

Case study



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Johnnie Arkwright, Proprietor, The Hatton Experience



Case study

Client - Hatton Country World

Family friendly destination Hatton Country World, consisting of Hatton Farm Village, the 20-outlet strong Hatton Shopping Village, and gastropub The Waterman, is located in Warwickshire.

As a week-round destination attracting approximately 700,000 visitors every year the management team prides itself on delivering The Hatton Experience and recognises that customer perceptions are vital to the venue's reputation and in turn financial success. The pub also attracts a local clientele and can be visited without visiting the other elements of Hatton's. Significant investment has occurred in recent years including a £1m refurbishment to the pub in 2007 and more recently a £750,000 upgrade to the facilities at the Farm Village.

Since May 2009, assessors from The Mystery Dining Company have been visiting between one and two times per month to provide Hatton's Country World with feedback on all elements of its retail, leisure and catering operation.



Challenges

- To achieve a consistent experience for the customer across diverse services
 - To establish The Waterman as a standalone destination for locals and other visitors by changing the perception of it from a boozier to a high quality food-led venue
 - To improve efficiencies and identify missed opportunities across an evolving business

Benefits

- Creates a benchmark for the Hatton Experience by establishing a brand of customer service that can be found across all elements of the attraction ensuring visitors leave with a good impression
- Instils confidence through ongoing reassurance that progress is being made business-wide and confirming where implemented changes genuinely benefit visitors
- Helps educate on operational procedures, motivate staff and support in-house training

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Results - Through an operator's eyes

Johnnie Arkwright, the Proprietor of The Waterman and Hatton Country World is in no doubt that the mystery visit programme has been pivotal in raising standards and, in turn, strengthening the Hatton brand.

"Working with The Mystery Dining Company has helped us to realise our potential as an overall destination. Our visitor mix is quite diverse. The Farm Village is very much a family destination while The Shopping Village, with its mix of independent and retail stores attracts both locals and visitors from further afield as well as those visiting the Farm. The Waterman is popular with visitors to Hatton's as well as having recently established itself as a destination pub for the region."

"Understanding what customers are expecting from their visit and how the different components fit together for an overall experience has been invaluable."

"Our catering operation is where the most significant insights have been gained. The Waterman has about 1000 guests every week for its lunch and dinner service as well as serving coffee and cake throughout the day."



"A few years ago The Waterman was being run as an old style pub, so one of the first operational challenges was to step it up to a different level. Regular mystery assessments very quickly enabled us to identify areas that needed attention. Using the insight from mystery visitor reports we were able to transform our initial report scores from 60% up to 95%."

"Ensuring that our food offer was up to scratch was one thing, however, it was clear that we needed to invest the same effort into ensuring we had a standard of service to match the menu and the aspirations we have for The Waterman. I'm a big believer that customers are able to forgive slightly average food if the service is amazing, but if the service is poor, even if the food is great, that's what they will remember."

"The Mystery Dining Company's team are experts at what they do so we were happy to let them guide us to help build a mystery visitor programme. Over time we've worked with them to evolve the questions or change them to address specific issues that we've identified. For example, our pub staff are now trained to recommend which dishes are suitable for different types of food allergies after we discovered that there were knowledge gaps in our mystery visitor reports. The reporting methods are straightforward and it's easy to benchmark performance across different areas of the business."

"Mystery visits are also the backbone of our own staff training programme. The mystery assessors' observations serve as an important reminder that you need to continually be looking at things in a fresh way. We actually use the feedback to motivate and reward our team. For example waitstaff who deliver outstanding service are treated to a meal out at one of our competitors' establishments. Being on the other side of the customer experience in a new environment helps to inspire them and often they make valuable suggestions about how we can make improvements to our own customer experience based upon the service they received."

"There are clear benefits in running a programme like ours; personally it gives me enormous peace of mind, ensuring standards don't slip at the pub."

"Our staff know that every guest is a potential mystery diner and that motivates them hugely. Our sales have been growing at around 30 per cent year on year so we do feel there is a good return on our investment."



Sally Whelan from The Mystery Dining Company said:

"Establishing consistency for a brand that offers a diverse mix of products, services and experiences requires effort and buy in from management as well as staff. The Hatton's team has proven that it's not only possible to raise the bar across multiple venues but also continue to challenge the status quo and enhance the customer experience at every stage of a visit."



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