

# Case study



FOOD & FUEL

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Jo Cumming, CEO, Food & Fuel



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## Client - Food & Fuel

Food & Fuel operates seven gastro pubs and three café/bars in and around the London area. The boutique group was founded on the principle that it would deliver 'true hospitality'; fresh, seasonal and delicious food and excellent wines, beers and ales, informed and efficient service, a welcoming environment and genuine value.

Putting customers, and therefore customer service, high on the agenda has been paramount to the group's success as it has continued to grow and gain both popularity and customer loyalty.

The Mystery Dining Company has been working with Food & Fuel since late 2008 to implement a mystery visit programme consisting of regular focused activity to investigate specific processes or service offerings. Following a concentrated wave of mystery visits time is allocated to analysing the report findings and addressing anything that is identified through the reports.

This style of programme has been developed in close partnership with Food & Fuel's management team to ensure that mystery dining continues to add value to their business and the customer's experience remains, at all times, the number one priority.

## Challenges

- Keeping the customer high on the agenda, across the whole business
- Creating a mystery dining programme that has 'buy-in' from the whole team
- Continuing to challenge performance levels by understanding the customer's point of view

## Benefits

- Different types of visits (bar only/ single diners/groups etc) ensures customer experience is understood from all perspectives
  - Thorough analysis of results enables better planning and implementation across all venues
  - Continually challenging management and their teams to improve
- Provides insight to both performance of individual operations and the group as a whole

## Results - Through an operator's eyes

**Jo Cumming, Food & Fuel's CEO explains how a bespoke mystery dining programme helps to unite the group and ensure it is constantly improving its customer service.**

### On establishing a programme

*"Establishing a mystery dining programme that had credibility was incredibly important to us. We understood that there was some degree of cynicism towards mystery dining programmes amongst our team so we knew, from the start, that there was a need to make sure everyone bought in to the scheme we would eventually use.*

*One of the things we did right at the beginning was to get the whole management team involved. The team mystery dined each others' pubs in order to gain a better understanding of what a mystery diner experiences - what they look for, how they respond to the service on offer.*

*This helped to put the scheme into perspective before we finalised the questionnaire and meant that everyone within the business understood what it was we were trying to achieve."*





### **An ever-evolving programme**

*"In our business we view mystery dining, first and foremost, as a tool to improve customer service provision. For that reason we implement a strategic approach by ensuring that each wave of activity has a very specific focus.*

*By undertaking a concentrated series of visits, generally consisting of three visits over a six week period, we can take a very structured review of how we are performing. Armed with the reports for each of our pubs we analyse the feedback and then look at what changes, if any, that we need to implement in order to make improvements.*

*For example, we recently focused on Sunday lunches. The questionnaires directed mystery diners to specifically consider elements such as menu range and availability, portion sizes, how children are catered for and general atmosphere in relation to that particular service. As our most important trading day it makes sense to ensure we are doing it right in the customer's eyes.*

*We have also used mystery dining to better understand the perceptions of sole diners as well as groups and families and to learn how we can better meet the needs and expectations of these guests.*

*We do also recognise the differences across our business and for that reason use two different questionnaires to ensure that the reports are fair and remove as much subjectivity as possible. For example, mystery diners who use bar-service will respond to a different set of questions to guests receiving table service."*

### **The Reports**

***"Balancing out objectivity and subjectivity within the results of a mystery dining report can be a challenge. The reports, which are validated after the mystery visit to ensure they are factually accurate and reliable, are rich in qualitative comments and can be very descriptive and this feedback can also be very useful in helping to evaluate individual experiences."***

**Jo Cumming, CEO, Food & Fuel**

## Keeping motivation high

"Food & Fuel operates a league table with each wave of mystery dining activity and we reward those teams that excel. We have chosen not to tie in the mystery dining results with our managers' salaries or bonus structure as we need to ensure the whole team is motivated and embraces the programme. Outstanding customer performance is not just about an individual or management, it's a team effort."

## On working with The Mystery Dining Company

"I have been very impressed by the bespoke approach that The Mystery Dining Company offers - this is incredibly important for our business.

We want to be very actively involved in the mystery dining process, using it to challenge ourselves and learn how we can better meet customers' needs. We work directly with Sally and a single account manager at The Mystery Dining Company and this personal interest and involvement in our company has helped to ensure consistency with our programme as well as flexibility."

Jo Cumming, CEO, Food & Fuel

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Sally Whelan, director at The Mystery Dining Company:

**"The team at Food & Fuel understands that to stand out in a crowd you have to do things a bit differently. By proactively using mystery dining to measure individual parts of their business they are constantly challenging the status quo. We've worked closely with Jo and her team to understand both the business model and their ambitions so that we can develop an ever-changing programme that provides an in-depth analysis of customer service activity delivery."**

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