

HOTELS



RAISING THE BAR

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Hotels are unlocking the revenue potential of their bar business by creating unique, customized offerings.

by ANN BAGEL STORCK, MANAGING EDITOR

Scotch, the signature whiskey bar that debuted last fall at The Balmoral in Edinburgh, boasts it offers the largest collection of purely Scottish whiskeys available to the public in the city — some 400, including vintages dating back to 1940. The experience doesn't end with what's served in the glass, however. "The idea was to give our guests a taste of the many different whiskey regions from the comfort of a luxury setting," says Lauren Robertson, PR and marketing manager at The Balmoral. "Scotch has been consistently contributing to the overall bottom line in a much more significant manner than its previous use as a drawing room."

According to New York City-based foodservice consultant Arlene Spiegel, the growth of outlets like Scotch in the hotel industry can be traced to a fairly simple reality — extreme competition, especially in urban areas. "Hotel bar programs have become more sophisticated in identifying guest needs and developing specific levels of offerings in design, size and specialty drinks," Spiegel confirms. "The one-size-fits-all approach is not working."

Still, in the rush to innovate, Spiegel cautions hotels not to lose sight of some bar business basics. "Often beverage managers are not analytic enough or make assumptions when deciding what products to feature and how to price them properly," she notes. "The keys to profitability can be found by mining the data in the system, insuring accuracy in the pour and through purchasing."

HEALTHY RESPONSE

Kimpton Hotels & Restaurants, San Francisco, kicked off the new year with a healthy start — the launch of a fresh juice menu that will be available at all of the company's properties later this year. Director of Restaurant Operations Frank Kawecki says the 10 restaurants currently offering the juices sell more than 20 daily on average, and Kimpton's next step may be to market juices bottled to go. "We know our guests are health-conscious, and juicing just made sense," Kawecki adds. "This couples nicely with the complimentary bikes and yoga mats we rolled out to all hotels last year."

After observing a decline in traditional soda sales, Enchantment Resort in Sedona, Arizona, recently introduced artisanal, house-made sodas crafted from fresh-squeezed juice that had initially seen success at the property's spa. Mark Grenoble, president and CEO of Enchantment Group, says the artisanal sodas have outsold traditional sodas at a rate of almost 2-to-1, and the product line's profitability is roughly 95%. "Our guests are in tune with their bodies, and as an active resort health and fitness is a major part of our DNA," Grenoble notes.

But even properties without an obvious "health halo" might be able to benefit from a move toward healthier bar offerings. "At bars, fresh juice is a must to position the venue as highest-quality," says New York City-based foodservice consultant Arlene Spiegel. "Even the mere presence of a juice machine at the bar signals 'premium' to guests."