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BUSINESS START UP: FOOD SAFETY

NEED TO KNOW

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GETTING STARTED

Starting your new venture in the hospitality industry is a very exciting, rewarding yet challenging time. It's very easy to get caught up in menu creation, pricing, staffing, décor considerations, fixtures & fittings & finding the best suppliers. Of course, all these are extremely important aspects of your business but pay lip service to good food safety at your peril. Businesses & customers are becoming more and more aware of the importance of food safety and its implications when falling foul of it, in part this is due to high profile cases of contamination.

Food poisoning is extremely easy and unless you have a good knowledge of the potential hazards associated with food types, temperatures and cross contamination the negative impacts on your business if not managed correctly are high. Ultimately so high that you could close in much less time than it took to get it open.

There's a common misconception that your local hygiene team are there to catch you out. For those of you who have not yet had the opportunity of running a food business I'm happy to share with you that my experiences are all positive. My advice is to actually go out of your way to maintain a relationship with your designated officer. Whilst their ultimate objective is protecting public health they are extremely helpful and want to facilitate the smooth operation your business, and naturally the two should go hand in hand. I urge you to see them as friend and ally and not the police disguised in a white lab coat! Sure, they may well come in unannounced, and yes, invariably it will be at the most inopportune time, during the busiest section of service, but how else can they see your food handling and operational processes operating for real?

In a nutshell, your Food hygiene officer needs to be able to trust you and to see you taking the protection of your customers health seriously. Work positively and be proactive with them. Ultimately this approach will help your businesses flourish with consistent 5 star hygiene ratings and a positive contribution to great Tripadvisor reviews.

Actions:

Approach your local councils Food Hygiene team:

- Get your business registered as soon as possible (28 days before as a minimum, more where possible). If you are redesigning your kitchen they have really useful policy & guidance but this may affect the equipment & layout. You need to know about this early on.
- Get your food hygiene certificate – you can't operate without this! Your local authority will have a list of accredited providers. It can be taken classroom style or on-line to suit yourself.
- Get your Safer Food Better Business Pack (SFBB)– follow this to structure your food safety management procedures and adhere to food hygiene regulations
- Form a relationship with your designated Food Safety Officer. Start by asking advice they'll really appreciate this and will help convince them that you have strong management approach to food safety.

ON THE JOB

Get into a daily routine with your checks and don't try and compromise this. Better to catch a fridge going down when you start your shift than half way through service.

- Stick to your policies and procedures and don't cut corners. Do all you can to ensure your food hygiene rating stays at a five! – your rating is a direct reflection on you and your business, it is a telling indicator to the general public of how you prioritize the importance of your customers well-being. In addition, ever increasing high street competition means customers don't have to travel far to find a competitor that may offer a similar product or service but also has a better rating.
- Keep your food safety pack up to date with changes in procedures, training & suppliers etc. Make sure your staff are aware of these changes and get them to sign that they have read them. Don't assume staff understand written procedures, especially if they are new, always check their understanding.
- Religiously record your fridge & food temperatures and at the correct times.
- Make your pest control review a priority and keep a constant look out. The implications of vermin and the possibility of customers & staff becoming aware of their presence could well be hugely damaging.
- Review your food safety procedures on a regular basis, new risks may be introduced as a result of changes in staff roles, menus and equipment.

WHAT'S AROUND THE CORNER

Food Safety change is coming to the hospitality industry. The Food Standards Agency has pledged to change the way it monitors food businesses by 2020. So what does that mean for your food business?

The FSA want a real focus on the consumer having the right to make food choices based on fact, not fabrication. It will be doing everything in its power to make sure the food you and your business produces and/or sells on is exactly what it claims to be. Food labelling (in particular allergens) & clear menu composition will become more and more important.

Small food businesses should anticipate stricter sentencing as the FSA moves to crack down on manufacturers, suppliers and retailers who've misled the end customer. The FSA's pledge is based on the belief that customers have the right to know that what they are eating is exactly what it claims to be.

According to the FSA digital food safety systems are becoming increasingly important. Smart technology Systems comprising mobile apps and automated fridge monitors that enable safety checks to be recorded electronically with a tamperproof date and time stamp are readily available. These make checks easier, faster and less invasive a distinct advantage over paper records which are not only tedious but easily falsified and open to human error. According to "Check-it" over the next few years there will be rapid adoption of cloud based smart systems within the food and hospitality sector. These systems help integrate food safety into one compliance management system that also encompasses stock control, deliveries & staff rotas. This has further advantages when considering businesses that run units over multiple sites. Your local food hygiene team, the FSA and the following website will provide further guidance and advice on the changing shape of food safety monitoring.

<http://www.checkit.net/>

USEFUL LINKS

- The Food Standards Agency - www.food.gov.uk
- National Food Hygiene Rating Scheme - <http://ratings.food.gov.uk>
- Safer Food Better Business Pack - www.food.gov.uk/business-industry/caterers/sfbb/
- Trading Standards – www.uktradingstandards.co.uk
- Your local council may also run food groups which aim to give guidance and training to local businesses in all aspects of food safety. They also aim to help keep you up to speed with changes to legislation.

References

FSA

<http://www.checkit.net/food-safety-issues-trends-2020/>