



MAKE VENUES

**UNDERSTANDING
EXCELLENCE**

BROADWAY HOUSE
Part of **MAKE VENUES**

ENGINEERS' HOUSE
Part of **MAKE VENUES**

WOODLAND GRANGE
Part of **MAKE VENUES**

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the inaugural Make Venues White Paper report, which looks into the concept of customer service excellence.

This is an area we were passionate about before the coronavirus crisis, as we think back to celebrating both the 2019 BVA BDRRC VenueVerdict awards for Small and Mid-sized Group for a seventh consecutive year, plus Best Value for Money Venue Group 2019. It's an area we're still extremely passionate about as we reshape our business for a world in which the customer needs to feel safe and assured that their chosen venue has quality procedures in place for an exceptional experience.

As we continue to strive to deliver an offer that exceeds customer service, food and beverage, event delivery, and venue product expectations across our three UK venues, we have to repeatedly ask ourselves, 'what constitutes quality in today's world?'

We pride ourselves on taking inspiration from a range of brands, sectors and individuals, some of which we showcase in this report.

With the postponed Olympics now set for 2021, it's interesting to look at improvements as a series of marginal gains, a sporting philosophy made famous by Sir David Brailsford, the former performance director of British cycling and current general manager of the Team Ineos cycling team in Manchester.

Brailsford realised, as many business owners do, that there is no magic bullet to turn high performance into elite performance. He concluded that if you break down everything you can think of that goes into riding a bike, and then improve it by 1%, you'll get a significant increase when you put them all together.





Equally, any fan of cricket will have seen the miraculous transformation of the England One Day team who dramatically lifted the World Cup in 2019 following four years of rebuilding from relative embarrassment in the previous 2015 competition. Their own approach, led spectacularly and epitomised by captain Eion Morgan, was to continue to push every boundary, every day, but to also accept the limitations of the players. Attitude was rewarded first and because of this, the platform for unlimited achievement was established; skill would follow.

It is not our role to determine what quality looks like as the customer drives our standards through their expectations and demands. Our success in achieving excellence is governed by how we engage with customers and get to understand their needs.

It isn't about having the flashiest product offering, but how we make the customer feel. We must not rest on our laurels but instead realise that there is always room for improvement through being honest with ourselves and actively canvassing customer opinion.

I know it is a cliché but 'happy staff lead to happy customers' – body language, attitude, personality, empowerment and passion.

In the meantime however, the notion of 'Excellence' can be defined in other ways too. In this report we explore the relationship between achieving brilliance and contributing factors such as the need for purpose, and - specifically for our industry - how creative customer service and food and event formats play their part.

We hope you gain inspiration from our delve into understanding excellence. And we look forward to welcoming you to a Make Venues property soon.

David Vaughton
Make Venues, Managing Director



QUALITY, ON PURPOSE



For most, the term quality is synonymous with service excellence. Ken Kelling, a life coach for overworked event professionals, discusses the relationship between quality and a sense of professional purpose.

The concept of 'Quality' in both goods and services has been around for a very long time.

Literally hundreds of years.

It's weaved into our language – just think of familiar marketing phrases like 'hallmark of quality', 'quality guaranteed' or 'great quality every time'.

There are 'Quality Standards' in hotel accommodation and visitor attractions, as well as many other business areas. More recently, these standards have also grown to reflect environmental and green quality marks in response to consumer demand.

We also understand the concept of a 'quality service' – a blend of efficient and friendly service standards that are customer-centric, prompt and focus on timely communication.

Quality has long been a familiar way of marketing and branding a product or service, from the heritage grandness of Fortnum & Mason and the Ritz, to hand-stitched leather seats in an Aston Martin. Believe it or not, the lager Stella Artois was also branded as "reassuringly expensive" in one of its earliest modern-day campaigns.

More recently, we've started to expect and enjoy so-called 'quality experiences'. From music festivals to theatrical and outlandish dining out, we also want to feel special, the first through the door, respected, prioritised and able to convert that experience into 'Instagrammable' photos and stories to share.

Covid-19 won't change this but it will shine a brighter light on an often understated aspect of how we view quality that is now coming increasingly to the fore – values.

As far back as the formation of the Body Shop, the very first company perhaps to put its values front and centre of its appeal, companies have been doing more to convince us that their values should make them a service of choice.

This trend was given a massive boost by Simon Sinek's book and TED Talk called Start with the Why. He articulated how people no longer wanted to know simply about the 'How' of a product or service but more importantly, the 'Why', its purpose.

There's been a simultaneous rise in interest in our own personal values and purpose, influencing everything from starting our own business as an entrepreneur to a much greater interest in working in an ethical environment.

We now actively seek out companies, services and experiences that match our highest values. And those companies who have treated employees badly during this pandemic or who haven't lived up to our value expectations will find it harder to regain consumer trust.

In reality, values have always been our most important drivers in making decisions. There's a concept known as 'neurological levels' that suggests our behaviour comes from a much deeper level than we think. It's a hierarchy of thought that implies our behaviour is always influenced by our purpose, values and beliefs. These are really what's influencing our decision-making.

SO WHAT DOES ALL THIS MEAN FOR VENUES?

It means getting crystal clear on your values as a workplace, as people, and what it means for those you work with, including your clients, especially in today's 'new normal'.

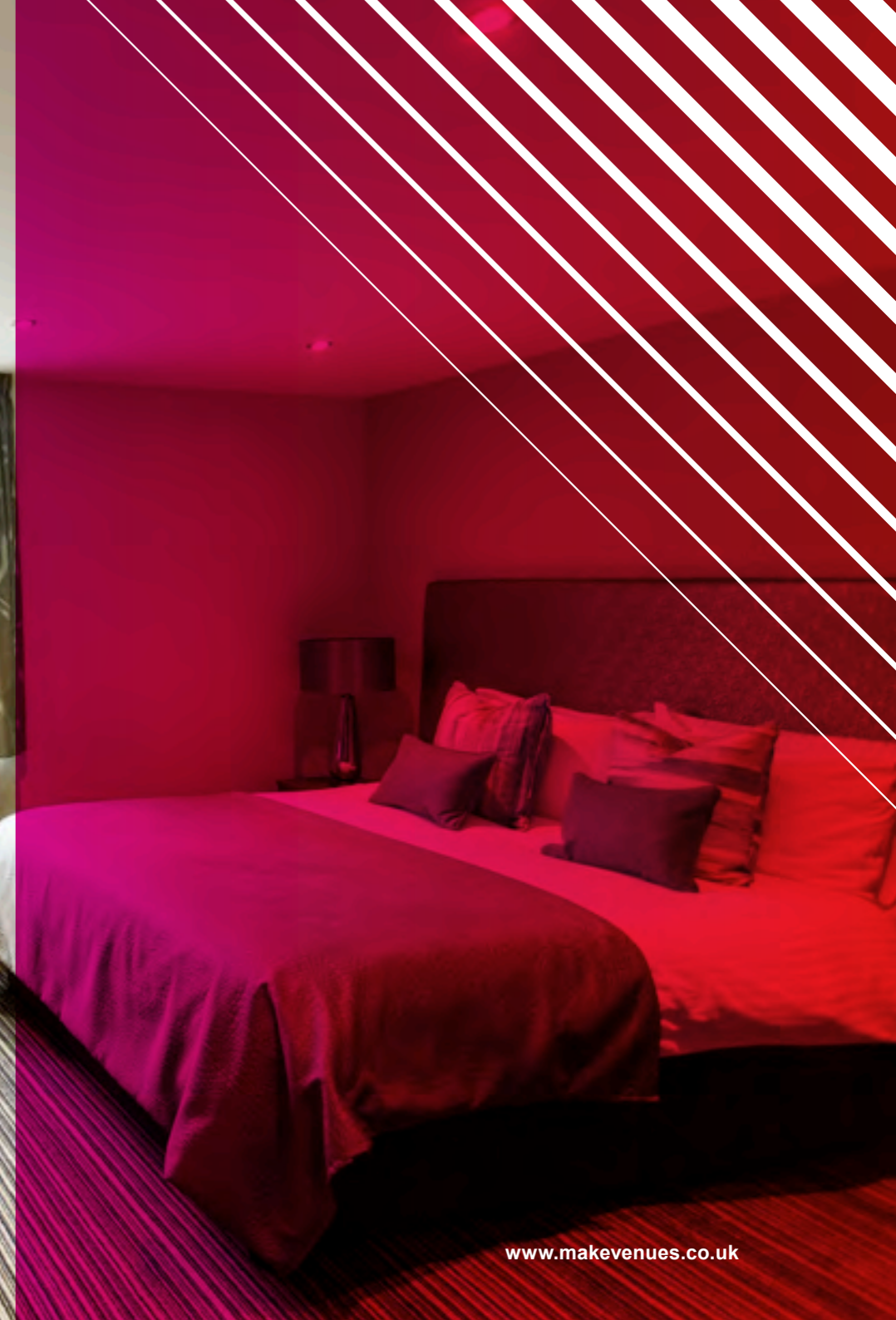
It also means thinking about the impact you want to have on others, including your local community and the world at large. How do you want people to feel about you? What do you want them to know about your purpose?

These ideas may seem far from the notions of service excellence that we've lived with for many years, but with increasing awareness of sustainability in its widest sense, buyers and planners are thinking about these ideas because they know how their delegates and attendees want to feel.

They will be looking for venues, services and products that are clear about their purpose and that will help them deliver a quality, purposeful experience for attendees.

Those destined to succeed in this context will be clear about, not just what and who they are, but also their 'why' and the impact they want to have on those that come into socially distanced contact with them.

It's the newly paved road that leads to a stand-out experience.



WHAT DOES OUTSTANDING SERVICE LOOK LIKE FOR PEOPLE-FOCUSED BRANDS?

How do brands earn the loyalty of their customers? How do they consistently delight and empower people so they not only keep returning, but they refer others to become customers too?

The answer often lies in exceptional customer service and brand purpose. To achieve excellence in these areas, successful brands promote the values that their customers truly care about.

They provide frictionless communication and support with a human touch, plus they focus on implementing rapid, problem-solving solutions that leave lasting and memorable impressions.

The following brand examples each provide an inspirational take-away that we can all adapt to suit our pursuit of quality during these unprecedented times.

THE RITZ-CARLTON HOTEL SARASOTA

When it comes to customer service, The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company is often spoken about in the same breath as iconic people pleasers such as Disney and Starbucks.

In his book, *What's the Secret to Providing a World Class Customer Experience*, author John R. DiJulius writes, "I left The Ritz-Carlton Sarasota in such a rush for the airport that I forgot my laptop charger in my room. I planned to call when I got back into my office, but before I could, I received a next-day air package from The Ritz-Carlton Sarasota. In it was my charger, with a note saying, 'Mr. DiJulius, I wanted to make sure we got this to you right away. I am sure you need it, and, just in case, I sent you an extra charger for your laptop.'"

The note was signed by an ordinary member of hotel staff. When DiJulius investigated further, he discovered that Ritz-Carlton actively encourages staff to improve the guest experience by authorising them to spend up to \$2,000 per day on creative customer service solutions when necessary.

Another heartwarming example is when Ritz-Carlton helped a dad convince his son that a left-behind stuffed giraffe was just enjoying a few extra days holiday by creating a booklet filled with photos showing how Joshie the giraffe had spent his time, before being posted home.





LYFT

Lyft, the ride-sharing company operating in 644 cities throughout the United States and 12 cities in Canada, is a great example of a purpose-led brand. Its customers take pride in supporting a business they feel represents their social and political views.

In 2018, Lyft announced it would immediately start offsetting the carbon emissions from all rides globally. This was a multi-million dollar investment in the first year alone, which has made Lyft one of the top voluntary purchasers of carbon offsets in the world.

The year before, Lyft donated \$1 million to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) in response to the introduction of an executive order that restricted immigration from seven Muslim-majority countries to the United States.

Lyft joined the widespread condemnation of the act, writing in an email to customers: "Banning people of a particular faith or creed, race or identity, sexuality or ethnicity, from entering the U.S. is antithetical to both Lyft's and our nation's core values. We stand firmly against these actions, and will not be silent on issues that threaten the values of our community."



SOUTHWEST AIRLINES

The world's largest low-cost airline has long been hailed a bastion of quality customer service with a raft of tales to support its global reputation for competitive prices, free checked luggage, friendly employees and a hassle-free experience.

Our favourite story is the one about the suitcase belonging to a teenage girl, which showed up on the luggage carousel with a damaged handle. When the girl's father walked into the Southwest office to complain, he was greeted with a friendly employee and a choice - he could either fill out some paperwork and arrange to have his luggage repaired, or Southwest would replace the luggage with a brand new piece; immediately – on the spot.

Choosing the latter, the man was taken into a room that was filled with all types of new luggage. He was asked to pick out one that closely resembled his daughter's broken luggage. After a very short amount of paperwork to acknowledge the exchange, it was just a matter of transferring the girl's belongings into the new luggage before heading home.

It's easy to be great when things go well. It's when things don't go well that can make or break a reputation. That's when a good system has to be in place.

That system, along with properly trained employees, can be the difference between losing and retaining a loyal customer.



WARBY PARKER

Warby Parker, an online retailer of prescription glasses and sunglasses based in New York, has revolutionised the way people purchase frames and eyewear by enhancing the customer service experience.

Upon arriving at Warby Parker's website, visitors are asked to take a quiz, which is both fun and designed to build excitement about the product range.

From there, visitors can browse the selection of frames, and they can choose five options to try on, free of charge, at home. No reason to leave the safety of your home, no reason to travel to a store and try on frames wearing a face-mask.

When Warby Parker sends customers glasses to try on, it recommends sharing selfies on Instagram using the hashtag #WarbyParkerHomeTryOn.

Take a look, it's a great way to encourage brand advocacy among followers and get friends to give their opinion on which frames to go for.

Providing customers with more options and making the purchasing experience fun, frictionless and 'Instagrammable' has transformed Warby Parker into a beloved fashion brand.

IN CONCLUSION

Jo Causon, CEO at The Institute of Customer Service sums it up best:

“In today's complex world, it is vital that organisations get the basics right first - efficiency of service, complaint handling and the actual customer experience. On top of this, consumers are placing growing importance on trust, transparency, emotional connectivity and ethical behaviours. Our research shows there's a compelling argument for meeting both these types of customer priority for a profitable business return. Brands can overcome the uncertainties we currently navigate as businesses by understanding what is genuinely important to today's consumer and acting on it.”



THREE EVENT CONCEPT IDEAS FOR A MEMORABLE ATTENDEE EXPERIENCE

Service excellence is often synonymous with personalisation when it comes to the event experience.

Innovative and meaningful meeting formats are preferred over large impersonal auditoriums as planners seek to foster authentic engagement with both the content, the venue surroundings and between attendees.

Here's three ideas we endorse across Make Venues to get attendees involved and engaged



1. ENCOURAGE SOCIALLY-DISTANCED PLAY

The year 2020 has highlighted the need for online resources more than ever and at Make Venues we continue to work with our clients and suppliers to see how technology can help with engagement. One area that is constantly evolving is the world of interactive play, which provides a way of engaging with guests on an entirely different level.

YourMembership, the world's largest provider of membership-management software, used an event-specific app to divide delegates into the four Harry

Potter-themed houses of Hogwarts before getting them to compete against each other in challenges such as checking into sessions, sharing photos, and scanning QR codes around the venue.

Attendees were even sent a Hogwarts acceptance letter letting them know which house they had been sorted into by the Sorting Hat. Upon entering the conference space, they had received a push notification letting them know that they'd arrived at Platform 9 ¾.

2. FACILITATE SMALLER GROUP DISCUSSIONS

When hosting events we always aim to use the range of spaces we have at our disposal. All three Make Venues sites offer flexible and varied rooms, which lend themselves well to breakout sessions. In the current climate, this not only allows us to host events more safely but also encourages more audience participation, gives everyone a chance to say their piece and makes sure that every attendee is heard.

During IMEX America each year, Hot Topic Tables tailored around a specific subject, give attendees the opportunity to break out and discuss the topics that are most important to them with a handful of peers who share the same interests. These small, moderated round-table discussions prevent attendees from becoming disengaged by spending a whole day in a large group listening to speaker after speaker.

3. TAKE THEM OUTSIDE

There's nothing better than making use of the great outdoors to stimulate creative thinking, maintain attendee energy levels, inspire a different perspective and promote a healthier, more covid-aware environment.

At Woodland Grange, we have introduced fire pits situated on the lawn adjacent to the venue's Café Bar.

The fire pits, as well as being a warm and welcoming home comfort, are also designed to allow team building exercises and incentives to continue after the meeting, but in a more relaxed way.

They are ideal for story-telling, informal post event discussions, or the chance to sit with a drink and roast marshmallows at the end of a productive day. They're literally perfect for a campfire format in the summer months.



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

David Vaughton, Managing Director of Make Venues shares his beliefs on what constitutes a first-class food offering in a culture of ever-changing nutritional trends.

In November 2019, George Midgeley, our Head Chef at Woodland Grange, picked-up the prestigious 'best main course' accolade at the Venues of Excellence annual 'Cook & Serve Awards' with a dish that was hailed as 'Michelin standard' by the judging panel.

The award served as the pinnacle of a series of initiatives we'd undertaken over the course of the second half of last year to reinforce our promise of focusing on an exceptional food and beverage offer throughout the venue group.

At the time of George's award, Woodland Grange's General Manager Mark Thurman said: "This recognition underlines our commitment to great food and our desire to reach the highest standards in the industry. It is also a great source of pride amongst both our staff and our customers, that we're serving this level of quality every day."



When we talk about our commitment to great food, we're promising so much more than maintaining high standards of food on the plate. We scrutinise every element of the offer, from sourcing to packaging, transportation to aesthetics and how we serve each dish.

Quality in food is also a farther-reaching subject, concerning global food production and its economic and ecological effects; from the cost of rearing beef to the growing movement of vegetarian and vegan lifestyles. All the time though it is twinned with the increasing discernment amongst consumers to get the best, tastiest, healthiest meals, created with authenticity and care.

Pre-coronavirus crisis, the food display at Woodland Grange was laid out in buffet formats. The display would start with the most stunning rainbow salads; beetroots, carrots, greens, sweet potatoes, tomatoes and aubergines. They looked colourful and inviting, so much so that they made the salad bar a viable alternative to the other 'naughty' goodies displayed further down, not just 'a place for the healthy people'.

Along from there we had pulses, beans, lentils and other energy options, also as part of the salad section, and again bringing colour and interest to the display.

As one moved along, delegates could grab their meats, either to supplement the salads and greens, or for those looking to a hot menu option.

These meats are sourced only through providers who give their livestock the best possible environment to support their welfare. Every supplier we work with shares our values on ethics from the outset. Things taste better when they are produced with care and consideration, that's from farm to fork.

Moving towards the end of the display, delegates could choose 'naughties' and stickies.

Even with the desserts, everything is made on site, using fresh ingredients, in season, and sourced locally whenever and wherever possible. For the very pragmatic reason that it can be served fresher and tastes better. Our chefs, like myself, believe in this approach very strongly.

But equally, we need to remind ourselves that although delegates are on business, this is also a 'day out', and we can't be judgemental on anyone who wants to treat themselves.

In truth, despite the changing trends of the food movement and the fact that we are currently unable to display our food in a buffet-style format, we've never really changed from the basics of what quality food is all about; colour, variety and nutrition.

This has helped us excel as both a food business and a meetings and events one. For now, what makes our food stand out is in the taste and governance but I look forward to the day our buffet display returns. Sometimes you just have to stick with the basics, all the answers are there.

THE LAST WORD

We hope you've enjoyed our delve into the notions surrounding service excellence

The last word goes to Genevieve Scoville, Head of Content for Policy Foresight, a provider of training and symposiums for government officials, local practitioners, academics, third sector professionals and business leaders to gain insight into national policy thinking and local policy implementation. Genevieve says:

"Quality is a fundamental requirement for success. It is about delivering a seamless product without the impression of excess effort. Central to this is providing an excellent service that matches the needs of a client whilst making them feel valued in the process. Broadway House, the Westminster-based venue we use, does this in leaps and bounds.

"For almost 10 years, I have worked with Broadway House and continue to return to organise conferences at the venue because it provides such an excellent service.

Its excellent quality is underpinned by outstanding customer service. The staff are warm, enthusiastic and hard-working, understanding the needs of their clients, organising everything to meet them whilst remaining flexible to respond to any changes that arise. This drives the sense of being valued as a client and they act as a key partner in the successful delivery of every event."



Discover one of Make Venues' three venues of quality for yourself.

MAKE
VENUES