

## Martin Dinkele: What do we want modern pubs to be?

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By **Martin Dinkele**

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If year zero for pubs was tomorrow what would they be like?

Or, what do we want pubs to be in order to be successful and relevant in a modern world?

Perhaps there are a few basic functional needs around subsistence and refreshment but it's easy to see these are also met by many competing offers out there at a lower (transparent) price, faster and more conveniently. So we should think beyond the functional.

Maybe we should consider the customer's feelings more carefully. How do we make the experience of going to a pub in some way more special? It's usually about being different – products and service, atmosphere and environment.

What would we keep if the blueprint was laid down tomorrow? New and different products that can't be found anywhere else like cask ale, especially perhaps in terms of how they are served. I've spoken recently to pubs and bars that have operated as 'pop up' (i.e. temporary) shops while selling alcohol alongside other things like vintage clothing or jewellery or an exhibition of affordable art. It's probably not enough to say we have brands and products that no-one else has, they need to be served in an engaging way and in an engaging environment.

What else? If a pub is to retain the broad idea of a Public House, and it may choose not to, it should at least be the best house in the area. How many pubs have changed as quickly as people's homes in terms of technology, entertainment, gardens and decoration. Even the food people cook and what it's eaten off has changed. Have the majority of pubs really kept up with this? Many have and in my experience the ones that do are more likely to succeed.

Anything else to keep? A sense of tradition and security is important in a pub: warmth and safety are features that make people feel at home. Bars don't really have to do this and some pubs operate closer to bars feeding a consumer appetite for greater sociability in higher energy mode. This is fine if that's the aim, but mixing the two is hard to pull off.

And some new stuff? Loyalty cards? More appealing externals? I look forward to places where I can do something alongside eating and drinking, perhaps with my children or with my mates. But this might come from other retailers becoming licensed rather than led by the

pub trade. Could this be a pub of the future? Not instead of but competing against and attracting genuine current non pub goers?

It's also not just what's changed but how quickly things are changing it seems to me. Can pubs keep up with the times is the challenge. Or, perhaps, can they even shape the future rather than play catch up? A few entrepreneurial types are doing it already and I for one will keep watching them with a keen eye...