BoozNooz

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Ring it up already!

By: Karl Blatt (Sculpture Hospitality of Los Angeles)

WHY 93% IS A FAILING GRADE IN THE BAR INDUSTRY

I think it's fair to say most bartenders are confident by nature-- projecting confidence, at least, is implicitly part of their job description. Confidence is desirable to a degree, of course, but when it crosses the line to cockiness or worse it can become problematic, not only to the patrons a cocky bartender inevitably off-puts, but because of squandered profits as well.

An obvious example is the lack of urgency all too many bartenders have when it comes to ringing up transactions, begging the question:

What's the most common reason drinks get left off my shoppers tab?	
Bartenders hook them up for bigger tip.	✖
Bartenders are after their phone number.	✖
Bartenders are promoting the venue.	✖
Bartenders forget to ring them up!	✔

Yes, they simply forget, and it's clear to my shoppers it was an oversight, not a deliberate act. I'd say this happens in about 1 out of every 5 reports our shoppers submit.

That's 20% of the time at least one drink, more often a round, gets inadvertently left off a shoppers tab!

A bit of off-screen math translates that into about 7% of the actual drinks made, which, at an average of let's say, $8.00 a drink (more in major metro areas), equals in the range of 1K in lost revenue (this is a pure retail loss) a week for a place doing 10-20K in beverage revenue a week.*

That's a ridiculous amount of lost revenue for an act that, unlike a deliberate comp, doesn't serve to promote the venue or encourage return patronage in any way.

Why does this happen?
Bartenders aren't stupid (most aren't anyway); they're over-confident, in particular about their memory. Too many of them are prone to...
1. When it's busy... take too many orders before finally getting to the register to update tabs.
2. When it's slow... delay updating tabs, often until the final check is requested.

In each case the bartender is over relying on their memory, which

too often results in oversight. The simple solution is to always, without exception, ring up an order as soon as you have an opening.
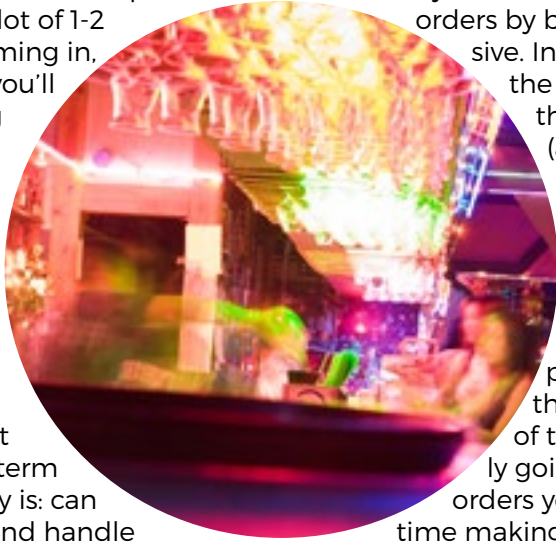
When it's slow this is a pretty straightforward proposition: Immediately after a running tab order is delivered, it's updated on the POS terminal. Not after another cup of coffee, not after all the fruit has been cut, not after answering a text... IMMEDIATELY.

The standard excuse for delay: that it's so slow there's no way the order can later be forgotten, has been discredited in so many reports I've read that the utterance of it should be banned industry-wide.

The reality is that short-term memory is quickly dislodged unless a conscious effort is made to transfer it to long-term storage. In other words, if we turn our attention to other matters without sufficiently processing the information first, we'll probably lose it in less than a minute.

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When it's busier, things get a bit more complicated, especially when it's insanely busy, like five deep at the bar and everyone's apoplectic, screaming for drinks. In this case you'll get buried if you deal with just one order at a time, especially if you've got a lot of 1-2 round orders coming in, not to mention you'll appear plodding and amateurish to your rabble of parched customers. But unlike servers, you don't have the luxury of writing down orders, so the trick is to be realistic about what your short term memory capacity is: can you remember and handle making 5 drinks at once? 7? 12? Always err on the side of taking too few orders, not too many. Don't try to pretend you can memorize the phone book, being over aggressive simply leads to having to go back for a reminder, or worse yet, making the wrong drinks and having to dump them and start all over again.

Harvard Professor George Miller's seminal work in the 1950's (http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Miller) found that the average number of items reflexively stored in interim working memory is 7 (+/- 2). More recent studies have put the average number even lower, at 4-5. More than that is difficult, if not impossible, to retain without concerted effort.

If you take a professional approach to bartending, your capacity should rise over time, but even if it doesn't and you never surpass, say, the seven drinks at a time mark, that's much less of handicap than if you constantly make mistakes and drop orders by being overaggressive. In my experience the bartenders with the highest sales (and tip intake) are usually not the ones with the best memories, but the ones that simply move the fastest, particularly during the busiest times of the night, tirelessly going after drink orders yet at the same time making just enough conversation with customers to personalize their experience.

Complicating the capacity question is that you've got more than the drinks being shouted at you to think about: there's drink orders piling up at the service well, a broken glass to clean up in front of you, a fight to diffuse between customers down the bar, food to pick up in the kitchen, etc. All these items are competing for short-term memory storage as well. Don't neglect to adequately prioritize them by overly focusing on taking as many orders as possible.

The simplest way to increase your drink order capacity it to repeat orders back to customers after you receive them. Studies have shown that repeating a list aloud, as opposed to sub vocally, increase retention significantly. You're also more likely to get the order specifics (ie. garnishes, etc.) right every time when you do!

So rather than spend a bunch of time practicing mnemonic techniques (although simple ones, like visually associating drinks with customers, can help), develop a rigid, dare I say humble system for taking and processing orders, one that becomes second nature over time. You should never have to think about when to ring up an order; it should happen automatically at the first opening. In the long run this approach will yield positive dividends for guests (who get the right drinks quickly), managers (who don't have to constantly void mis-orders), and owners (whose profit shrinkage is reduced), not to mention you, the bartender, who stands to increase sales and tips by a significant percentage as a result!

This number is much higher when you factor in the profit lost by over-pouring and outright theft, more in the 25% range, meaning 1 out of every 4 drinks is unaccounted for in sales.

5 MOST STOLEN BAR PRODUCTS
FROM AROUND THE WORLD

We asked representatives from a few of our 450 Sculpture offices to let us know what the most stolen brands were in their part of the world. Our analysts weigh every open bottle and count the full bottles, then match up the usage to the POS sales report for every brand. The Sculpture process gives us this unique insight into the brands that are most stolen and over-poured as a percentage of sales. Here are the top five around the world.

As a % of sales reported by Sculpture Hospitality franchisees in UK, Canada, United States, Argentina, South America, Sweden, Poland and Australia

CANADA
#1	#2	#3	#4	#5
DRAFT BEER	VODKA	RED BULL	JAGERMEISTER	CROWN ROYAL

USA
#1	#2	#3	#4	#5
RED BULL	FIREBALL	DRAFT BEER	BOTTLED WATER	PATRON TEQUILA

AUSTRALIA
#1	#2	#3	#4	#5
RED BULL	SHOTS	DRAFT BEER	WINE BY THE GLASS	JAGERMEISTER

UNITED KINGDOM
#1	#2	#3	#4	#5
DRAFT BEER	RED BULL	SMIRNOFF	SOFT DRINKS/ COFFEE	JAGERMEISTER

POLAND
#1	#2	#3	#4	#5
RED BULL	VODKA	DRAFT BEER	JAGERMEISTER	JACK DANIELS

SWEDEN
#1	#2	#3	#4	#5
DRAFT BEER	JAGERMEISTER	FIREBALL	JACK DANIELS	ABSOLUT

SOUTH AFRICA
#1	#2	#3	#4	#5
DRAFT BEER	JAGERMEISTER	RED BULL	BOTTLED WATER	WINE BY THE GLASS

ARGENTINA
#1	#2	#3	#4	#5
BOTTLED WATER	RED BULL/ SPEED	WINE BY THE GLASS	DRAFT BEER	JAGERMEISTER