



What Differentiates Exceptional from Adequate Food and Beverage Operations at Your Casino?

by Craig Pendleton

Most casinos offer food and beverage. This is an additional amenity, other than gaming and entertainment venues, in which the food and beverage outlets have the longest guest interaction time with the players. This represents an excellent opportunity and at the same time a large responsibility. Given the probability that most players do not leave each casino visit with the same amount of money than they came with, food and beverage services have the opportunity to be one of the greatest experiences of a player's visit to the casino.

What challenges face casino food and beverage operations?

All food and beverage operators are challenged with providing exceptional and differentiated products and services. Casino food and beverage operators are further challenged to provide these services to attract and retain players with the goal of generating additional gaming revenues. Generating gaming revenues almost always has a higher profitability than selling food and beverage to your players.

What is the differentiating factor on whether a casino provides exceptional food and beverage operations?

Exceptional casino food and beverage operators provide an experience for players, not merely food and beverage products and service.

What constitutes an experience for a player?

All players have certain expectations of all elements of a casino experience. These are based upon past experiences at the casino, expectations provided by others and that of the player's past experiences at other casinos. While player experiences and expectations are different, they do consist of a minimum level of what is acceptable and what experiences players normally have. Providing experiences above those that players don't normally have is how casinos differentiate themselves. Often the little things that are done "over and above" and on a consistent basis from visit to visit, department to department and from staff member to staff member are what create the definitive advantage for a casino.

What are experiences and what are services?

Often there is a blurred line between services provided in the process of delivering food and beverage and what creates an experience. Services are the steps and actions to provide the food and beverage product to the player/guest. Casino food and beverage customer experience is the sum of all experiences a customer has with the outlet and staff over the

duration of their visit and relationship.

A casino's ability to deliver an experience that sets it apart in the eyes of its customers can increase their spending, visitation and time on property. Optimally this will inspire loyalty. Loyalty is driven primarily by the casino's interaction with its players and how well it delivers on their wants and needs by creating an experience above and beyond providing the normal products and services on a consistent basis.

Experiences are Both Emotional and Subjective

Humans can rationalize certain experiences as an "emotional experience" where there is a feeling created that may not even be able to be described but leaves them with a lasting impression and, if positive, makes them want to experience this again. Experience can result in a dramatic emotional response.

"Subjective experiences" involve a state of individual subjectivity and perception on which a player builds their own state of reality. This reality is based on a player's interaction with the casino staff and environment. Perception is how different people interpret the same environmental stimuli in different ways and determine if in fact they have received an exceptional experience. The same product and service provided to different players will create different experiences and levels of emotional experiences. The bar of exceptional is different for each player and in fact may be different for each player for each visit and specific circumstances of each visit.

The Experience

You may *serve good food and beverage products* and/or you may provide *good service to your player/customers*. These two actions will not in themselves create an exceptional experience. Many food and beverage outlets do not go the extra distance to create an experience where the staff connects with the guest during their visit. Delivering food and beverage is not providing an experience. Experiences are what create the feeling with your guests of acknowledgement, being valued and the invitation to return again for another great experience.

Exceptional service can only occur once the staff member has created a connection with the guest. Exceptional service requires training the staff to provide specific elements of the service experience on a consistent basis.

Exceptional food and beverage product is the product that your guests want, not what you imagine they want. Every

outlet must have differentiated signature dishes on their menus. These products must be different and better than your player's perception of what is provided by the casino's surrounding competition.

Elements of Providing an Exceptional Experience

There are three basic elements in providing the experience – facilities, product and service.

Facilities

The most common elements for differentiation are: beautiful restaurants and bars, comfortable environment, entertaining and a conducive environment for the meal experience. Exceptional experience standards are different for different players. Often it might be little things that guests may not even be aware of such as proper room temperature, air quality, noise level, background music and comfortable seating.

Product

Great food, great beverage, great specials, items players can't make at home, served at the correct temperature, visually appealing and great tasting. One of the greatest areas of differentiation from other casinos is - unique and signature items in every outlet, on every menu and in every menu section.

Service

Elements of personal service include: staff members introducing themselves using their own names and the guests' names if known or if discovered during the service process; the right level of familiarity, a friendly smile and eye contact; a connection built with the player; anticipating the guest's needs; being there at just the right time; guiding the guests through the meal experience; making personalized suggestions; selling extra items that enhance the meal; checking back frequently; timing beverages and meals appropriately; offering and providing unexpected additional service; continuously clearing the table and resetting; suggesting desserts; delivering the check and promptly returning with change; and most importantly (and not commonly/ consistently performed by casino staff members) - the players/guests are thanked, personally invited back and wished good luck.

How do you know if you are providing exceptional food and beverage service with your operations?

Ask your players/guests. You must separate the different tiers of players and determine the highest value players and ask them. This is where segmentation of your player database and marketing/service/development strategy comes into play. Remember the goal is to provide an exceptional amenity that generates increased gaming revenues.

The Role of Casino Food and Beverage Operations – a Higher Calling

The role of casino food and beverage is to create an exceptional experience with the player who has left money with the casino and provide a good feeling and memory about their visit. The player may not be able to describe why they feel the way they do but if an exceptional experience is provided not only will the player return but they can potentially become an advocate of the casino and an integral part of word of mouth advertising. When casino food and beverage outlets provide exceptional player/guest experiences, the standard is elevated. The new challenge comes in providing this exceptional experience during every future visit – any day, any time, any outlet, by any staff member. ♣

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