

Story of the month

Give diners a reason to stay loyal, say marketing experts

F&B loyalty programmes increasingly important in race for repeat business

F&B operators having problems garnering repeat business should consider launching a customer loyalty programme, marketing experts have advised.

The Radisson Blu Hotel, Dubai Deira Creek drew inspiration from its standard hotel loyalty programme and implemented a separate, dedicated F&B programme, 'Dining Plus'.

"It's worked so well that over the past couple of years, our other Radisson Blu properties in the UAE have joined us — so it's now a Radisson Blu UAE dining programme," explained the property's PR and communications manager, Stephanie Abou Jaoude.

"For this, guests must initially purchase the card; then they get a welcome pack including vouchers and a consistent 20% off food and 15% off beverages."

Hilton Hotels is about to launch a similar scheme, according to cluster marketing manager Helena Lundberg.

"We've had Hilton HHonors, our hotel loyalty programme, for a long time now and we're just now launching our Hilton Premium Club F&B loyalty programme for the region," she revealed.

The new scheme will see members receive cash and F&B vouchers to use in Hilton hotels and outlets in the Arabian Peninsula, as well as discounts on room rates and F&B.

"I think when customers are making an initial payment for the card — which, like Radisson, is how our new Hilton card will work — and you're giving that guaranteed discount plus cash vouchers, you

almost guarantee loyalty, because they want to get their money's worth," she said.

Lundberg added that in addition to driving customer loyalty, the CRM behind the programme yielded numerous other benefits as well.

"We can track our guests' movements between properties and more accurately target those who have visited us, or are likely to visit us in the future," she said. "It also opens up new doors for cross-promotion between Hilton hotels."

Other brands following the customer loyalty card trend include Foodmark — a division of Lanmark Group, whose franchise portfolio includes Ushna, Mango Tree and Carluccio's — which will launch its dedicated F&B programme next year, as well as The Meat Co and Ribs & Rumps.

The South African brands' regional operations manager Rob de Villiers commented: "We embarked on a loyalty programme around nine months ago, in Australia, and we've now rolled it out across all our businesses world-wide.

"It's important to recognise your loyal customers — and the current economic conditions have pushed us to enhance that programme and increase the value offering," he added.

Rmal Hospitality is also looking into a programme to provide diners with benefits across its portfolio of outlets, according to vice president strategy Tiina-Maija Bergman.

"I believe there's a lot of value in it, with regards to loyal customers, but we really see the leverage as being the fact that such a scheme would build a loyalty programme across Rmal restaurants, rather than just individual outlets," she said.

However Bergman noted that independent outlet operators lacking the size of international hotel groups would necessarily be slower to get their programmes up and running.

"A loyalty programme has clear value, but obviously now the budget to invest in creating it is the main issue; so right now we are working on justifying that scenario," she explained.

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Hilton Hotels' Helena Lundberg.