

Seth Linder reports on how Guinness UDV, world-leading companies and Irish pubs are working together to keep the Irish Pub Concept at the top

SHAPING SUCCESS TOGETHER

The Irish Pub Concept has been one of the great success stories of the last decade. But can its global dominance continue in the crowded hospitality market of the future? In our last issue, we profiled new research commissioned by Guinness UDV, which examined the challenges that lie ahead for Irish pubs. The message was clear: to remain market leaders, Irish pubs need to provide an environment that is attractive to female customers – which means that pubs that are too noisy, too smoky, where staff are not properly motivated and engaging with customers and where cleanliness is not of the highest standard will lag behind. But Guinness UDV didn't just examine the problems themselves, it explored the solutions too, and they have proved both highly effective and surprisingly inexpensive.

The research and solutions formed the cornerstone of the Shaping Success Together programme, launched in London last September by Guinness UDV, which was attended by owners representing over 100 Irish pubs. Having identified the main areas of concern, Guinness UDV then researched the leading companies working in music management, staff training, cleaning and air quality to implement the solutions. Reaction from attending pub owners was so positive – strikingly, nearly all reported the same areas of concern that were revealed in the research – that most decided to link up with the four companies for a trial period. The initial results have exceeded all expectations.

Overall, owners or managers from 19 single outlets attended the launch, with key managers from O'Neill's representing 89 outlets and John McGowan, with 19 outlets, also attending. After being shown a presentation of the research, which highlighted current market and consumer trends, pub owners then met with representatives of the four companies to hear how they proposed to implement solutions. They were impressed, with a large number agreeing to trial periods with Honeywell electrostatic air cleaners, Imagesound music management systems, Quantum Training (for management training) and Diversey Lever (for cleaning). After 12 weeks, the results and feedback were astonishing.

TRAINING

Quantum Training, who has provided management tips for *The Buzz* and also helps facilitate the Guinness Investors Course, was the company selected to implement training. 'The presentation brought to life for pub owners the value of training,' says Quantum co-director Brendan Colclough, 'and how it can enhance business and increase profits.' Before arranging training seminars, Quantum tailors the programme with the participating pub, identifying areas that need addressing, be they business, standards, management structure or communication. 'It's also vital,' says Brendan, 'that there is a back-up for when our training is complete. Our role is to set up a structure whereby management are able to implement training programmes themselves at their pubs.'

One of the pub owners who signed up to the training initiative was Finbar Holian, who owns five Irish pubs in north London, the most



CLOCKWISE, FROM ABOVE: A QUANTUM TRAINING SEMINAR; JOHN SWEENEY, OF THE ARCHWAY TAVERN; DIVERSEY LEVER CLEANING PRODUCTS; PETER BROOK GUINNESS UDV RETAIL DEVELOPMENT MANAGER, SITS IN ON A TRAINING SEMINAR; BRENDAN COLCLOUGH OF QUANTUM

recent being the 700-capacity Quays. Finbar took eight of his managers and assistant managers to two training seminars, which he feels have already had a significant impact on his business. 'It's been extremely important, both for myself and my managers. It's very in-depth and there were a lot of new insights into managing staff, dealing with customers, finances and the day-to-day running of the business. It's making people think about the whole experience of management, perhaps opening up areas you hadn't thought about, but it's also very practical.'

Already the insights learnt on the training scheme have filtered through to Finbar's regular management meetings. 'Finding out what customers think and sharing their ideas, making female customers feel comfortable, encouraging floor staff to become sales staff, interacting with customers and taking drinks orders to encourage them not to move on. A whole range of things, from eliminating waste to using staff properly to encouraging higher standards of service.'



'A clean atmosphere makes people stay longer'

AIR QUALITY

The Guinness UDV research identified poor air quality as the major reason for customers, particularly women, not visiting an Irish pub or cutting their visit short, and this concern was demonstrated at the launch by the interest in Honeywell air cleaners. Smoking, however, remains popular. It's a problem that the pub owners recognised all too well. The solution, however, is neither difficult nor expensive. 'Smoking,' says Alan Carbray of Honeywell, 'is here to stay. Actual smoke is not. Numerous case studies have shown that if the air inside a pub is of poor quality, it can drive turnover and profits down. Provide clean air and wet sales increase by an average of 12 per cent – much higher where food is sold. Because turnover is increased so dramatically, creating a cleaner environment becomes a self-funding exercise.' As a result of the take-up at the launch, surveys were conducted in 13 outlets with four chosen for a trial (including John McGowan's Clery's Clock – see Pub Profile on p20).

All four pubs had reported customer complaints, and staff members were also unhappy about the levels of smoke and were suffering from the effects of passive smoking, such as stinging eyes, coughing and throat problems. John Sweeney, who owns three Irish pubs in London, installed





CORR VALUES: PROPERLY PROGRAMMED, GREAT IRISH MUSIC, SUCH AS THE CORRS, CAN TRANSFORM YOUR PUB'S AMBIENCE

four Honeywell electrostatic cleaners in the Archway Tavern, one of London's biggest and busiest pubs. He found the cleaners were a big improvement over the old ducting system. 'The previous system was reasonably efficient but took the hot air out too, which is a big problem in winter. The Honeywell cleaners purify and then redistribute the air. It's not only more efficient, but it keeps the hot air as well. Staff and customers are much happier now about the clean air and the smoke clears very quickly and effectively. The cleaners are visible and people can see straight away that we are health conscious, which affects their decision to stay. The clean atmosphere makes them stay longer. The actual running costs of the machines are very low, it's a good investment for any pub. We'll definitely be keeping them.'

CLEANING

The Archway Tavern was also one of the 18 outlets that took the Diversey Lever cleaning products on trial. John Sweeney was so impressed at the savings, he will be using them in all three of his outlets. According to Richard Morrison of Diversey Lever, cost effectiveness, in an area that can be very expensive for pubs, is one of the major attractions of the company's service. 'Our dispensing systems are specifically designed for the pub trade, making sure you get exactly the right dosage of concentrate and cutting out waste. Using our system, the average cleaning cost for a pub is £3 per day for all cleaning areas, which is very good value for such a high standard.' Their

'If washrooms are not spotless, customers will vote with their feet'

service includes surveys, installation, product training and product data in line with health and safety regulations.

Derмот O'Callaghan of The O'Connor Don in London's West End was one of the pub owners who signed up to trial the Diversey Lever service at the launch, having the products installed in the pub's kitchen, bar, cellar and toilets. Dermot, who was already looking at the area of cleaning, found the presentation of great use and would like to see other aspects of pub management explored in the same way. 'It was very timely for us (brother Brendan is co-owner).

These days, there is so much more awareness of health and hygiene and so much competition that customers, especially women, will vote with their feet if your toilets and washrooms are not spotlessly clean. We'd had problems with previous cleaning companies, but Diversey Lever products are more reliable, easier to use and there is much less waste.'

MUSIC MANAGEMENT

A key conclusion at the presentation was the amount of customers who refuse to stay in pubs with a high level of noise, and music that is not properly controlled. According to Jackie Clarke of Imagesound, music management makes a huge difference to revenue. 'The quantity and quality of a pub's customers are reflective of the music and music level played. Each venue should have its music profiled to the client it wants to attract and keep. The ambience of a bar can be changed in an instant by turning up or off music or playing a poor track.'

The Imagesound system – basically a PC that has around 20 playlists (approximately 1,000 individual tracks) suitable for Irish pubs stored on its hard drive – connects to a pub speaker and a dedicated phone line. It is tailored to automatically deliver the right music for the right time of day and is also flexible enough to be changed at the push of a button.

Cathal Lynch, bar manager at Callaghan's Irish Pub, Piccadilly Circus, says staff and regular customers were delighted with the difference the system made when it was installed after the launch. 'People used to complain if they heard the same CD come on again. What Imagesound means is that you can switch it on at the beginning of the day and forget about it and not have to change a CD during a busy lunch hour because it's inappropriate or not right for that time of day. It's also carefully programmed, not at the whim of a member of staff. Music is one of the main elements that create a mood and it has to be right. This way the mood is always right and customers react to that.'

The high take-up of pub owners who decided to participate at the trials demonstrates how important these areas are to Irish pubs in the contemporary market. The early results and feedback show just what a difference can be made, when the right solutions are found. The overall increase in sales at participating outlets during the trial period – an astonishing 19.25 per cent compared with selected control pubs – tells its own story. Feedback from staff and customers could not have been more positive either. There is no question, with the solutions on offer, that the Irish pub will continue to lead its competition for many years to come.

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