



Delivering Great Customer Experience

Simple, practical ways to create a consistent, high-quality experience that keeps customers coming back.

You do not need complicated systems to deliver a great experience. In hospitality, the basics done well, every time, make the biggest difference. Customers remember how you made them feel, whether they were looked after, and if everything matched their expectations. This guide focuses on simple actions that help cafés, pubs, restaurants and venues create reliable, positive experiences.

Why customer experience matters

Customers have more choice than ever. This means they can be far more particular about where to spend their money, especially if their disposable income is limited. A great experience leads to repeat visits, stronger word of mouth and better reviews.

A poor experience, even once, can quickly put people off. In places with strong competition, from city centres to coastal and market towns, consistency is what sets good businesses apart from the rest.

Three things that shape the experience

1. First impressions count

Customers make decisions about a business quickly, often within the first few seconds of arriving. The following few minutes then set the tone for everything that follows.

Focus on:

- A clean, tidy and welcoming entrance .
- Staff acknowledging customers within a few seconds of arrival.
- A warm, prompt greeting - even when busy.

Simple actions that work:

- Make eye contact and smile as soon as customers arrive.
- Let people know you have seen them, even if they need to wait.
- Keep front-of-house areas clutter-free and well-presented.
- Check toilets and key areas regularly throughout the day.

2. Staff behaviour and consistency

Customers expect the same level of service every time they visit. Inconsistent service is one of the most common causes of negative feedback.

Focus on:

- Friendly, approachable and attentive staff.
- Clear service standards everyone follows.
- Good communication between team members.

**Simple actions that work:**

- Agree a few non-negotiable service basics (eg greet every guest, check back after serving food).
- Brief staff at the start of each shift so everyone is aligned.
- Lead by example, behaviour from managers sets the tone.
- Support staff during busy periods so standards do not slip.

3. Managing the atmosphere

The atmosphere of a business is not something that is created by your customers, it is artificially created by you to improve the customer experience and varies according to what you are trying to achieve.

Focus on:

- Keep the lighting levels appropriate, dimmer or softer lighting creates intimacy. Brighter lighting encourages vibrancy and a more sociable atmosphere as well as highlighting cleanliness.
- Monitor your music levels and content closely to make sure they match the atmosphere you are creating. As a rule, music should be quiet enough to allow customers to hold a conversation amongst themselves, but loud enough that they cannot be easily overheard.
- Staff behaviour helps shape the feel of the space (friendly vs rushed vs relaxed).

Simple actions that work:

- Create simple 'day vs evening' settings for lighting and playlists to align with the mood you want customers to feel.
- Do hourly checks for cleanliness, temperature, and noise levels to make sure the environment stays consistent throughout the day.
- Brief staff at the start of each shift on the desired 'vibe' (eg lively lunch rush vs calm evening dining) so service matches the atmosphere.

Handling complaints properly

Inevitably things will go wrong at some point. What matters most is how you deal with it.

Handled well, a complaint can turn into a loyal customer. Handled badly, it often leads to negative reviews and lost business. Remember: all feedback, both good and bad, is always valuable.

Focus on:

- Listening without interrupting.
- Taking responsibility and showing understanding, don't be defensive.
- Acting quickly to resolve the issue.
- If you notice a customer seems unhappy, proactively speak to them rather than waiting for them to complain to you.

**Simple actions that work:**

- Stay calm, listen to the client without interrupting and show empathy.
- Take ownership: ask how the customer would like this issue to be resolved and then agree a solution.
- Follow up before the customer leaves so they feel valued.

Actions you can take this week:

- Imagine you are one of your customers: walk into your premises and review your first impressions. Be honest: what would you improve?
- Agree three simple service standards with your team to be used at all times
- Hold a quick briefing at the start of each shift on the desired 'vibe' so service matches the desired atmosphere.
- Brief staff on how to handle complaints confidently and empower them to deal with complaints themselves where possible.

Common mistakes to avoid:

- Ignoring customers when they arrive or making them wait without acknowledgement.
- Letting service standards vary depending on who is working.
- Being defensive or dismissive when handling complaints.
- Focusing only on selling products rather than the overall customer experience.

Take action

Start small and stay consistent. Pick one or two improvements and put them into practice straight away. Over time, these small changes build a stronger reputation, better reviews and more repeat visits.