

Case study



wagamama[®]

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Jez Sykes, wagamama operations manager



Case study

Client - wagamama

Established more than 15 years ago, wagamama has built an international restaurant chain which prides itself on high quality, healthy Asian-style food served in a vibrant and informal setting. Consistency and reliability have played a fundamental role in making the wagamama brand remarkably successful in the UK and exportable across the world. It currently operates 65 sites in the UK and more than 35 restaurants internationally.



Challenges

- Achieving a consistent brand experience across a diverse range of settings, locations and cultural expectations
- Executing outstanding customer service in terms of food quality, speed of service and staff interaction
- Creating a vibrant eating environment that customers wish to return to time and time again
- Upholding staff morale while improving customer experience
- Evolving service delivery to meet the needs of a changing client-base

Solution

Assessing performance was already established practice at wagamama when The Mystery Dining Company (TMDC) was brought in to support the fast growing restaurant chain in 2004.

wagamama judged and scored its own performance on criteria such as greetings, prompt order-taking and upselling through a points based system. However, the management team wanted to raise performance another level.

"Sometimes it's the things you don't want to hear that are the most beneficial to a business. The Mystery Dining Company and their team don't hold back - and generally they are spot on with their observations."

Jez Sykes

As dedicated hospitality sector specialists, TMDC was able to offer a unique perspective and valuable insight on how wagamama's aspirations could be achieved. Using a team of trusted mystery diners, TMDC was able to identify the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for the wagamama brand as it continued to grow.

Long term commercial value

With strong assessment criteria already in place, TMDC worked closely with the wagamama operational team to devise an effective evaluation and reporting method. Five years on, this same fundamental approach continues to deliver tangible commercial benefits.

Benefits

- Gain an accurate picture of the customer experience
- Boost standards by learning from mistakes
- Enhance brand reputation
- Motivate and reward staff



Results

A more accurate picture of the customer experience

wagamama, like many commercial operations, was used to meeting practical targets and judging its own performance based on these. TMDC introduced a Goodwill Rating into the mystery diner assessment which takes into account some of the more subtle and subjective elements of service that make a rounded, pleasurable dining experience - one that the customer will return for.

"Mystery visits keep us realistic in our assessments and remind us what the customer wants. TMDC help us to recognise the areas of our business most affected by this and work with us to refine what we do. Achieving a positive, memorable experience is essential for any business that wants to grow."

Jez Sykes

Boost standards by learning from mistakes

TMDC's mystery diners are trained to look at the big picture as well as the finer details on their visits. As well as knowing what makes an experience great, they look at what can be done better at every level, from the warmth of the greeting, to the attentiveness of staff, through to the state of the toilets. As a hospitality sector specialist, TMDC also offers market and competitor insights.

"Part of investing in a professional service like mystery dining is being prepared to accept mistakes and learn from a third party's observations. This feedback enables us to understand what every other customer passing through our doors experiences. TMDC's reports are held in high esteem and our managers are extremely quick to evaluate their mystery dining results and, most importantly, act upon them." Jez Sykes

Enhance brand reputation

Reacting quickly to operational issues is critical to protecting brand reputation. TMDC supplies the mystery diner's report within 24 hours of the site visit. A text message with the report score is sent to the operations manager as soon as the report is processed.

"Receiving information about a problem almost immediately enables us to address the issue - often even before the next service. The reassurance offered by having someone else looking out for you is enormous. We don't lose time sorting out issues and this helps to enhance both the restaurant's service and the brand's reputation." Jez Sykes

Motivate and reward staff

wagamama's restaurants are given access to their results at the end of each four week period via the company's intranet (although the operations team is able to review them earlier). The scores and improvements achieved by each restaurant are shared company-wide.



"A third party giving a comprehensive and independent view of the company forces us to look inwards first, and this has proven to be a competitive advantage time and time again."

Jez Sykes

"Rivalry between the different restaurants does tend to help motivate our teams, but the mystery visits are more than that; they also allow us to acknowledge outstanding performance from our own staff. As such mystery dining is integrated in our own training and bonus structures. The mystery diner visit helps our staff strive to offer a consistent, informal yet attentive style of service to every wagamama customer."

Jez Sykes



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