

Sales - Product Knowledge

WHY	<p>In a world where information is available at the tip of our fingers, (product) knowledge has become an even greater tool to persuade and sell. But is knowledge itself what sells? If knowledge is having the right answers, we're arguing that intelligence is asking the right questions.</p> <p>This short course will you allow to put in place a thorough product knowledge system so that your team members have the confidence to sell.</p>
WHO	<p>Audience:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hospitality professionals of all levels - Anyone curious about sales <p>Facilitator:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Self-learning - Managers of all levels
WHAT	<p>Content includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is product knowledge, and why is it so essential? - World-class system to train on product knowledge - Example <p>Content length:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Approximately 30 minutes
HOW	<p>1st Read content and select what you believe to be useful for you/your team</p> <p>2nd Decide what element you/your team will apply and make a plan</p> <p>3rd Set a deadline for application to be reviewed</p> <p>4th Review results, amend methods according to specific needs and apply again until satisfied</p>
PLUS	<p>Internal resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - As part of this course, you'll find a template for Product Knowledge testing in the PDF Versions section. - Although each course can be taken independently, the course on Sales Techniques will be useful in applying the above mentioned.

What is product knowledge, and why it is so essential

Let's not try to reinvent the wheel here: to sell something, whether it is wine, a dish, or any retail item for that matter, one must know what it is they sell! Not just how it works and what it is made of, but essentially how is it going to make customers happy.

One of the very reasons we go out eating and drinking is that we want to have a nice experience, be given food/drinks we just don't know how to prepare ourselves. And the more expensive the bill gets, the more we want value for money. In fact, it is not just about the quality of products themselves... it is essentially about our perception of such value.

So, is there a recipe to train team members on product knowledge? Yes there is! The following system is being used in many fine dining restaurants, where product knowledge is taken very seriously. It is actually simple enough to be applied in pretty much any business:

1. Start with specification sheets
2. Design tests based on the specification sheets
3. Provide training and let team members time to learn
4. Assess your team on the knowledge required
5. Once the system is in place, allow team members to create the specification sheets themselves

World-class system to train on product knowledge

1. Specification Sheets

A specification sheet includes all the relevant information one must know about a product to be able to sell it. Such information can be:

- Ingredients, including allergens (see Compliance section)
- How it is made
- Where it comes from
- History and fun facts
- Key words to describe the product
- Wine/food pairing

2. Tests

Once a specification sheet has been created, all it takes to build a test from is turning each point into a question.

Ex: This wine is made from Pinot Noir = what grapes are used to make this wine?

There is no need to over-complicate the questions. The purpose is to make sure team members can give clear and simple answers to direct questions.

3. Training

To effectively train people on product knowledge, all we have to do now is provide both the test and the answers (specification sheet) to the team members. Ideally this will be done during a tasting session where they will be able to see and try each dish/drink, asking all relevant questions.

Give team members a reasonable amount of time to learn the information before testing their knowledge. You want them to be successful; all of them; to know it all.

4. Assessment

Assessing team members' product knowledge can be done informally (during briefings or one-to-one sessions) or more formally (set up like an exam), depending on style of management and culture of the business. Regardless, it must be done fairly, with full adhesion of the team.

5. Self-teaching

Once the system is in place and starts to show results, it is even more efficient to delegate the creation of specification sheets* and test to team members themselves. As any trainer could tell you, the person who learns the most from training is the trainer himself.

*Bear in mind that information such as allergens must be signed off by managers with the relevant level of authority, holding the responsibility for Food Safety Management within your organisation.

Example

Let's say you're introducing a new house wine by the glass on your menu. This wine has a healthy GP (see **Menu Engineering** and **P&L** sections) and offers great value for money for your customers. It is an Italian wine called *Salice Salentino*.

Let's review some of the information you may need your team members to know about this new item, and how to design a test based on these questions:

- **Ingredients, including allergens? (see Compliance section)**

→ This wine is primarily produced from the Negroamaro grape

→ Contains sulphites

- **Where it comes from?**

→ Salentino is in Puglia (South-East of Italy). The wine is primarily produced in the provinces of Brindisi and Lecce.

- **Key words to describe the product?**

→ Dark purple in the glass / nose: aromas of ripe dark fruits, notes of espresso, wood and caramel / dry palate, nearly full-bodies, long with tangy flavours.

- **Wine/food pairing?**

→ Pair with olive-based Mediterranean dishes, charcuteries, hard sheep milk cheeses

The above list is non-exhaustive. Make your own specification sheets and tests! Contact us directly should you require any support designing such tools.