



Make Your Venue Work Harder

Your venue already has more potential than you think. The key is to use it better, sell it better, and give people more reasons to choose you.

For hospitality businesses, standing still is rarely enough. Customer habits change, trading patterns shift, and quieter periods can quickly drag on income if they are left unchecked. Whether you run a café in a market town, a pub in a village, a restaurant on the coast, or a venue in a busy city centre, this guide is designed to help you spot missed opportunities and turn them into practical action. The aim is simple: make more from the space, time, and customers you already have.

Start by looking at what is underused

Many hospitality businesses are busiest at only a few points in the week. A lunch rush, a Friday evening, or a sunny weekend can mask the fact that mornings, midweek afternoons, and off-season periods are much quieter than they should be. If parts of your venue sit empty or underused for long stretches, that is not just a space issue. It is a missed income opportunity. The good news is that small, focused changes can make a real difference.

Five practical ways to make your venue work harder

1. Create reasons to visit at different times of day

Do not let your quieter hours go unchallenged. If you are busy in the evening, look again at the value of your mornings and afternoons. A town-centre café could test breakfast clubs or remote working offers, while a coastal venue could promote weather-proof daytime deals outside peak visitor hours.

2. Use events to bring in new audiences

Events can do more than fill seats for one night. Done well, they help you attract new customers, create repeat visits, and build a stronger local profile. Quiz nights, local producer tastings, supper clubs, live music, themed menus, family sessions, and seasonal workshops can all work if they reflect your customers and your location.

3. Work with nearby businesses and local groups

You do not have to do everything alone. The right partnership can bring in customers you would not reach on your own. Consider working with a local deli, brewery, florist, bookshop, artist, tourist attraction, or business network to create shared offers, events, trails, or cross-promotion.

4. Offer flexible uses for your space

Look hard at what is sitting idle. A private room, terrace, empty corner, or quieter weekday period could become bookable space. That might mean private hire,



pop-up retail, community meetings, co-working mornings, business meet-ups, or small celebrations.

5. Add a simple retail offer

A retail element can help you increase spend without adding more covers. This could include local produce, branded goods, take-home treats, gift boxes, meal kits, vouchers, or products linked to your events and menus. In Norfolk and Suffolk, this often works best when it reflects local identity and gives customers something worth taking away.

Ideas you can try

- Run a morning coffee and co-working offer for freelancers, remote workers, and local professionals.
- Host parent and baby meet-ups in quieter daytime slots.
- Create pre-theatre menus or post-event offers near local venues and cultural spaces.
- Use seasonal tasting nights to showcase Norfolk or Suffolk produce.
- Partner with local makers, brewers, food producers, or farm shops.
- Offer bookable meeting space for local networks, councillors, charities, and community groups.
- Introduce pop-up retail with local independents during festivals, market days, or holiday periods.
- Develop wet weather offers for coastal towns when visitor footfall changes suddenly.

Bold ideas

- Create a monthly market-style evening with local traders, makers, and food producers.
- Position your venue as a regular meeting point for walking groups, cyclists, coastal visitors, or local business networks.
- Build a signature event around local identity, such as a seafood night, harvest supper, makers' social, winter warming club, or market town late opening.
- Turn quieter periods into themed experiences that encourage advance booking and repeat visits.
- Develop ideas that connect strongly to place, season, and community so your venue feels memorable rather than interchangeable.

Make sure it works financially

New ideas only matter if they are commercially worthwhile. Before you launch anything, be clear about what it will cost, how much staff time it needs, and what success should look like. If an idea is popular but does not make money, it may still need to change.



- Use the space, stock, and team you already have where possible.
- Build offers around high-margin items such as drinks, desserts, add-ons, or set menus.
- Set a minimum spend, booking fee or ticket price if needed.
- Keep the format simple enough to repeat if it works.
- Review whether the idea brings in extra income, extra footfall or both.

Tell people clearly what is new

Even a strong idea will fail quietly if people do not hear about it. If you are trialling something new, explain it clearly, repeat the message often, and make it easy for customers to understand why it is worth trying.

- Use window posters and table talkers as well as social media.
- Mention it in every customer touchpoint, including bookings and receipts if possible.
- Share it with nearby businesses, local groups and town networks.
- Link it to market days, school holidays, festivals, seafront activity, or seasonal visitor patterns.
- Use clear photos so people can quickly understand the experience.

Actions you can take this week

- Identify one underused time slot, room or area.
- Choose one improvement that fits your customers, your location and your team capacity.
- Price it properly and decide how you will measure success.
- Promote it in at least three places before you launch.
- Run a short trial, review the results and improve it quickly.

Common mistakes to avoid

- Launching too many ideas at once and delivering none of them well.
- Running events that create activity but not profit.
- Creating offers that are too complicated for staff to deliver consistently.
- Ignoring quieter daytime or off-season trading patterns.
- Copying someone else's idea without adapting it to your town, customers, or venue.

Take action

Do not wait for trade to improve on its own. Choose one space, one quiet period, or one customer group to focus on first and test a better use for it this month. Start small, learn quickly and build on what works. The hospitality businesses that stand out in Norfolk and Suffolk are often the ones that keep improving, keep adapting and keep giving people a fresh reason to visit.