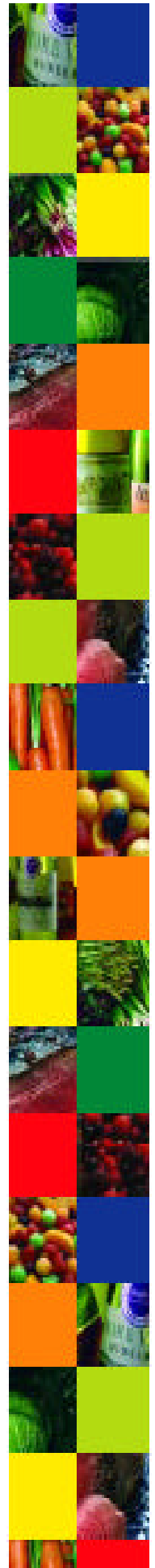




Extending Regional Hospitality



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8: IMPROVING SERVICE THROUGH KNOWLEDGE OF LOCAL FOOD AND DRINK

“What makes us special is because we go the xetra bit. We do work very hard at training our staff to know what the products are ... to know what the producucts are ... to know how to deal with customers ... to respond to guests in a favourable manner.”

Pub restaurant, Belfast

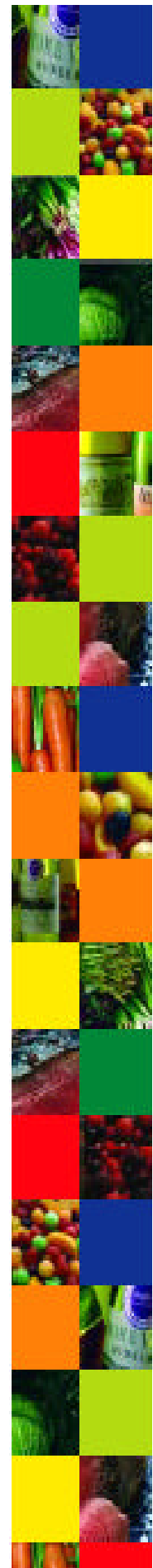
Have you been to a restaurant and asked for some information about a dish on the menu, maybe advertised as a house speciality, and the member of staff has not been able to answer your question. How did you feel? Probably frustrated, maybe a bit concerned that something that was so ‘special’ a member of staff couldn’t answer a question on.

In this section you will:

- Identify ways of improving your own and your staff product knowledge
- Identify ways to participate in being recognised as ‘a best practice business’

■ How do you improve service through your staff?

When your staff are selling your local specialities they will feel far more confident if they have information about the products you have to offer.



■ EXERCISE:

From the products listed in the previous exercise now identify how you might want your staff to describe the products or what key words they should use to make the product attractive for a customer to buy. You could have a staff meeting to discuss this.

If a customer asks about	What questions might they ask?	Any additional information you or your staff should know – just in case?!
The local meat on the menu	What are the animals fed on?	
The local fish on the menu	How fished?	
The locally produced wine	How produced?	
The regional fruit juices	Are there any additives?	
The locally produced fruit and vegetables	How are they grown?	
Speciality dishes of the house	What is the origin ?	
Special beers/ ales	Where is it made?	
Traditional recipes used	How was the recipe discovered?	

Discuss this with your staff and other colleagues to get their points

The more knowledge you and your staff have the more customers perceive that you are '**passionate**' about your product. This in turn gives the customer both the confidence and the commitment to your business.

■ How do you get the product knowledge?

Here are some ideas – fill in the benefits these examples could give.

Method	What benefits can be achieved? What information can be learnt?
Arrange for staff to visit your supplier premises	See the environment the product comes from
Arrange to visit another business using the product or similar	Get ideas and motivation
Read supplier information/ background information sourced from websites etc	Get background information
Taste the product	Can personally recommend to customers
Visit local trade fairs	See a variety of products
Run training sessions / briefings with your staff	Develops all the staff at the same time
Any other ideas?	

Ask your staff for any other ideas – after all they are the ones who have to promote your products!

■ Case Study

TO BE ADDED
A company that has arranged supplier visits and the results

Questions: What was the benefit to the staff of this visit?
What was the knock on effect for the customer?

■ EXERCISE:

Identify which methods of developing product knowledge could you use in your business.
Plan to action these points.

Method	What do	Who with	When

■ **Becoming a best practice business**

Aiming to carry out business practices to a high standard often means that you can gain recognition for being a 'best practice business'.

Heart of England Food and Drink Excellence Awards

“The Heart of England Food and Drink Excellence Awards have been established as part of the English Tourism Council’s Food and Drink in Tourism Project. These awards celebrate excellence in food and drink and recognise businesses, which find local sources of supply, use them imaginatively to create both traditional and innovative recipes and celebrate the wealth of local fresh, seasonal food and drink in their promotions.”

Categories for these awards include:

- ◆ Best restaurant sourcing local produce
- ◆ Best pub/inn sourcing local produce
- ◆ Best tea/coffee shop sourcing local produce
- ◆ Best breakfast sourcing local produce

Within each category are also highly commended, commended and recommended winners.

■ **EXERCISE:**

What would having this type of recognition bring to your business?

■ Other Awards



The Crown Country Inn won the Deliciously Shropshire Good Eating Awards “Restaurant of the Year” award in 2001 and 2003-4, and was “Highly Commended” at the 2003 Heart of England “Food and Drink Excellence” awards.

A cafe in Shropshire has been picked as the best place in the West Midlands to take Tea for Two. Back in July BBC Midlands Today asked viewers to nominate their favourite tea shops in the region.

The winner of the “Best Breakfast Sourcing Local Produce” in the Heart of England “Excellence in Food and Drink Regional Awards” 2003/2004 was Betty’s Coffee Shop in Gobowen, near Oswestry:

- Excellence awards for food and drink
 - ◆ Best restaurant sourcing local produce
 - ◆ Best Pub / Inn sourcing local produce
 - ◆ Best tea/coffee shop sourcing local produce
 - ◆ Best Breakfast sourcing local produce
- AA rosettes
- Michelin stars
- Johansens – Most Excellent Inn Award
- Top Dining Pub of the Year in Good Pub Guide

■ Taking part in educational projects

Adopt a school programme - Run by the Academy of Culinary Arts - structured workshops, which integrate well with Key Stages I -4 of the National Schools Curriculum, are delivered by chefs who are members of the Academy of Culinary Arts and leading members of the food industry in this country. The chefs give their time voluntarily because they want to pass on the passion that first brought them to the profession they love.

Taking part in this type of project raises the profile of your business in the local community and enhances word of mouth reputation as well as inspiring chefs of the future.

■ Summary

- When your staff are selling your local specialities they will feel far more confident if they have information about the products you have to offer.
- Arrange for staff to visit your supplier premises.
- Taste the product.
- Ask your staff for any other ideas.
- Aiming to carry out business practices to a high standard often means that you can gain recognition for being a ‘best practice business’.