

## **Speeding To Success**

### **Robert Read Catering Quality Audit System And York Racecourse**

Ahead of the 2010 Racing Season, FCSI Consultant Robert Read, owner of Robert Read Associates (RRA) was appointed by the largest Racing Venue in the North, York Racecourse, to work with the team to independently review and help further improve the Course's well regarded food and beverage operation.

Robert's unique Catering Quality Audit System, which is used at iconic Sporting Venues across the country including amongst others Wembley, The Millennium Stadium, Twickenham, Croke Park and Durham County Cricket was used to benchmark its performance against national mean average data to find out exactly which areas needed addressing to make the service, catering and organisation at the Venue even more successful.

Following the results of two Audits at Racedays in 2010, a detailed action plan developed by the York team and a £500,000 investment in bars, lawns and catering equipment, has seen a series of developments to the Racecourse Catering and Hospitality offer. This has led to an impressive increase in sales. After this success, York Racecourse employed the Audit System at the same May Raceday in 2011 with outstanding results. The May Meeting was up in per head sales by over ten per cent year on year and records for daily Public Catering sales have been smashed.

Robert comments: "The way York has used the Audit System is a perfect example of how it should be done. They've taken on board the improvements and shown why it is a robust tool for improving performance across a Venue. The Racecourse has efficient service, catering and food they can truly be proud of."

#### **Out Of The Start Gates**

York Racecourse approached RRA as part of their on-going development process where they look to improve all aspects of the Venue to make the race-going experience enjoyable, value for money and a great day out. As part of this consultancy, Robert recommended the use of his Catering Quality Audit System, which is an impartial system that identifies the areas that need to be improved. This unique tool highlights what needs to be done to boost business. Operators then use the results to form an action plan and make the necessary adjustments in order to improve their Venue.

William Derby, Chief Executive and Clerk of the Course at York Racecourse comments: "We're always keen to improve the Raceday experience for our customers and we engaged with Robert in 2010 as part of this programme. The Racecourse is one of the largest and most successful Venues in the north of England, so it's vitally important that the quality of what we do continues to rise and that our customers have a thoroughly enjoyable time."

#### **Finding The Right Route**

The brief included three main elements - to assess the public space catering, to look at private hospitality and to find out from racegoers what areas they felt could be improved.

Each Audit is always completed on Event days so the facilities can be assessed when working at capacity and so they can be compared to both national mean average data and previous Events. This makes the process consistent to produce reliable results.

Robert's team of highly trained Assessors spent time at the Venue during the audit period assessing each of the different bars, restaurants and hospitality suites. With over 100 bars, a vast array of catering outlets and some of the largest permanent facilities in British racing, this was no mean feat. The Assessors look at everything from customer service, product quality and physical appearance of the staff and of the units. Once completed, the independent team centrally feedback their observations to be processed. This system means that accurate and fair results are produced with every Audit.

## **Taking The Reins**

Robert continues: "Once our robust Audit has taken place we feedback to the Client with action points rated in order of importance. At York these included several areas for consideration including how to expand their ever popular champagne lawns and how to speed up service. Together with the team at York we developed a plan, which included both some short-term changes as well as some major investment by the Racecourse in facilities.

"Also, thanks to direct feedback from York's customers at the Racecourse we realised that there were small things that could be changed straight away to make a difference to its catering - one of these was simply stocking Guinness and a premium lager at the bars. The detail that came out of the Audit process gives each Client an in-depth look at their Venue, which is invaluable to building on their offer."

In addition, the audit identified a deeper issue around space. It was noted that at some of the outlets queue times were not as short as they could be and that there needed to be some expansion of Public Catering facilities. This led to the development of a long-term building plan during winter, which included transforming a large chunk of the back of house area to front of house, and purpose building a new champagne lawn and bar. The outcome of the project was remarkably successful. In the 2011 season the Racecourse has been able to dramatically reduce queue times for refreshments, offer improved landscape and customer facilities - a huge improvement on previous racedays.

Robert comments: "York take their development very seriously and so they got some really positive results from the Audit. Not only did they embark on the massive redevelopment project they also worked on areas such as staffing skills, uniforms, hygiene standards and signage improvements. They took every result from the Audit and turned it into something really positive for the business."

Nick Fazackerley, General Manager of York Racecourse Hospitality, the partner Caterer at the Racecourse comments: "The whole independent Audit process let us see more than a 'snapshot' of each aspect of the Venue which is an invaluable insight. On a raceday the senior management team are very hands-on making it difficult for us to stand back and observe how a bar performs over a longer period - Robert's team was able to do this for us in an unobtrusive and professional way. The action plan we developed as a result covered a whole range of improvements including point of sale material, bar layouts and additional equipment such as tills, dishwashers and credit card facilities. The combination of the 2010 audit, the investment programme and the hard work of all the teams involved have helped us make our customers day more enjoyable and to make our operation more successful."

## **Trophy Winning Results**

In May 2011 York saw all of its hard work come to fruition. The facilities and employees came out of the Audit remarkably improved and there was clear success across both the Public Catering areas and the Hospitality Suites. The boost to their revenues is fantastic - a true testament to the success of its developments and the Audit process alike.

William adds: "We're exceptionally pleased with the smooth running of the Event and the improvements on results from the previous Audit. We're delighted, the business is booming and, more importantly, the punters are flooding in for an enjoyable day of racing. A lot of this is down to the improvements made as a result of the Audit.

"The huge amount of detail and information that came out of the process made it possible to implement such successful changes and it has driven our performance. We've found it a very useful perspective and an important element in our continued development and are appreciative for the important role Robert Read and his team have played in helping us raise the bar even higher. To top the year off we won the "Excellence in Racecourse Catering 2011" at the National Racing Catering Awards sponsored by Piper Heidsieck and "York Tourism and Hospitality Business of the Year" and part of this win can be attributed to Robert and his Audit."