

Placing More Emphasis on Furniture and Dining Room Design Can Build Your Bottom-Line

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Many successful veterans in the Food Service Industry never lose sight on the bottom line and this includes the dining room. In a time where every missing seat on a busy night represents dollars being lost, a full evaluation of how your seating layout stacks-up may be just what the consultant ordered.

One of the first evaluation techniques Consultants and Veterans turn to is to simply look at your seating layout. It may have changed considerably since you first opened. Many times, as an Independent Consultant, I see dining room designs influenced by a dealer or designer's best interests and / or budgets and space restrictions that were

saved for last. This shows up immediately since the kitchen production either far exceeds or under compensates for the seating capacity. Avoid these pitfalls by always keeping the customer in mind with a keen eye on how every seat impacts the bottom line. As an example: a variety of table sizes may add to the esthetics but they may not maintain the versatility you need for larger parties of customers. You may be able to satisfy both requirements by a single sized table with fold-up leaves.



Viewing the dining experience from the customer's perspective may be a good way to begin. After all the dining room and all it has to offer, or not offer, is a major influencing factor as to the customer wanting to return or not. With that said; when is the last time you took a good look at what your customer sees, hears, touches and smells in your dining room?

During this review look at the flow, bottlenecks which restrict waitress service and most of all anything that interacts positively or negatively with your customer's dining experience. This includes keeping code issues in check while exceeding some codes by allowing a 60" main aisle that handicapped and elderly customers will always remember. See if any customer may be hit or injured

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by passing personnel and / or customers. Review the view and see if you would like to sit there yourself.

A second way you can find dining room shortcomings is by touching everything yourself. Check for unlevelled tables, broken or unlevelled chairs, loose tabletops, loose seat cushions, clean the tops, check for tabletop cracks that may result in tipped glassware, remove all the gum and other items that find their way under the tabletop and don't forget to check the tiles, grout, carpet, lower walls and seat cushions for oily or dirt buildup. Rancid oily build-up on carpets, chair cushions and tile grout, compounded by lack of maintenance, results in the smell most customers relate with a dirty rat infested facility. Oily build-up also results in slip and fall lawsuits.

Listen to your customers' needs and what they may be hearing. Listen to the sound system, does the music match what you are trying to present? Is the music too low or loud, depending on the time of day or night? Are you receiving too much kitchen noise or is it really the noise from the missing feet on the tables and chairs?

Select furniture and fabrics that are intended for commercial use in restaurants. Many supply houses are

currently stocking cheaper stylish tables and chairs in order to deliver a cheaper cost product but are they really commercial grade?

Look for furnishings that are sealed and follow general sensibility guidelines. Are all surfaces cleanable? Are the materials flame retardant, if so ask for the certificate numbers and ratings? Are metal chairs welded consistently? Are wooden chairs able to withstand weight and handling load? Are they comfortable to sit in for the duration it takes for your customers to dine? Do they fit your décor and budget? Are they able to be replaced or will parts be available 5 years from now? If you are making booths: consider utilizing the storage areas under the cushions for storage, if needed. Can your existing furniture be refinished or upholstered to save money? What warranties do you have? Has the manufacturer been around for more than 10 years?

All of these items affect your bottom line, either in a short or long-term way. Consider placing more emphasis on the customer and watch your bottom-line grow.