

## Strategy clinic

**"My café has always been waitress service, but staff costs go ever upward. Should I introduce self-service?"**

You probably started small, when service to table was no big deal. There were small number of tables, no great queues, and the food was cooked to order, hence minimal wastage and maximum freshness.

The problems of success come with larger premises, with more tables, and service that can no longer be managed by you and trusty friends and family.

Let's examine the financial basics of most cafés. Generally, we don't bother with "covers", and average spend per till transaction works out to about £7.50, or £3.25 per customer, excluding VAT.

For that you are lugging a large volume of low-spend items from kitchen to table. Of course, customers like the service, but can you afford to supply it? Staff costs never go

down, and staff availability rarely improves.

A further impetus for change could be that, from the moment a customer sits down in your full-service café, they want service - immediately. At high prices this is understandable, but when the order is a £1 tea, let's get real. Bars and many value restaurants have "order at bar" service for very good reasons.

I would like to stress the real positives of converting to a "buy with your eyes" self-service or counter-service café, where displaying good food well sells.

Retailers learnt long ago that we buy with our eyes. Let customers help themselves. It works every time. Our eyes take in so much that we often lose track of price and acquire the perception of value.

The help-yourself philosophy should include cakes, sandwiches and cold drinks and can include soup and hot drinks. Queues can be busted, staff costs kept reasonable and average spends improved.

Hail the "buy with your eyes" café.

→ Chris Brown  
[www.turpinsmale.co.uk](http://www.turpinsmale.co.uk)

## My life in hospitality

### KEITH POPE

DIRECTOR, MEMBERSHIP SERVICES,  
BEST WESTERN



#### HIGHS...

I wasn't born into the industry, but when I was 14 my parents bought a free house and restaurant and I used to work behind the bar, in the days when you could do that sort of thing. I loved the buzz of it all and, after leaving school with not many qualifications, I decided to go to catering college, then to Switzerland to work as a commis chef.

My first hotel trainee manager job was with Centre Hotels, and I've since worked for Trusthouse Forte, Greenfield Holdings and Ryan Hotels, all over the place.

My love has always been hotelkeeping. In 1983 I took up the challenge to become Consort Hotels' chief executive, where we won the Queen's Award for Export, one of my biggest career highs. To take a company to such a level and be recognised by the Queen was a very proud moment for me and proof, I think, that if you put hard work into your career, the rewards will follow. The industry offers anyone great opportunities.

I left Consort and moved into the travel industry, but I returned to Consort in 1997, becoming involved in the merger with Best Western Hotels, in 2000. It was the natural thing to do. Both organisations were able to reduce expenditure and in the long term we created a very solid brand. Obviously, there were highs and lows - offices closed and some colleagues lost jobs - but going from a national consortium in the UK to becoming part of a worldwide brand was hugely exciting.

#### LOWS...

One low that sticks out is very early on in my career when I applied for a trainee manager job with Trusthouse Forte and was told I didn't have enough qualifications. I vowed there and then that I would return as a manager one day, and in 1977 I became general manager of the Hemel Hempstead Post House. I took great pleasure in reminding the personnel director of his decision eight years before.



**If you put hard work into your career, the rewards will follow**



## AVERAGE PRICE OF A MEAL AT WORK



- 10.7 billion meals were eaten at work in Europe in 2007.
- The average price across the 40 countries was €1.75.
- The UK accounts for 10% of all European meals eaten at work.
- The five largest European countries - UK, France, Germany, Italy, Spain - account for two out of every five meals eaten at work in Europe.

Source: Horizons

## The briefing

**● Workplace theft is rampant**  
More than 80% of employees admit to having stolen from their workplace, according to new research. The report from Royal & Sun Alliance insurance found that 14% of employees have exaggerated the amount of overtime worked or falsified expense claims, while 1% admitted to taking a work laptop and never returning it. The insurer said that upping security levels by making sure staff sign for borrowed equipment, enforcing disciplinary

procedures and carefully checking staff expenses could all help to reduce fraud and theft.

**● UK in front on ageing workers**  
When it comes to demographic fitness, or being able to adapt to an ageing, shrinking workforce, the UK is ahead of most of its European neighbours, a new report has revealed. In the *Demographic Fitness Index 2007*, the UK came in joint first place with Germany as being the most prepared for older workers - beating France and Spain

- with two-thirds of firms creating new positions to boost career progress and 93% offering equal opportunities for all ages. Nine out of 10 businesses also offered workplace-based training.

**● Free seminar on marketing**  
Interested in marketing your business on a small budget? A free one-day Business Link seminar on 27 February in London will teach practical low-cost marketing techniques. Contact 0845 602 3709 for details.

**● Small firms in denial over debt**  
Small-business owners are burying their heads in the sand when it comes to debts, with almost 20% unaware of how much money they owe, according to entrepreneur think-tank the Tenon Forum. Its survey of 1,000 small firms found that 47% owe money, with four out of 10 taking out loans to grow their business, and 15% needing to cover costs. Those in the North were most concerned by debt, with one-quarter claiming that they never borrow money.