



**Fáilte Ireland**

National Tourism Development Authority

# FOOD *in* TOURISM



Individual Enterprise  
Case Studies

Future Trends  
and Global  
Best Practice

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# CASE STUDY ONE

## **ALINEA RESTAURANTS, USA**





## CASE STUDY ONE: **ALINEA RESTAURANTS, USA**



### OVERVIEW

Based in Chicago, the Alinea Group operates four highly acclaimed restaurants together with a design house, Crucial Detail. The Group also operates Tock, a dynamically priced online reservation system that has helped restaurateurs around the world manage their guest bookings. The first collaboration in 2005 of co-founders and co-owners, Nick Kokonas and Grant Achatz was Alinea, their flagship fine dining restaurant. Alinea is the only restaurant in Chicago to earn the coveted Michelin 3 Star rating and is widely acknowledged as one of the best restaurants in the world.

The Alinea Group also runs Next, an award winning restaurant renowned for its innovative approach captured through its complete change of menu and dining experience every four months. The much lauded Roister restaurant combines rustic with fine dining and also won international acclaim with the awarding of a Michelin Star. 'Next' features a completely new menu every four months, shifting focus to different culinary regions, themes and moments in time such as Childhood; Ancient Rome and 1906 Paris. While 'Roister' elevates its casual and approachable environment with fine dining technique applied to a rustic menu.





Also located in Fulton Market, Chicago, The Aviary cocktail lounge offers a gastronomic drinking experience with perfectly crafted cocktails created by the collusion of one chef, one bartender and one server. Rare, antique spirits are served in The Office which is located below The Aviary.

This case study primarily focuses on the actions taken by the Alinea restaurant to completely change their business model.

## RESPONDING TO COVID-19

Prior to early March, the Alinea Restaurant Group employed 450 employees between their five restaurants. Based on the re-thinking of the business model and the development of a new take-out business model, 360 employees were shortly re-employed with the remaining 90 opting not to return.



Joint Managing Director Nick Kokonas attributes their recovery during the peak Covid-19 restrictions to their ability to understand their existing and target audience through technology. They recognised that customers did not want expensive meals at that time and decided to pivot largely based on creating affordable three-star Michelin food at a very affordable price point. This resulted in a new carry-out business model which focused on providing a very simple menu and maintained the price point under \$40. Diners in Chicago could now access three-star Michelin food for \$40 or less.

Within a couple of weeks Alinea had recovered to 75% of its previous revenue through this new model. They reconfigured their reservation systems to only focus on maximising the customer carry-out experience but blended the operational approach to become similar to managing the in-house reservations.

This resulted in customers arriving during an allocated 15 minute window and food was placed in their car by employees, ensuring no direct contact was made. They estimated that they could get through 350 different vehicles in approximately two hours based on this 15 minute food pick up model.



Co-business owners Grant Achatz and Kokonas are also involved in a technology company called Tock which provides a global reservations management system for restaurants. They quickly re-configured Tock to develop a new working prototype of 'Tock to go'. They realised that a large number of delivery apps were charging between 20 to 30% commission. Tock charged a flat 3%. They outlined how the delivery apps did not possess the same order management system that restaurants currently used.

The way their restaurants work is every 15 minutes a certain number of tables are seated so that the kitchen does not get overrun. The rival delivery apps tended to put in orders as they came in. In order for the



Alinea Group to ensure really high quality carry-out, they re-structured the operational model for the take-away business to look more like the restaurant model to ensure processing order was easier.

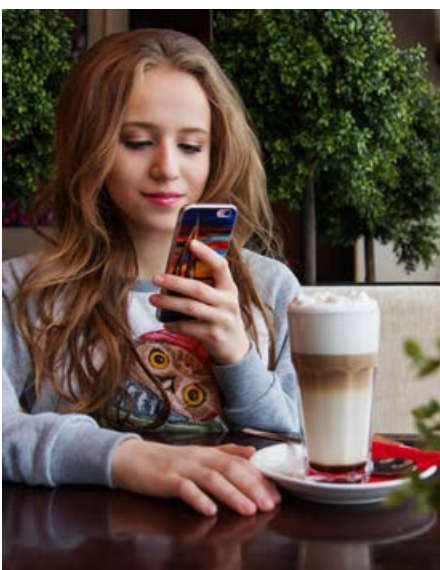
Alinea Group recognise that future occupancy / on site capacity is going to be severely reduced through a business model built around serving a certain amount of people per night that would have to operate at around 50% of previous levels when restrictions lifted. They quickly realised that they had to be creative around their adoption of carry-out as a key element of their business model. Their plan is to continue carry-out at all of their restaurants, based on ensuring that customers can purchase meals that they cannot prepare at home. This 'can't prepare at home' ethos is now central to the development of their menus. In addition, they decided their take-out food was going to be different to the food that they served in the restaurant.



## OVERVIEW NEW OPERATIONAL MINDSET

Nick feels that the global pandemic has resulted in a new mindset around how the hospitality industry now view digital and technology. His long-held perception was that the hospitality industry viewed technology with scepticism. However, based on his experience with food service businesses across the globe through his technology business, hospitality businesses are now beginning to meet their customers more digitally and then pivot their menus and business models accordingly.

He suggests that through data, businesses will need to know how to understand their customer and create the "like" audience i.e. move them to social media followers for future marketing / targeting. He outlined how everyone is now transacting through their phone and online but he feels that the hospitality industry require further convincing that digital for essential in their operations approach.



In one of his restaurants, they do not have a telephone system ensuring all customer engagement is online e.g. reservations and enquiries. The Alinea Group is focused on integrating digital in all of what they do. Their belief is that marketing is key in terms of understanding the audiences, what they want to eat and the ability to drive the business model through increased efficiencies e.g. reduction in food waste because of a higher degree of understanding of what customers want.

## EMBRACING TECHNOLOGY

Prior to entering the hospitality industry, Nick was a derivatives trader and met his business partner who was a chef. Early in the business, Nick focused on the business side of operations and quickly recognised the scale of inefficiency that existed. In 2010, when they realised that there were many better ways to operate the business despite having already been named as Best Restaurant in America, they created Tock.





They realised that greater use of technology and proactive marketing had many immediate positive impacts such as reduction in no-show rates, innovation such as dynamic pricing on menus in order to generate business for off-peak periods and the ability to influence kitchen and food operations.

They recognise that consumers' food discovery journey is through "search and social" i.e. searching online or through social media channels. Their focus is on the need to consistently have menu changes that are seasonal and reflect what customers are looking for i.e. retain the best sellers and make a virtue of their best-selling menu items for marketing.

Their estimated engagement is 58% on mobile, 37% on desktop and 5% tablet. There is an increasing pattern of younger people engaging with food premises online with 47% of the Alinea business under the age of 34 using the digital platforms for reservations.



Nick and the Alinea Group emphasise that it is vital that businesses identify what they do best and sell these as the 'anchor' products. The recognition by management that they would need to continue with the take-away business post Pandemic resulted in the development a dedicated take-out website "Alinea Group to Go". This was designed to create a differentiation between the on-site experiences and the food options for take away.

## CREATING FOOD DIFFERENTIATION

They highlighted the importance of strong branding around both the on-site and off-site business models, supported by consistent and coherent marketing. One of the main focuses of the Alinea Group in their take-away model is that customers will buy online what they cannot make at home. This has become a key development focus. Recently, 16% of searches on the Tock forums were for sushi i.e. food that people cannot generally make at home. Consequently, the Alinea restaurant included a dedicated menu focus on sushi which generated considerable interest and based on this bespoke menu reacted to what people were searching for online.



Despite the menu focus dedicated to separating the onsite and offsite offering they have created a range of signature dishes that can be purchased in the restaurant and through the online platforms. An example of this was a new signature dish around the use of the whole of the chicken combining it through roasting, frying and using parts of the chicken to make chutney. This has also driven online marketing content. It has resulted in strong demand for the signature range based on the principle of what providing online purchase options focused on what customers cannot make at home. The marketing focus is constantly through social media channels and adding fun elements to differentiate the message and keep content fresh and interesting.

When restrictions began to lift, the Group still had to operate within restricted capacity and used surrounding space to address this reduced



number of covers they could accommodate each night. They were open for 25% occupancy indoors and subsequently rented a roof top to expand operations and built patios in these rented spaces. Recognising the challenges of the Chicago winter, the focus will be mainly on the take-out business.

The success of the take-out dining option (providing up to 1,000 take away meals per night) resulted in the City authorities making the street one-way for a limited period of time based on the volume of business they had generated through the click and collect model. The night of the USA presidential elections generated 1,500 take away meals through a dedicated election night menu package and adding 'added value' elements such as Champagne / Whiskey. This will be an area for development for the business i.e. using special occasions to drive online business e.g. Super Bowl night, Thanksgiving.



## APPLYING MARKETING INNOVATION

Based on their understanding of consumers' inclination to spend more online, the Alinea Group adopted a marketing principle of the three tiers pricing model based on low, medium and expensive. The inclusion of a medium pricing model e.g. dinner plus wine as an added value proposition has very large conversion. This three tier pricing and packaging principle is applied in both online and in restaurant experiences.

They have also incorporated pre-booked meals as part of the dining experience where people book and order online in advance of their visit. The Group consolidated all booking and payment systems, making it easier for both the customer and the business. The experience of the Alinea Group was an increase in the average bill when people pre-booked and ordered online. It was estimated that there was an increase of approximately 16% in revenue when people are ordering food online for their brunch pre-book and pre-pay experience.



The pre-ordering of the food and reservation enabled the front of house staff to focus on the food service element, contributing to greater staffing efficiencies. Prior to developing the reservations technology and encouraging their customers to book online, each restaurant within the group had a number of people dedicated to managing reservations. They have now consolidated this to three people full time across the group, reducing this from more than 15 people.

The operational ethos is not to change their hospitality but to make it consistently better through technology and its impact on the day to day business.

According to the Alinea Group, knowing your customer better will become the most important element of food service. They believe there will be an increasing integration of technology by the hospitality industry to get a better understanding of the customer and how that impacts on how the food service industry develops their operations.





# CASE STUDY TWO

## **STEM & GLORY, UK**





## CASE STUDY TWO: STEM & GLORY, UK



### OVERVIEW

Stem and Glory is a restaurant company operating from premises in London and Cambridge in the United Kingdom.

The owners identified the rapid change in consumer attitude towards plant-based food and the desire of the population to lead a healthier, environmentally friendlier, and ethical lifestyle. Recognition of this societal change is reinforced by the company's success in crowdfunding to develop their restaurants, raising over £100k in 2016 to open in Cambridge and more than £600k in 2019 to open their London premises. The company was voted 'Most Investable Concept' at the Global Restaurant Investment Forum in early 2020.

### RESPONDING TO COVID-19

Once the Covid-19 pandemic struck the immediate challenge for Stem & Glory was a need to develop a broader business model. They undertook an assessment of new food trends and emerging consumer preferences.





They also examined the opportunities that could be brought to the overall business model through upgrading technology.

One of the main and immediate questions they asked themselves was 'did the business have the structures in place to deliver a new business model approach e.g. delivery and carry-out'. They realised there was a requirement to invest in systems and the need to have a well thought out process in the development of the new business model e.g. understanding the additional partners who may be involved such as delivery partners, ordering systems.

In understanding new customer preferences and trends in how food was being bought from restaurants, they developed a new omni-channel business model that included 'click and collect', online ordering, home delivery, next day use products and the development of their instore range.

They also took the time to invest in a brand refresh which supported the expansion of the new business model i.e. a brand supporting the onsite and offsite food experience. The new brand allowed them to extend their menus and focus on marketing to support the omni-channel business model e.g. online collection or delivery.



## DEVELOPING NEW SYSTEMS

In the review of technology they realised the complexity of integrating all systems i.e. their ePos system linked to ordering systems, delivery and all internal food management processes. The new focus became concentrated on two distinct elements of front of house and back of house operations. They immediately generated increased levels of demand that provided reassurance that the technology was needed to support their in-restaurant experience and develop the online growth opportunities.

One of the key elements of developing the new menu and the extended onsite and offsite food options was understanding what the audience wanted locally and how that would impact on visitors. Initiatives such as undertaking customer conversations were undertaken to understand what customers wanted to see on the menu, new food preferences and what they were likely to buy. They also hosted a preview menu launch that provided a feedback loop where they discounted the launch of their menu to a number of their regular customers and this provided them with additional feedback on the effectiveness of the menu.

After research and customer analysis, they realised that the preference remained on the core menu items they were historically recognised for but it could be delivered in a variety of different ways through innovative preparation. This allowed them to overhaul the menu. One immediate trend was a new health focus with healthier dishes now being in-demand but combined with a new comfort food type approach i.e. comfort food but healthier. This applied to both the in-restaurant experience and the food at home i.e. delivery of online orders.







They realised their need to ensure a variety of systems would drive business to the premises from the creation of a web app, online presence and the in-restaurant dining experience. The main areas of focus was the online element i.e. take-away as the projected additional spend per person was an estimated 30% compared to the in-restaurant diner. They realised that the new omni-channel approach allowed them to upsell a range of products when customers were selecting different meals to purchase online i.e. bundling extra food elements with meals such as side orders.

## A FOCUS ON SUSTAINABILITY

With the restricted capacity levels, they converted the instore dining focus around the availability of an exclusive number of covers and concentrated on a high rotation of tables. There was an associated growth in efficiency among staff through the new technology systems that they had put in place i.e. ordering, payment.



One of the immediate benefits of the new investment in the technology process was zero waste with all food being made to order. The management of Stem & Glory have a very strict adherence to sustainable approaches to food. They recognise that 38% of consumers want brands to help them to become more sustainable. They also highlighted how 43% of consumers say that companies are making it difficult for them to achieve their own personal sustainable goals. Stem & Glory realise that for a sustainable approach to be efficient, it must engage employees and customers and drive innovation across the business.

A number of initiatives incorporating sustainability for innovation purposes and engagement with customers through sustainable messaging include carbon free dining where they plant trees to offset any carbon emissions from their activities; engagement in reforestation initiatives e.g. reforest tea and the development of a plastic negative approach and recycling plastic waste. The new approach to onsite and offsite food production has resulted in low to zero waste while the fit out of their premises has a strong sustainable ethos incorporating as many recycled products as possible.



The lockdown period enabled the owners to identify future cost savings from waste production, the ability to negotiate with suppliers and identifying where technology could help run a more efficient operation i.e. staffing. There was a level of analysis undertaken on the menus and the most popular items. This allowed the owners to go and source less expensive options or source new suppliers.



## KEY LEARNINGS

One of the key learnings around marketing was digital engagement can sometimes lose momentum. The focus for Stem & Glory was on Facebook and Instagram. Marketing focus was placed around value for money rather than offering free product. The value for money approach generated a higher level of spend and the average customer bill remained high. One of the most successful campaigns operated by Stem & Glory was the use of Facebook Many Chat through Facebook Messenger. This involved emailing offers to existing customers on a bi-monthly and monthly basis. The return on investment was considerable. The future marketing focus is based on the following;

- The marketing channels that are open to attracting visitors also represent channels for continuous engagement e.g. hosting of online cookery videos, online demos, highlighting hero product dishes.
- One of the key learnings for Stem & Glory was the need to be consistent in their marketing approach and the importance of how brand can open up new opportunities (online and onsite).
- There is a need to constantly engage on social media.
- All marketing must represent a call to action with the need to either make a sale, generate footfall or gather data on the customer.
- Targeting customers is based on understanding the customer base and applying relevant marketing to that customer cohort.



## FUTURE OF DINING

According to Stem and Glory the anticipated dining experience of the future will incorporate the following;

- An increased level of demand for plant based and sustainable food with a requirement for food service outlets to include more sustainable approaches within their menus e.g. sustainable dining.
- There will be a global move to the incorporation of digital in hospitality and its integration in the dining experience.
- There is an anticipation that demand for the in-restaurant experience will soar when the Pandemic is over.
- The recovery after the Pandemic will be built on providing a better quality experience for a smaller number of diners. This will also apply to events and all elements of catering with a new mindset change among consumers on where they eat, how foods are prepared and awareness around sustainability.
- The “pack them in” mentality will change forever and will need to be offset with different business models to compensate for lost capacity.
- There will be a growth in the inclusion of carbon offset on menus where customers are provided with carbon neutral opportunities to offset their carbon footprint e.g. options to pay extra amount to offset the carbon generated by their meals.







- More streamlined opening hours built on efficiency around what works for the business and led by the customer.
- New streamlined menus based on healthy comfort food and seasonal approaches to food.
- Creation of exclusive access through rewarding loyal customers e.g. development of VIP groups to reward locals and returning customers.
- A need to grow all revenue streams following an assessment of the full range of options that are open to businesses e.g. in house dining experience and off site /carry out/ delivery.
- Businesses will need to consider a new events focus through seasonal opportunities throughout the calendar year or themed food to create marketing content e.g. food innovation nights.
- Customers are increasingly more conscious of their health and this is being applied to their habits around food.
- There is a need to provide better information around local food e.g. local sourcing.
- Sustainability and healthier eating will become integral to food service and will be reflected in future menu development and marketing messaging
- The focus on technology must not impact on customer service and should be viewed as an opportunity for front of house employees to engage more with customers.
- Businesses need to look at the different times of the day and flexibility in adapting menus through the incorporation of QR codes allowing for prompt changing of menus.





# CASE STUDY THREE

## **RICKSHAW RESTAURANT, CORINTHIA HOTEL, MALTA**





## CASE STUDY THREE: RICKSHAW RESTAURANT, CORINTHIA HOTEL, MALTA



### OVERVIEW

The focus of the case study is the Rickshaw Restaurant within the Corinthia Hotel located in Valletta, Malta. For the third year running, the hotel was voted Malta's best hotel at the recent World Travel Awards, while the hotel's spa has also received a number of international accolades.

During January, the restaurant typically did 70 covers on a Friday, achieving 80 to 90 on a Saturday. This was compromised with the introduction of new guidelines reducing capacity. The restaurant also did approximately 20 take-aways per night. This subsequently doubled when restrictions impacted the business, and the restaurant began to develop a delivery model.

One of the main areas of focus was to ensure the delivery model did not compromise the brand quality and service ethos of the onsite dining experience. The General Manager of the Hotel initially delivered the food supported by fully uniformed staff to help maintain a level of brand presence in the community. While the property was initially closed, they focused on cold packaged take-aways and delivery. Special occasions such as Mothers' Day were used as opportunities to increase business.





## IDENTIFYING NEW OPPORTUNITIES

When the property re-opened there was a huge demand for afternoon tea. This was based on the social element of friends and family getting out and about after the lockdown period. The Corinthia also noticed an increasing pattern in terms of certain age categories using different times of the day to socialise e.g. older generations in particular availing of the afternoon to avoid busier later evening periods. This prompted additional thinking around how the different parts of the day would be used to generate business e.g. post-work opportunities using the afternoon targeting certain age cohorts.

On re-opening, a large emphasis was placed on showcasing safety policy and procedures. However, the safety message was delivered very subtly to provide a constant reassurance for guests through staff training around consistent staff application of safety measures. This messaging was also reflected in online content as a secondary message supporting the main marketing focus demand generation.



Despite the reduction in capacity, the property did not cut its rate to achieve volume over quality. They increased their pricing by 15% in the outside areas based on the new levels of demand for the outdoor spaces and to also ensure they could sustain the levels of service required as part of their reputation management strategy.

The focus among management was to deal with the reduced capacity and grow the outside dining value per customer. This resulted in a reduced focus in the off-site delivery model largely due to the concerns around managing the quality of food when it is delivered by a third party delivery service provider.

## A NEW FOOD AND MARKETING FOCUS

One of the biggest changes implemented was what was described as “menu engineering”. The management undertook a three-year analysis of what sold particularly well on the menus. They also undertook a review of pricing based on their cocktail lists and drinks and added more combinations that would result in higher levels of profit contribution.



The management also recognised the different customers that were being attracted across the different stages of the day and adapted their marketing to reflect this. They engaged with more mature social influencers rather than the use of younger influencers. This was designed to attract more frequent tea and coffee business among an older audience which has resulted in an increase in footfall in off peak periods. A new focus on the cocktail menu and drinks experience combined with after work charcuterie platters attracted the return of the afterwork business. Their marketing activity also included the development of a joint package with another hotel in the destination, offering the chance to sample the extended range of experiences across the area and adding value to their own stay and dine packages.





The marketing focus has become considerably more targeted with a predominantly digital strategy. After the review of past business, a new customer was being targeted through this digital marketing focus. The Government in Malta issued vouchers to all local residents and these became widely used. However, the greatest level of use was among domestic customers who were extremely price sensitive and unlikely to return to the property unless subsidised. This experience shaped the thinking of the management in who they would target for future business and how they would package their food and beverage experiences.

## ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES

One of the biggest challenges the property experienced was adapting the service team to the new regulations and operating environment. The reduced capacity resulted in the use of new spaces in the hotel to provide additional dining options which resulted in longer distances required between the food service and the food preparation areas. This required a greater level of speed and efficiency in food service and proved difficult particularly among the older members of staff. The opportunity to use wider levels of space in the hotel for dining also became a key element in the marketing to align with the subtle safety and reassurance messaging that the Corinthia was communicating.

One of the main areas of focus in the context of staff training was learning to sell to customers. A range of initiatives were introduced such as special offers on wine such as maximising “bin ends” and marketing of affordable luxury combining food and good quality wine. The focus became more experiential with the staff trained to probe more details from customers when taking a booking so they could potentially identify new sales opportunities.

There was a new focus on the experiential delivery of service and its capacity to generate additional revenue. A whiskey trolley was created to introduce a wide range of whiskeys to customers that was wheeled to their table. It combined the need to restrict movement with an opportunity to upsell whiskey at the diners table through a bespoke experience.

There was a considerable reduction in the food bank held within the property. There was a need to re-train the kitchen staff which was largely attributed to a need to increase the speed of food delivery as a result of the new levels of space that had to be incorporated in the dining experience.

## APPLYING MARKETING INNOVATION

Marketing focus was entirely based on digital channels. The packaging of accommodation deals was based on achieving a room rate that would also ensure that the property received food and beverage expenditure from the visitor. There was a review of past expenditure from previous





guests with a view to understanding the expenditure power of the target audience.

A new data focus to inform the ongoing marketing activity is concentrating on data collection, particularly around registration card information. The focus is now on building the database through all means available e.g. QR codes registration, sign up pages and accessing menus online.

There is an increased level of incorporation of technology such as the use of iPad's at tables that help with the speed and efficiency of the food service operation. It also contributes to this focus around list and data generation with a particular emphasis on the quality of the data captured.

## PREPARING FOR FUTURE RESILIENCE

In preparing for the future resilience, the areas of focus for the Rickshaw restaurant at the Corinthia will include

- There will be a move towards a preference for later dining
- Customers are looking for cleaner menus with foods that require less preparation with more natural foods.
- There will be demand for simple food that is high in flavour.
- There will continue to be hypersensitivity around food handling.
- Dining space will become more integrated in the conscious dining experience.
- There will be an increased focus on getting to know customers, informing menus development and future innovation will be based on understanding customers.
- There will be a requirement for increased rounds of menu changes to keep the offering fresh with a focus on clean and seasonal produce.
- Grill based food will become more popular.
- Technology will become central to all operations but must be simple to use and work across all internal systems.







# CASE STUDY FOUR

## **THE NEWT, UK**







## CASE STUDY FOUR: THE NEWT, UK



### OVERVIEW

This recently opened (June 2019) enterprise, called The Newt Somerset, is the complete re-imagining of a traditional 17th century Country House and its 800 acres of parkland, woodland, and gardens and turning it into a 21st century visitor attraction. The Emily estate has a long tradition of innovation in estate management, horticulture, and gardening. At the heart of the Emily Estate is the, Grade II\* Listed, Hadspen House. The Estate has been owned by the Hobhouse Family (merchants, politicians, and philanthropists) since 1785 until purchased in 2013 by South African billionaire media and design couple Koos Bekker and Karen Roos.

The enterprise is located two miles south of the Somerset market town of Bruton about 30 minutes driving time from Bristol and over 2 hours by train from London

The project consists of a 23room, rustic-chic, hotel in the House with spa, restaurants and bar with an adjacent visitor attraction comprising re-modelled gardens, a cidery producing cider from the Estes 63 acres of orchards, a Farm Shop selling produce from the Estate's Avalon Farm, a upscale gift shop, a subterranean Museum of Gardening and an Ice Cream Parlour.





International architects and designers were employed to create the design and local crafts people and horticulturalists to create the gardens and the whole 'farm-to-fork' lifestyle proposition. The outcome is an attraction that is world-class and has food and drink at its heart.

## FOOD EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT

There has been considerable diversification of the product offer: the visitor journey is planned to ensure that there are lots of places to encounter food and drink for consumption, for direct sale supported by lots of on-site and on-line prompts to buy. This means, for example, that there are three themed shops in the core visitor area (The Farm Shop selling their own farm produce and wines / ciders from The Newt and Babylonstoren; a garden produce and plant shop and a gift ware shop specialising in kitchen and cookery-related; ice cream outlets and mobile sales on bicycles; coffee shop and retail-related to gardening in The Garden Museum).



There have been high levels of self-sufficiency giving very local provenance to the food and drink offer. The gardens, working farm and the orchards are managed to produce food and the cider for use in the hotel, restaurants and for sale in the shops. There has been a priority placed on growing traditional, sometimes, rare species of apples in particular. Where the Estate is unable to provide produce additional vegetables and fruit is sourced from a network of approved (by the Estate) local suppliers.

Visitors are allowed to explore the gardens, the orchards and parts of the farm to see production: this is to encourage an interaction by guests with the sustainable methods of production and an understanding of the way food is grown and produced. Guests are allowed to touch and taste crops in the gardens and to wander the fields and meadows.



The Estate uses the Candide app to allow visitors to find out more about the plants that they encounter. ([www.candidegardening.com](http://www.candidegardening.com)). This app is made available free-of-charge on payment of the admission fee and is immediately activated. The arrangement also allows every guest to share the app (and hence The Newt experience) with two other named persons thus increasing the reach of the marketing by 60%.

There is cross selling of all aspects of all the products: throughout the experience guests are prompted to explore and visit all aspects of the Estate and, especially, to take advantage of the on-site and on-line shopping opportunities. This is achieved by cleverly designed flows and the design of footpaths the visual triggers and the location of outlets at key points.

Picnics are allowed: despite the commercial emphasis on encouraging spend on-site guests are encouraged to bring their own picnics. This has created a positive impact for a number of reasons: (i) local people feel welcomed and not 'priced-out' by a perception of higher priced food and



drink on-site; (ii) those guests bringing their own picnic are spending on hot and cold drinks and supplementary snacks during their visit; (iii) they are staying longer on-site; and, (iv) are spending on take away goods. In addition, this 'freedom' is encouraging repeat visitation by local people and word-of-mouth recommendations.

The admissions policy is based on generating good will and repeat visitation: the entry fee (see: [www.thenewtinsomerset.com](http://www.thenewtinsomerset.com) for current charges) allows visitors unlimited return visits during a 12month period plus free admission for up to two named persons. In addition, all guests get the free Candide app.

## RESPONDING TO COVID-19

A number of initiatives and projects were developed by the business during the Covid-19 pandemic.



Advance booking tickets with allocated time slots were introduced for the visitor attraction. This has worked well to manage the flow of visitors and to manage the capacity of the car parks. As a result, entry is efficient without any waiting times or delays. A concierge service is available at reception together with good information, free maps and a dedicated free electric car to transport less-mobile guests to the core area. The information at point-of-entry includes details about the menus in the various outlets and the array of goods for sale in the shops.

Additional pop-up' serveries selling teas, cakes, coffee and soft drinks were deployed around the parkland walks. During busy times there is a fleet of mobile units (including old fashioned grocery delivery bikes) and pop-up serveries at busy areas thus reducing the demand on the indoor spaces and boosting impulse sales.

Innovative pricing and ticketing policy involving download of the Newt's 'Candide' app to provide up-to-date information and instant recognition and information about the plants seen in the garden plus free repeat visits for 12 months and the ability to nominate up to two other families to gain free admission. This app and the collection of guest emails allows the Estate to send fortnightly e-Newsletters which are cleverly written using seasonal ideas that stimulate on-line sales of food and drink by promoting a recipe, a particular fruit of vegetable or an idea by one of the gardeners or estate workers.



The introduction of a day package including first class rail fare to / from London, cider tasting, demonstrations and lunch and tea for £295 per person, enabling a visitor to do in a day what would normally involve an overnight stay. Clearly responding to (a) the fact that during the easing of the lockdown the hotel was at capacity and aware of the fact that there was pent-up demand in London for a special occasion they introduced this package making use of the local railway station and main-line service to London.





Introduction of 'shop mobile' mix of on-line shopping and purchase on-site with delivery to home was promoted using the Newsletter and consists of recipes designed by chefs and the delivery of the complete box of ingredients to make the meal yourself. The service included suggestions for paired ciders and wines and cheeses.

The development of demonstrations and tasting sessions, a regular feature during the day when visiting the Estate was extended to on-line demonstrations. The purpose is to engage guests but at the same time to promote sales of food and drink.

Introduction of the Stop Look Listen online Instagram TV program with regular episodes featuring the Estate's gardening teams, which has had the impact of connecting guests to individuals working at The Newt thus building personal and emotional ties such that when a suggestion is made to 'try this cider' or 'this cheese' it is provoking sales.

Additionally, the business has maintained a very good website and associated newsletter (CRM program) giving hints as to healthy eating and living, tips for seasonal foods and all using emotive, sensual, clever language and imagery.



## SUMMARY IMPACTS OF RESPONSE TO COVID-19

Positive impacts generated by the innovation developed by The Newt include:

1. Consistently good PR is secured across all media (local, national and international) on a frequent basis supported by local word of mouth recommendations (see: [www.telegraph.co.uk](http://www.telegraph.co.uk); [www.cntraveller.com](http://www.cntraveller.com); [www.standard.co.uk](http://www.standard.co.uk)).
2. Strengthening reputation: the whole experience has a focus on engagement and interaction with the environment and with the produce grown on the Estate. Clever pricing policies, innovative use of the Candide app, and Newsletter.
3. The capturing of hearts and minds of local people has been crucial to the robust development and early success of the scheme and building the foundations for a long-term sustainable future.
4. Generating significant numbers of staying and day visitation throughout Covid-19 (day and staying visitors) and managing the resulting capacity implications.
5. Generating high levels of repeat business and visits for the short-term and the longer-term.
6. Cross-referrals with local businesses and new partnerships to grow the collective business.





The most obvious, tangible, and visible factor for success is the investment in quality in every aspect of the product and the visitor experience. This is supported by the innovative use of technology for marketing and on-line sales with a strong communications strategy and excellent CRM systems to ensure constant and consistent messaging to existing customers.

Innovative pricing policies together with many incentives to make return visits throughout the year with multiple opportunities to spend on local produce, arts and crafts and other unique merchandise produced high per capita spend both on-site and off-site.





 **CASE  
STUDY  
FIVE**

**SPARROW BISTRO,  
SWEDEN**





## CASE STUDY FIVE: SPARROW BISTRO, SWEDEN



### OVERVIEW

The Sparrow Bistro is part of the Sparrow Hotel located close to the city centre in Stockholm. The overall French-style theme of the hotel is carried into the hotel's Sparrow Wine Bar and Bistro restaurant which is led by one of Sweden's leading chefs. The restaurant is widely acclaimed as one of Stockholm's finest delivering a modern take on classic French cuisine, popular with residents and the city's residents.

### RESPONDING TO COVID-19

The immediate menu focus was on the development of rustic comfort food and the provision of a simpler menu that supported inhouse efficiency in the relaunch of the Bistro. There was an increased level of focus placed on technology that would support more focus marketing. This resulted in an examination of available third party software options that would support more focus marketing using the data already contained within the business.

The Sparrow Bistro initially focused on take-away but recognised that the quality of service was potentially a challenge in dealing with third party delivery service providers. They recognised that their brand was compromised by individuals not directly employed by the business. Based on this reputational risk, they stopped the take-away option.





## IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL

In seeking to expand footfall to the business their business model has been focused on developing themed evenings and value for money propositions. This has generated good levels of footfall. They regularly host “Bubbly Wednesday” which incorporates champagne tastings. The business has partnered with wine suppliers to host wine evenings aligned with a number of themed approaches. One of the principle approaches was to also bring the customers closer to the people behind the products. The planned evolution of this was to merge the in-bistro experience of meeting the people behind the product with the development of itineraries and creating different personal experiences for customers.

They are planning to bring these “people behind the product” evenings online to develop a series of food events to create marketing collateral. Sustainability represents a core value of the Bistro and the opportunity to work with local producers represented a manifestation of their brand values. “Meet the Producer” experience resonated with the locals who saw it as something different and as a personalised experience outside of the standard dining experience. The replacing of midweek business travellers with leisure visitors has seen an increased focus by the Bistro on ensuring more value being added to the menu due to higher levels of price consciousness among the leisure traveller.



In accordance with regulations set by the Swedish Government the bistro’s capacity of 60 covers was reduced to a new capacity of 40 covers with the requirement to have one metre between tables. In a measure to offset spatial restrictions the Government opened up restrictions for outdoor dining. Previously food businesses would obtain a permit for certain time periods however this has now been opened up for businesses to operate outdoors the whole year round. The Bistro has incorporated an outdoor pizza oven and it also provides for walk ups and takeaway business.



## SUMMARY LEARNING FROM COVID-19

One of the key learnings from the change in the business model was the need to recognise the change in the profile of the customer. They had moved from a position of busy midweek business and quieter weekends to this being overtaken by Saturdays becoming their strongest performing day.

The key lesson for the property was the importance of establishing local loyalty. It became an immediate focus for recovery. Prior to the Pandemic, The Sparrow Bistro attracted large volumes of international business and midweek generated a lot of footfall among business travellers to Stockholm. A challenge for the bistro was how to reposition and market themselves to the local audience with key messages that would generate business particularly midweek.



# CASE STUDY SIX

## **HASELBURY MILL AND GREAT TITHE BARN, UK**







## CASE STUDY SIX: HASELBURY MILL AND GREAT TITHE BARN, UK



### OVERVIEW

Haselbury Mill in Somerset, UK dates back to the time of William the Conqueror. The buildings now form a 3-star plus hotel with 21 bedrooms dispersed between three separate buildings in the historic core with 3 restaurants, 2 bars (including the Windy Miller's pub) and several function facilities – including the Great Tithe Barn. Additional beds are located about 500 yards from the main complex in The Gathering in The Glade – a cluster of three wagons in a woodland setting on the river bank.



This enterprise is owned by a private limited company the three directors who since acquiring the property over 15 years ago have developed it into one of the destination's leading hospitality brands known for its good, honest, and wholesome experiences (based on food, drink, quality of service and value for money pricing policies combined with innovation and a touch of the eclectic.

It represents a successful local business, owned, and managed by local people. Throughout its 20 years history as a hospitality business it has evolved into a highly respected venue for weddings and other events. The owners have consistently courted the local markets building high levels of repeat business and loyalty – a factor that has stood them in good stead during the pandemic. For years, for example, the Mill has hosted (free-of-charge) meetings of local charities and has donated extensively in support of local good causes.

The Mill represents a number of best practice features:

- (i) Constant innovation and creativity;
- (ii) diversification of the core product;
- (iii) extraordinary focus on local stories and local produce;
- (iv) high levels of commitment to delivering great experiences;
- (v) wise use of limited resources;
- (vi) understanding of the use of incremental spending to grow revenues;
- (vii) using the initial COVID lockdown period to refresh and invest in refurbishment;
- (viii) using local craftspeople to undertake all the refurbishments



## RESPONDING TO COVID-19

Pre-Covid-19, the enterprise had a strong domestic leisure market (events, weddings, pleasure) and mixed international and domestic clientele for the MICE which has specifically focused on farming groups, local businesses and local charitable groups.

From start of lock down in Spring 2020 the Mill immediately introduced a drive-through take ways with paired drinks and a highly discounted offer for NHS works – at peak they were serving 100 meals a week with these arrangements.

During the first stage of coming out of lockdown they introduced a 'Pizza in the Park' ticketed weekend program in the outdoors with pop-up food stalls but, although successful in terms of tickets sold, it attracted the wrong demographic and was ended after two weekends. Staying with the basic idea, the owners transformed the concept into a ticketed





family festival with simple activities and games for the family linked to picnic in the park with each family allocated a space, a picnic and live music. Over 300 family tickets were sold over three weekends.

They developed a program of dining with reduced capacity in the main restaurant but building capacity by using meeting rooms and the pub / bars all done in association with the local authority key account manager to sort planning and licensing.

This initiative was supplemented by a sequence of promotions involving afternoon teas on the riverbank with the selling of a further 250 tickets during August. This idea was then developed for October, with a Halloween inspired, 'Spooknoon Teas' with a spooknoon trail for the children and activity books in two weeks over 200 tickets sold at £39.95.

Throughout late November and December the idea morphed into a drive through 'enchanted' Christmas experience with a range of light shows and the collection of a Christmas gift from a Santa Grotto at the exit to the estate. Over 150 tickets were sold for this experience. This was enhanced with an outdoor local producers one-day Christmas market on 20th December and a one-night, by invitation only concert for 90 local guests involving world renowned musicians.



## KEY BUSINESS OUTCOMES

The success of this enterprise is undoubtedly down to the tenacity, drive, and inventiveness of the owners. They run a well operated, cost-efficient, business model. The creative implementation is the responsibility of one person and delivered by on-site maintenance crew and in-house crafts people.

The Mill maintains a very good relationship with local people and with its customer base through an e-Newsletter plus lots of personal contact with customers. For example, all brides who had their weddings cancelled because of Covid-19 have been sent a special gift to thank them for re-booking in 2021 thus building good will.

Room sales have been linked directly to dining packages and bookable direct with the hotel thus cutting out the booking engines and increasing profits and yields on rooms. Covid-19 related regulations and physical requirements (such as spacing screens in the restaurants) have been done to the highest quality.

Revenue income has been maintained by the development and focus on growing incremental spend as, for example, two families buy tickets for the 'Spooknoon Teas' there will be secondary spend on extra drinks, take-away pizzas, and extras for the kids and the cross-selling of opportunities to book tables for lunches resulting in a significant uplift of bookings. At all times, there was a commitment to adding value to all the experiences. For example, there were lots of additional 'free giveaways' to children (such as coloured pencils and activity books) for every afternoon tea ticket bought.





In addition to the success of the business as measured by its turnover during the pandemic there has been a number of other reputational enhancements: (i) strengthening relationship with the local community; (ii) developing a positive relationship with local authority; and, (iii) great local PR.

In addition, the dynamics of developing and implementing fast moving ideas with rapid decision-making and investment has demonstrated ideas that work and can be carried forward in a post-Covid-19 situation. The in-house team has risen to the challenge and showed that they are adaptable and respond well to change.

The idea of a dedicated ideas person has worked. Social media and a simple website have demonstrated that you do not need a large marketing budget. A knowledgeable and sound understanding of local markets has been crucial together with a close engagement with the key people in the Local Authority.



Success has come as a result of a willingness to try new things, monitoring their success and improving as they progressed while bringing ideas that didn't work to a quick ending.







# CASE STUDY SEVEN

## **DAWES TWINE WORKS AND THE TWINEMAKER'S ARMS, UK**





## CASE STUDY SEVEN: DAWES TWINE WORKS AND THE TWINEMAKER'S ARMS, UK



### OVERVIEW

The Dawes Twine Works and Twinemaker's Arms Pub are located in a rural Somerset village in the south west of England.

For over three hundred years from 1700 to the early 20th century West Coker, together with the neighbouring village of East Coker, were a centre for twine and rope making as well as the production of high-quality sail cloth.

This case study explores two components of the project: (a) the Dawes Twineworks Heritage site and visitor centre and (b) the extension of the project to take over and operate one of the village pubs that was forced to cease operating due to the pandemic and its re-opening as The Twinemaker's Arms.





This provides a good illustration of how a community-led heritage restoration and conservation project has diversified into becoming a focal point for community activities involving food and drink. It demonstrates that, through collective effort and a shared vision, a project can evolve into a multi-purpose venue using simple ideas that are well-executed and delivered with style and panache.

Innovation and a willingness to try new ideas combined with a passion for the project as a whole has resulted in a unique, highly respected, and novel visitor attraction. The business model is driven by the core values of doing something 'good' for the community rather than a volume driven model where levels of visitation and spending is the measure of success.

In Spring 2019, the small visitor centre was built housing an exhibition space, and archive, toilets, a small retail area and a café (capacity 35 covers) that has become a village facility. The factory is now operational. The attraction is open for pre-booked groups and for events and open days. The café is open most days.

The whole enterprise is run by volunteers. In addition to providing interpretation as guides and demonstrators there is a core team of villagers making cakes and the Trust is now involved making their own cider for retail (takeaway as well as on-site consumption) using traditional heritage apples from local orchards and local recipes. They are also running themed dining experiences with a talk on an aspect of the heritage of sail and rope making. Volunteers prepare the food whilst a specialist provides the paired wines and talks about the provenance – a kind of heritage and wine sommelier. Plans are in place for a novel dining experience in the Spring where a five-course menu is designed, and a competition held for diners to vote on if the paired wine or the paired cider is the best complement to each course.

## RESPONDING TO COVID-19

Food and drink now forming an essential part of the visitor experience and generating revenues for the operation. This includes casual purchases as well as set meals for visiting groups and the themed evening heritage meets food and wine evenings. In August 2020, the visitor centre achieved a 5\* hygiene rating and had become, de facto, the Village Café and meeting place.

At the start of the pandemic in March 2020 the tenant of a local pub was unable to make the enterprise work and it soon closed. One of the Trustees of the Twineworks successfully applied for the license, refurbished the property and it's six bedrooms within a 6-week period using the same team of craftspeople who had restored the Twineworks. He then re-opened the pub in July 2020 and re-named it The Twinemaker's Arms. He engaged a cook from the village serving quality local food and drink supported by a weekly events program (music and dining) together



with themed evenings pairing local food with drinks and traditional pub games.

There is with cross-selling, collaborative promotions, and other joint initiatives with the heritage site. Visitors are encouraged to stay at the pub, or at Lanes Hotel, to create an overnight package. Artists and performers who are booked at the pub are also invited to perform at the Twineworks and vice versa and a new contemporary arts festival has emerged that helps connect these two sites and other places of interest in both East and West Coker ([www.oddartsfestival.co.uk](http://www.oddartsfestival.co.uk)). The next edition of the festival is scheduled for May 2021.

In addition, there has been increasing collaboration between The Twineworks and the pub with other South Somerset tourism businesses most notable Hauser and Wirth Contemporary Art Gallery in Bruton, The Somerset Cider Brandy Company in Huish Episcopi, and Haselbury Mill. On a rather more extravagant basis the Twineworks Trustees have in December 2020 announced collaborations with the Government of Antigua to celebrate their shared sail making links and their connections with Lord Nelson along with an agreement with the British Museum to share exhibitions.



## APPLYING INNOVATION

There are a number of stand out aspects of innovation that makes these projects a success:

- a community initiative and local leadership;
- the importance of diversification of a heritage project;
- clever use of local produce and volunteers;
- the bold development with addition of village pub;
- the use of innovative events and themed evenings at both sites;
- establishing strong local networks with community groups and local suppliers;
- working with other successful initiatives such as Hauser & Wirth and Haselbury Mill;
- the clever use of social media peppered with a sense of fun and delivered with good humour.

Particular innovation at the Twineworks heritage site includes: becoming the village café; developing a local themed lunch menu called the 'Somerset and Dorset Jurassic Tasting Menu' specialising in local food and wines from Furliegh Estate; signing up a team of volunteer cooks to make homemade cakes, etc; offering themed dining for evening group visits including a heritage talk and a selection of wines; holding heritage days (150 people over two days) on three occasions during lock-down offering snacks and lunch menu as well as dining events with the local WI group (6 tables with 6 persons).







The innovations at the Twinemaker's Arms include: the development of a takeaway meals with one choice each week at a reasonable set price of £7.50; regular Sunday roasts which have sold out every week; introduced a daily lunch menu of two courses for £6; commencing a regular program of live music inside and in the exterior courtyard; re-introducing traditional pub games; converting the skittle alley (not able to play team games indoors) to provide larger dining capacity; and having a weekly competition for customers to win a 'swag bag' of local produce.

## SUMMARY OF BUSINESS IMPACTS

The following are regarded as the main critical success factors:

- a focus on growing loyal customer base from a very local audiences;
- developing visitation from niche interest groups;
- serving a real local need for a meeting and social environment during Covid-19;
- generating civic pride and community involvement;
- driving revenues from different sources;
- ensuring quality standards and reviews (5\* hygiene and both the heritage site and the pub are receiving 5\* TripAdvisor reviews);
- the inclusion of food and drink as an integral part of the heritage experience;
- innovation on a regular basis with community involvement and volunteer effort;
- using local produce with simple recipes backed by a strong narrative linked to the heritage story; and
- clear vision, leadership and determined commitment.





# Fáilte Ireland

National Tourism Development Authority

