ascot Racecourse dates back to 1711 when Queen Anne rode out from Windsor Castle and declared that it was a perfect place for her horses to run full stretch. It is now visited by over 500,000 racegoers a year and is home to the world famous Royal Ascot week, Europe's best attended race meeting.



## Challenges

- Royal Ascot is a week long event attended by 300,000 people. The TMDC team was asked to devise and implement an all encompassing quality benchmarking scheme to cover the whole Royal Ascot 'experience'
- In order for the feedback to be realistic views of typical racegoers, rather than seasoned auditors, were required
  - It would require getting feedback on everything from ease of parking and placing a bet, to buying food and beverages
- With a high proportion of the total revenue for Ascot Racecourse dependent on a successful Royal Ascot event, providing the client with 'live' feedback was vital. This meant any problems could be highlighted instantly, recommendations passed to the client team on the ground, and changes implemented the same or next day

## Solution

Assessing performance and auditing elements such as food safety is a familiar concept to Sodexo and Ascot Racecourse, however, with so much resting on a successful Royal Ascot week it was decided to take on a new approach, by assessing the 2010 event from the customers' perspective. The Mystery Dining Company (TMDC) and its team of assessors were able to partner up with the contractor and the venue to gain comprehensive insight on the event management.

As Gary England, Director of Ascot Hospitality explains, customer expectations for Royal Ascot week are very high.

*"The perception is that the week is far more than a race meeting, by many it is deemed as the definitive social event of the British summer calendar, and as such we have one chance to make the right impression. It is vital that customers have the best experience possible which is why we need to be aware of any areas that are not up to standard straight away and make changes instantly, and not wait for next year's event. If a customer has a bad experience they may not give us a second chance the following year."*

With over 300,000 visitors during the week, consuming 360,000 bottles of champagne and beer, four tonnes of beef, salmon and lobster and 75,000 rounds of sandwiches a day across a multitude of food outlets, assessing the customer service levels throughout Royal Ascot week represented a huge challenge for the racecourse, Sodexo and TMDC.



Working closely with Ascot Hospitality to create comprehensive assessment criteria and build a team of mystery assessors who understood the expectations linked with a day out at Royal Ascot, TMDC developed a reporting system to provide 'live' feedback and recommendations.

Each day a team of assessors reflecting the broad spectrum of visitor groups attending the event - from those in morning suits in the Royal Enclosure to the casual visitor in the more informal Silver Ring - were briefed by on-site managers. The assessors were then sent to different parts of the racecourse to assess a wide range of elements; from car parking to placing a bet, to using seated restaurants or mobile food outlets.



Each assessor, who is trained to observe the way customer service is delivered, would undertake an assignment on-site and immediately feed the results back to the TMDC head office in Bath who would prepare and verify the report. These were then uploaded on to TMDC's bespoke reporting system which could be accessed online by the Sodexo and Ascot Hospitality team 24 hours a day.

In instances where customers reported a negative, for example an out of stock situation, or inferior levels of service or quality of product, TMDC was able to alert the operating teams to any important issues straight away so that changes could be made instantly to rectify the situation. These sites could then be re-visited by mystery assessors to ensure that changes had been implemented and standards maintained.

## Results

- The all-important 'Welcome' greeting improved 10% on last year
- The appearance and grooming of staff saw a dramatic improvement (up 26%) during the event following feedback
- There was a 23% improvement in ratings for payment, dealing with the transaction and the 'goodbye'
- 2010 was a record year for cash sales on a single day at Royal Ascot

*"Seeing customer service visibly improve as a result of the mystery assessors' observations - often in a matter of hours - is testament to the Ascot team's flexibility and determination to make Royal Ascot a truly exceptional and memorable day out for each and every visitor."*

Sally Whelan, Director, Mystery Dining Company

**Gary England, Director of Ascot Hospitality says;**

*"At the end of each day we would have a de-briefing session with the TMDC team on site at Ascot. In some cases we were able to implement changes instantly, at other times we used the findings to re-focus or train our staff at the start of the following day. The on-site live reporting enabled us to continually adapt and improve our operation throughout the week ensuring all visitors to Royal Ascot week received the best possible service."*

He continues: *"Ascot is an instantly recognisable brand and one that customers associate with a quality experience. To have the reassurance that the TMDC team was monitoring everything from a customers' perspective was a huge support for myself and all our staff. We were able to constantly respond to issues on the racecourse and deliver the best possible day out for a customer - and this is the lifeblood of any successful business."*



**Sally Whelan, director for The Mystery Dining Company says;** *"With the speed of gathering, analysing and reporting information from multiple on-site locations being critical to this assignment, we carefully reviewed and tailored our own reporting methods to develop a live-feed that would provide information in a time-sensitive manner, ensuring that, where possible, changes to customer service could be immediately implemented."*

*Royal Ascot week was a fantastic project for us, with the on-site and off-site TMDC teams pulling together to deliver fast and relevant feedback for the venue.*

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