

# New Age of Hospitality Calls for Added Experience Without Added Complexity



Key Developments, Trends and Disruptive Elements of the Year Gone By and the Years Ahead

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“The only constant is change,” a smart Greek philosopher said some odd 2,000 years ago. Neither did he work in hospitality nor live through the lunacy of our COVID-19 crisis-ridden times.

Lockdowns and global restrictions have noticeably and physically challenged our daily routine and many things we always took for granted. They have accelerated evolutions and looming changes that we now accept as new reality.



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The global hospitality industry and the food-and-beverage segment have enjoyed a certain crisis resistance through the years of natural ups and downs. Eating, drinking and socializing are fundamental human needs, after all. The past 24 months, however, have debunked that myth. Now the entire ecosystem must recalibrate and refocus its core values and beliefs.

The most prominent issue is and will be human resources. Not that we didn't know about the troubled relationship this industry has had with working hours, adequate payment, mental illness and the like, but COVID-19 has become the ugly particle accelerator and is holding the proverbial mirror up to everybody's face.

Hospitality, first and foremost, must be an internal value, applied to ourselves and our own staff, before even thinking of opening the door to guests. Staff shortages are omnipresent, and to an extent that the word dramatic wouldn't even do justice. As a matter of consequence, those who are still willing to endure the daily grind have a plethora of potential employers to choose from and will carefully select those with the best working environment. Employer branding and marketing for recruitment

purposes have become just as important as attracting new customers. Before conceptualizing product and service, successful operators will create internal experiences to set the mark.

Change is inevitable; hence the entire industry must rethink old stereotypes and dogmas.

The past months have dramatically shifted and recalibrated how we perceive and expect our experiences to unfold on all levels.

More than ever, simplicity and convenience define our hedonism. We became accustomed to the comfort and security of our own four walls, but at the same time still yearn for the illustrious delights of gourmet food and world-class mixology. Whether through elaborate delivery and pickup dinners or off-the-shelf, ready-to-drink items, professionals in hospitality and food and beverage need to take their treats to people's doorsteps.

Ken Taylor, vice president of strategic development for Marketeam Inc., agrees: "Simplicity has become a guiding principle and a current trend due to challenges with labor and operational requirements."

At the same time, he assesses the potential downsides: “What keeps me up at night is the impact this can have on brand differentiation, the competitiveness, the uniqueness and distinctness of hospitality brands. What brands need to do moving forward is to focus on the ‘additives’ vs. the ‘iteratives.’”

Both our lust for technological advancement as well as the need to stay on top of health conditions have forced us to innovate and reinvent ourselves.

Taylor stresses, though, that we must “add to the consumer experience, with the essential goal to make it better and leverage this great opportunity, versus simply arbitrarily adding more steps and more procedures.”

Let’s not forget after the deprivations of the pandemic, people’s hunger and thirst for adventure, exuberance and experience are bigger than ever. So, while operators try to focus and keep up with the diminishing resources and limited room to maneuver, the guest’s expectations are constantly evolving. As a matter of fact, it’s a fine line between constant innovation in an ever-changing world and refocusing on simplicity and core competencies.

The leitmotif for all stakeholders of the industry is and will be experience. Whether internally to create a unique

selling proposition among current and future staff, or externally to provide memorable moments for guests and customers, providing value beyond just the product or service is the order of the day. This means involving all the senses, creating holistic experiential concepts, and making sure that a corporate culture, built on strong values and core principles, is lived and not just ink on a paper.

The past months have made us aware that, now more than ever, change is the only constant we have. Our ability to adjust and to reinvent ourselves, while staying true to who we are, will define our future success.

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