



BAR CODE

Steven Brown, Inn-Formation, advises golf clubs to utilize the back of bar display more effectively.

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The back of your bar is an opportunity to market profitable drinks to visitors and members. So why, asks, do so many golf clubs use the fitting to display products that they can't even sell?

When I sit down to write an article on food and beverage, the theme is usually based upon how not to lose money. Now, whilst I am an advocate of that, I thought, for my sermon this time, I would focus on how to make money ... interested?

One of the UK's major pub companies employs my services to advise them on product displays or merchandising. My role is to offer advice on how to best promote their key products in order for them to achieve a maximisation of sales on those lines. I would now like to share with you some of those tried and tested merchandising techniques used by the top high street retailers in food and beverage.

Having visited many, many golf clubs over the years, I have to sadly report that the standard of product merchandising in bars is, in many cases, average at best. Please do forgive me if your product displays win awards! That being the case, read no further. If, however, you feel that your bar manager/steward would perhaps benefit from a few tips on the topic, then do read on. In essence we are talking about some quick wins here that will help today!

So where do we begin? You have to understand the thinking behind the need for a superb product display. Well that's easy – to sell your most profitable products! Sounds simple, but most back bar product displays are set up to enable staff to more easily access the more popular or most requested products and in so doing we lose sight of the powerful effect that our 'shop window' can have.

We need to find a balance between the bar servery being a physical, practical workplace and the opportunity that presents itself to display our products. The back bar fitting should be the display area and not the dumping ground for any of the following: trophies, raffle tickets, handbags, keys, invoices, postcards from around the world, books, phones, Spanish donkeys, salt and pepper pots, rosettes, newspapers, music centres, staplers, money bags, scissors, blue tack, tills and so on.

I challenge you now to walk into your bar and tell me that your back fitting contains none of those things! If they do, ask the bar staff what they are charging for each for them! They must be for sale otherwise they wouldn't be on display in your shop window, would they?! If the only thing you do today, having read this article, is to remove what we call 'space wasters' from your back fitting, you will have achieved 50 per cent of the tasks. The other 50 per cent is to use the tried and tested merchandising techniques to expose profitable products to the danger of being sold!

Note: The eagle eyes amongst you may have noted that I mentioned tills as one of the space wasters. Allow me to let you into a little secret. Whenever high street retailers design brand new bar serveries, the till is placed into the counter directly in front of the customer. They are secured, of course, but the front facing till achieves the following:

1. It frees up the back fitting for our profitable products
2. Research proves that the closer you can get to a customer and by dropping the volume of your voice and maintaining eye contact, so long as you ask the right questions, you increase sales by three to four per cent.

Start moving the tills! Hold on a moment. Let's get real here. Golf club bars and back fittings were built long before we became aware of this research. The reality is that, due to space restrictions, you may not be able to re-site the till. There is also the cost of re-cabling. If that sounds like your scenario, no problem, simply do everything you can to reduce the impact of having a till placed in the centre of your back fitting, occupying your primary hot spot. (Oh, by the way, check to see how many pieces of paperwork are stored in the 'sub office' down either side of the till! Avoid getting into the habit of 'temporarily' filing sheets of paper in the 'well' alongside the till, as you never know when you just might urgently need to pick up that invoice. You don't want to be rifling through a collection of papers by the side of the till right in the middle of a customer being served, do you?!)

I feel so much better now I've gotten that off my chest. I hope my message is clear. You need to utilise your shop window to aid sales of products that will help your bar to make a bigger profit or alternatively to shift products that you are over-stocked on, and that is in danger of exceeding its sell-by date (both equally legitimate reasons for merchandising).

Another key reason why we need to focus on this activity is this simple but horribly stunning fact. Ninety one per cent of bar staff do not sell, they simply serve! If that is true in your establishment then you desperately need a fabulously merchandised back fitting to make up for their lack of effort. If, on the other hand, you get both of these things right, you will maximise your sales with little effort or cost.

You should be employing sales people on the bar. Employ them from the neck up and not the neck down. Over 70 per cent of all retail bar sales are made by people we employ on the lowest wage we can get away with! (This is not true of every golf club I have consulted with.) We all understand the need to control wage costs, me more than anyone else, but I do worry that by employing 'hands merely to serve', that you miss too many sales opportunities. Consider

reviewing job descriptions to include the title ‘proven retail sales experience’ and offer sales target-related incentives. Let us assume that we have excellent sales people and not sales prevention officers! Let us also assume that we have removed all space wasters. We are now free to put all of our innovative and creative juices into creating a masterful merchandising display that will make us some money. What follows now is a resume of the top merchandising techniques used by today’s switched-on retailers. Most of them can be adopted by you in a series of quick win actions (in other words do it now). Others may take time and money to achieve – you decide if it is worthy of the time and effort.

Hot spots – areas of high visibility where our recognised high cash margin products must be displayed.

Comment – you will doubtless be aware of the saying ‘eye level is buy level’. An old saying, yes, but 100 per cent right – so what’s displayed at eye level on your back fitting? I guess that whilst the range may be wide, spirits will top many people’s lists. OK, so which spirits should be displayed and how?

Here are some top tips for spirits’ displays:

Establish which, in each range of the spirits you sell (for example gin, vodka and whiskey), provides you with the greatest cash margin. Let me give you an illustration. The majority of golf clubs sell both Bell’s whiskey and Famous Grouse side by side on the optic and at the same retail price. Now, 54 per cent of whiskey drinkers do not specify a whiskey by name. That being the case, which one of the products will your bar staff recommend?

- 1) The most popular one (safe)
- 2) Their personnel favourite
- 3) Or the nearest one to reach?

None of these are of course the right answer. The right answer should have been **the most profitable**. So, without looking at your stock results, which one is it? My personal experience tells me that in most cases the answer is Bell’s because it normally costs less to buy. (Dependant upon your own personal deals of course).

The point being, if what I have just said is true, how can we,

- a) educate the staff to sell our most profitable brands and
- b) display those products to our best advantage?

Firstly, identify the most profitable products in every category (beers, wines, spirits and so on) with little gold stars and get your staff to ‘reach for the stars’ when a customer doesn’t specify a particular brand. Secondly, and here is your first merchandised tip for spirits, make sure that the Bell’s is the first spirit they see (people review the products from left to right) and that it’s larger bottled (one or 1.5 litres) to give it greater prominence.

There is an argument that even questions whether or not spirits need to be displayed on optics! Many modern outlets have removed them from display – the argument being that you don’t need to ‘tell’ the customer you sell spirits – you’re a bar! What you need is for the staff to suggest the product you want to be sold. For many outlets, using optics to display products merely speeds up

service and provides us with a convenience for staff to dispense. I say let's challenge that convenience!

Cold spots – areas of low visibility. Now these will be the bottom shelves of a back bar fitting (ankle height). In here you display what are known as the 'demand' items or the type of products all bars have to have 'just in case' (for example, bottles of pale ale, Guinness, barley wine and so on). No prominence needs to be given to these products, many of which are showing declining sales as their followers will specifically ask for them. They may also be low margin lines.

SID

SID is an acronym that stands for Speciality items, Impulse buys and Demand items.

Speciality items such as unique products available only from you, these must be placed in hot spots.

Impulse buys should be placed in hot spots or near to tills. These are those 'extra' little sales, not necessarily large retail values requested as a last minute, but during the course of the year these add up to desirable amounts (for example crisps, chocolate, a bottle of Champagne for a hole in one and so on).

Demand items. The products that virtually every bar will sell – because all bars do! These should be displayed in cold spot areas.

Other terms you might need to know:

Blocking – the term used to describe a display area dedicated to one product. (This may be a new product or a line you need to shift due to over stocking.) It should be obvious to the intending purchasers what product is being promoted and this should be supported by excellent signage and staff support.

Attention grabbers – whilst much of your back bar product display probably will remain for the main part unaltered for up to two months, you should consider having a display area dedicated to promoting specific products (new or old it doesn't matter) that changes on a weekly basis. Your lighting should be here. I have a spotlight with a brilliant white bulb shining onto this display – we will, by doing this, draw the customers attention to this area without saying a word. This is precisely what merchandisers mean when they talk about silent selling. The displays need to be eye catching and innovative and create a talking point.

Wine walls – a product display dedicated to the sale and promotion of wines. Given that average golf clubs' propensity to promote wines (they make up 30 to 40 per cent of total sales and in clubs where large events take place, this is an even higher percentage), how well are you promoting the product? Yes, wine lists, tasting and wine flights. I am in favour of them all but where oh where are the much-needed wine walls so well favoured in today's high street outlets. This simply means that instead of using the old wine racks displays where bottles are 'laid down' so that all that can be seen is the bottle top, bottles of wine are displayed vertically, in styles and colours (white, red, rosé and Champagne) together with a great description of the characteristics of each one, say, a beautiful piece of slate or wood. Additionally, this deserves high intensity lighting from the top and by spots.

Display (say) four different types of wine in each category but not in single bottles. Use three or four of the same bottle product and then change. At this stage I am going to stop. 'Hurrah' I hear

you cry! It's not because I have no more tips to offer but space simply does not allow. There are many other useful pointers and I suggest that you access my forthcoming newsletter for any further tips.

My last comment needs to be regarding the question of who will carry out all of this?

You, as club secretaries/general managers, should not be expected to be involved in this process, other than to delegate the task to your bar manager/steward, and introduced the need and passed on my top tips.

I suggest you start with jointly reviewing the existing display status with your manager and agree on an action plan for him or her to conduct the exercise.

Go and motivate your staff to help you to make more profit and remember these things:

1. Make your displays remembered
2. Make your displays make you more money
3. Dare to be different
4. Make somebody buy something extra or profit enhanced.

I hope this all helps. I know for a fact it helps my clients to help their licensees to make more money for very little effort. Good luck to you and remember if you silent sell and remove space wasters, you won't go far wrong.

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