



Night Time
Industries
Association

Building a brand and identity

Night Time Industries Association

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The board and staff of the NTIA acknowledge that we are on unceded land of the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation. We pay our respect to Elders past, present and future and are privileged to celebrate a living culture of over 60,000 years.

Foreword

Central to successfully navigating the journey from a good idea to a profitable business is establishing your company's brand and identity.

This guidebook looks at the issue of brand and identity for night-time economy operators. It considers the importance of having a clear vision, communicating that vision among your staff, and reflecting it into every last detail that makes up your venue. Creating a successful brand can be the result of an intuition or gut feeling about what 'seems right', or the product of extensive market research.

This guidebook highlights the importance of being authentic, while at the same time trying to drive sales and return visitation. It considers the trend towards personalised service experiences, and the importance of positioning the customer at the centre of everything you do. It includes a case study of some of the key elements that make up the successful Merivale brand. Of course we also provide our Top 10 Tips, including using the drink test to help make sure you select staff who will best represent your brand.

Regards,

Mick Gibb



Mick Gibb
CEO - Night Time Industries Association





Key Considerations

Develop Your Authentic Vision

Building a brand requires a clear vision of what kind of venue you want to be. Do you cater to the after work crowd or the late night crowd? Do you target one particular demographic, or different groups on different nights? How you answer these questions will impact choices you make from whether or not you have a wine list, to if you provide guests the option of ordering through a QR code.

Developing your vision is both an art and a science. Many venues begin as an idea that captures an entrepreneur's imagination. They are passionate about creating a unique experience for their guests – and work to bring that idea to life. The scientific element involves doing your due diligence to research the market, identify your point of difference, and crunch the numbers to protect your return on investment. It requires drafting a business plan to make prudent decisions about when to invest more, or when to consolidate spending.

The vision for a venue and a brand has to be authentic. Consumers are attune to a fake persona and can see through an offering that is contrived, derivative or inauthentic. The vision is most genuine when it is a reflection of the owners' values and interests. Challenges will arise when creating and communicating a vision. The underlying passion and commitment will offer a level of motivation and desire needed to persevere. However, passion will only take you so far. If you rely solely on your intuition without doing your due diligence, you risk putting all your energy behind an idea that doesn't really work.

Your brand is associated with the level of quality or standard that guests come to expect when visiting your venue. There is a certain experience that guests can count on. It doesn't matter if that standard is aimed at an affluent clientele or if your price point is one that almost everyone can afford, the key is being clear about your vision. Once you know what your venue represents, your brand can begin to shine through.

Build Your Team

Once you have a clear vision that expresses your authentically held values, it's critical to develop a shared vision among your team. Successful brands are coherent across the entire business. Everyone is important; from the door staff, to the head chef, to the manager, to the cleaner. Ideally you want to trust that everyone on the team holds the same goal in mind, even if each individual plays a different role in achieving that goal.

For established operators this means finding ways to communicate your vision with staff. The process of developing a shared vision can include explicit communications through staff meetings, training manuals, one on one coaching, and working alongside to support your staff. Your vision can also be expressed implicitly through how the venue is presented, lighting, décor, keeping up to date operational checklists, and your attention to detail.

The most impactful way to bring staff onboard is by demonstrating your commitment to achieving your vision. They have to believe in you. If you want your venue's brand to be synonymous with a certain level of quality, then you need to set the standard for the staff to follow. Approach your work with the same level of passion you expect from your team.

For new entrants to the market, creating a shared vision starts with ensuring you get the right people onboard. These will be the people you'll be working with to build your venue's brand and identity. Look for people who share your values. As the old saying goes, "hire for attitude, train for skill."

In addition to reviewing someone's CV, look at what they did with their previous opportunities. Be on the lookout for someone with a track record of creating value at each step of their journey, regardless of their rank or position. That person is likely to have a much higher ceiling than someone with all the relevant experience, but little or no examples of what they did with those opportunities.

When in doubt use the drink test. The drink test involves asking whether you and your existing employees would enjoy going out for a drink with that person – just the two of you. It can be a thought experiment (thinking about if you'd like to hang out with that person outside of work), or actually having a drink as part of the recruitment process. In fact, some venues incorporate going out for dinner as part of the hiring process for the executive or management teams. The drink test is a good way to see if you connect with the other person and pick up on some things that don't come across on a CV or in an interview.

It is a cultural fit test to ensure that a person has the capability and capacity to align with the values and vision held by the rest of the organisation. Of course, it's important to look at the holistic benefit a candidate can provide your organisation and the value that comes from different backgrounds and experiences. The drink test helps better understand the individual and how they can best achieve your vision.



Develop Profiles Of Your Ideal Clients

Not every venue is for everyone. Even the most welcoming and inclusive venues will not be the right fit for some people. Rather than trying to cater to everyone or follow the latest trends, it's important to know who your ideal clients are. These are the people that will love what you provide – and that you'll enjoy creating value for. Develop draft profiles for your ideal clients and keep them in mind as you make choices about your products and services.

At times focusing on your ideal clients may mean missing out on other audiences. That's not an easy choice in such a competitive marketplace. For example, setting your price point may exclude certain people from what you are offering. The same is true for guests that demand a level of service or attention beyond what you can or want to provide.

Of course it's important to be responsive to the needs of your guests. You want to do your research before setting your price point, and you definitely want to make sure your venue has the basic amenities customers have come to expect. But if you are clear about your authentic vision, and you are acting in alignment with that vision, then the people for whom this is an issue are by definition not your ideal clients.

That's OK. Cater to that strong cohort of ideal clients and focus on serving them to the best of your abilities. They will be delighted by what you provide – and you will be delighted to provide it time and again.

Personalise It

Now that you know who your ideal clients are, then the next step is to surprise and delight them. You can do this by providing personalised experiences that let your guests know you appreciate them and value their patronage.

Personalisation can take many forms. It can be expressed in marketing and promotional campaigns with something as simple as ensuring any communications include the name of the patron on your mailing list (i.e. “Hello Jack” rather than “Dear Customer”). Addressing people personally can help your communications to stand out from other unsolicited emails.

Another way to personalise the guest experience is by making sure you are able to track and identify your regular guests. Some venues have marketing technology systems to pull this information based on booking and reservation data, point of sales data, QR code scanning, or a specialised app for their venue. Other venues actively encourage guests to sign up for mailing lists with promotional offers or loyalty rewards. A crucial component of building out technology driven insights is investing in an integrated technology stack that works seamlessly together. A technology stack is simply the range of technology solutions that work together to solve a business problem or automate your operations. When building your marketing technology stack you want to ensure you have solutions that all integrate with one another, output data in a similar or the same way and allow for analysis that provides a holistic view of your customer. This technology can help automate and streamline your marketing activity and give you greater insights into what is and isn't working. The key to getting this right is in wisely choosing the solutions that work for your business. Having a wide array of technology solutions that don't work together will create more work for your business.

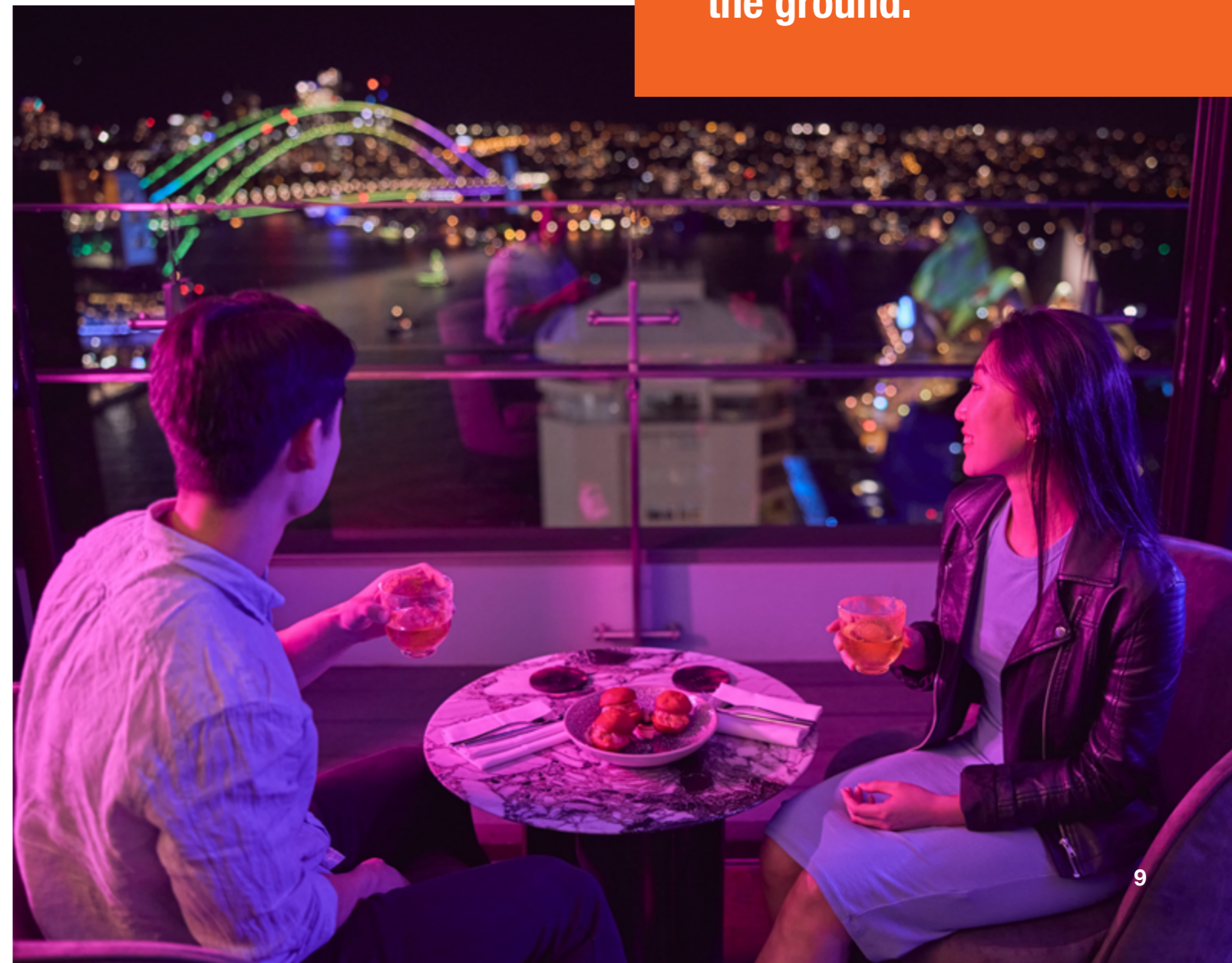
If you can't afford a highly automated marketing technology system, then look at what basic technology will help your business and empower your staff to act as data points. Staff can do this by talking with guests, learning their names, orders and patronage frequency. While it can be harder to track and certainly automate, it can help build customer loyalty and rapport.

Remember that return guests can include a wide range of clients in very different circumstances. It could be that group who come every Friday after-work or it could be the couple who come every year to celebrate their anniversary. Consider empowering your bar staff to provide a round on the house on a case by case basis, or a complimentary dessert on someone's birthday. The key is to rely on the data you collect and the experience of your staff to identify return guests and consider how to surprise and delight them from time to time.

Personalisation of guest experience is not always about providing free food and drink. Simply saying ‘welcome back’ acknowledges that you recognise your return guests and appreciate them. Creating those connections and special memories are the best way to encourage repeat visitation. It also leads to one of the most valued forms of promotion – a personal endorsement by a guest to friends in their network. Word of mouth recommendations are a powerful motivator to get new audiences into your venue.

Another opportunity for personalised engagement is through responding to customer reviews. You can express your appreciation for the positive reviews and let them know about upcoming events they may enjoy. You can also express regret for missing the mark with a guest who did not have a positive experience and ask how to improve. Even poor ratings can be an opportunity to create new allies. Regardless of whether you get a five star rating or a harsh criticism, these are the people that are actively engaging with your venue. Make time to acknowledge them and strengthen or repair a relationship.

Depending on the size of your venue, you'll want to have ongoing communication between your customer engagement team and your front line staff. The people developing your marketing campaigns should be informed by what's happening on the ground.



Give Back To The Community

One of the most unique things about any venue is the location or neighbourhood it is located. In addition to doing your due diligence to confirm you can generate a return on your investment, you'll also want to ask "does this neighbourhood benefit from my venue being here?" Benefit may include increased opportunity for social activity, the economic benefit for ancillary businesses, and your venues' role in providing jobs.

Becoming an active member of the community can have commercial benefits too. Engaging with neighbouring businesses can be a driver of word of mouth marketing. For example, providing a happy hour for neighbouring business owners may result in those owners talking favourably about your venue to their customers. There are many different ways to contribute to the local community. You may launch your venue with a locals weekend or provide some local discounts. You can try to procure local products such as a nearby butchery or farmers market. You may donate a portion of sales on Sunday afternoon to a local charity, and invite guests to vote on which charity to support.

Giving back to the community shouldn't take you too far from focusing on delivering a high quality product to your ideal clients. When done well, what you contribute will be integrated with your overarching brand and help attract guests that identify with what you are trying to achieve.



Case Study: The Merivale Identity

Merivale is a leader in the Australian hospitality industry, with a portfolio of over 90 brands including the iconic nightclub, ivy, along with restaurants, bars, pubs, and hotels.

The Merivale brand philosophy is centred around creating remarkable experiences for guests and providing guests with the assurance that when they choose a Merivale venue, they will experience high quality product and service, along with strong attention to detail.

In this case study we delve into the essence of the Merivale brand, the process of opening a new venue and how to get the best from their team.

Each new Merivale venue begins with a very clear vision – what exactly do they want to provide to guests and the community?

While the concepts for a new venue can develop from an observation, such as a gap in the market or just an idea, some venues require more detailed market research than others.

An example of this was the re-opening of the nightclub, ivy. Merivale undertook in-depth research and external consultation to better understand the ivy audience/s, particularly a younger demographic. This research and consultation allowed the team to better understand how the product and experiences would directly appeal to different audiences, based on specific nights (club nights) of the week. There was a need to really listen to potential target audiences to create the right offering. As a result, each night's crowd has their own perception of what ivy is and why they visit.

Once the vision for the venue has crystallised, it needs to be clearly articulated and understood by the entire team. Everyone involved needs to adopt that vision and work together towards making it a reality. After the expectations are set and there is a clear standard, then it's time to execute and do everything possible to make it reality. Compromising on the standard is not an option, even if that means extending the timeline to get it right.

Merivale's brand identities are defined by many aspects such as the branding, music curation, quality of product, curation of menus, lighting, and the venues' interior design and decor. However, the strongest aspect to a brand comes through meticulous attention to detail – this includes staff uniforms, the way that staff interact with guests, small elements to evoke feelings in a space.

Importantly, Merivale does not try to duplicate the same thing over and over - venues and experiences are very carefully selected and considered based on location, audience/s, etc. What each Merivale venue does share is a strong focus on the guest – this has become ingrained in the Merivale culture and helps drive excellence. Guests arrive with expectations of service, quality and how the brand is presented.

One of the challenges for operating a number of venues is bringing new staff along for the journey to ensure employee satisfaction, and that they represent the brand/s in the best way possible. Having a 'can-do' positive attitude is something that Merivale looks for during the recruitment process. Merivale invests heavily in training and career development opportunities for employees. New staff are supported and mentored by more experienced team members, working together to achieve the required standard. Merivale also maintains up to date and detailed operating procedures so the information is clear and easy to follow.

With a reputation for success, there comes an intense pressure to deliver. Merivale's guests come with high expectations and therefore the pressure to perform always is there. Employees are encouraged to have a mindset of authentic continual growth. The result is a focus on the guest to provide the absolute best experience possible when they visit a Merivale venue.

ivy
Sydney



Making Media Coverage Part Of Your Plan

Public relations and subsequent media coverage is a key part of launching a new venue, brand, event or idea. The third party endorsement that comes from positive media coverage not only helps give an added level of prestige to what you're doing, but it helps broaden your reach into audiences you may not have had before. There are some key steps to land the right coverage.

1 Find and explain your hook

First and foremost is being able to answer the question, "why should we care?" For something to have news value it needs to be a combination of exciting, innovative, insightful or new. There needs to be a reason why the audience would care about what you're doing. For example, a new bar operator might have a storied career working in bars around the world or in leading bars in Australia. The news they are going out with their own venue is exciting and something that audiences would be keen to check out.

2 Engage the right media, not all media

The reality is journalists receive dozens of emails every day from organisations and individuals. If you want to have cut through you need to be hyper targeted to the journalists who are most likely to cover you. This means targeting media outlets that typically cover your topic and then delving into individual journalists who write about that topic. When you contact them, show you've done your homework and researched what they've been writing about and why what you're doing might be of interest to them.

3 Finding the right contact

There are a myriad of media database providers that more established businesses can subscribe to. However, journalist contact details can be found through a range of other more manual processes too. Checking out the Twitter/X profile of a journalist, looking at the 'About' page of a media outlet or even looking at LinkedIn can help with getting the right email address.

4 Exclusives are the key

Media outlets are competing on a lot of different fronts, one of which is being the first or only one to have a piece of news or insight into a topic. By offering a journalist an exclusive you can help land one larger piece of coverage and then do a second round of media engagement to try and get more coverage.

5 Keeping yourself in the news cycle

Headlines change throughout the course of a day so it's important to stay on top of it - especially if you want to get ongoing coverage. When you see breaking news that is relevant to you and what you're doing, try to contact the journalist with your perspective and why it's relevant. Trends and changes in consumer behaviour are a hot topic for the media so it pays to keep an eye on how your customers are engaging with you. For example, if you notice you're getting more group bookings at Valentine's Day than you did on years prior it could be a sign that people are moving away from the romantic couple setting and looking to celebrate with their friends instead.

6 Make a journalist's life easier

The more well written, detailed and fact based information you can give to a journalist the easier it will be for the journalist to pick up your story. This means taking the time to craft a media release or pitch email that could almost be copied and pasted by the journalist with quotes from your spokesperson tailored made for that outlet. Good quality and exciting images also go a long way to helping media pick up your story. It's worth investing in a photographer to get a stockpile of images for media, social media and your other digital platforms.

Know Your Customer: Marketing Q&A with Australian Venue Co's Chief Marketing Officer, Kylie Moncur

1 What marketing technology solutions should hospitality businesses be exploring?

It's important that marketing technology solutions support the overall customer experience and journey with a venue or group. There are three key solutions to consider.

First I would consider some kind of reservation and data platform, something like SevenRooms. Customers want to be able to book quickly, conveniently and with as little as 30 minutes before arriving at the venue. Being able to collect information such as visit history, dietary preferences, VIP status, reviews they have placed, favourite dishes is all very valuable information when used to enhance the in venue customer experience.

Second is 'order at table' technology, customers scan a QR code and see a beautiful visual menu. Not only is it exceptionally convenient, and many customers preferred way to order, there is the added benefit of being able to up-sell or bolt on items that will increase the average transaction value.

Third, and probably more likely for a larger business, is a customer data platform. Consider technology that will allow you to unify your customer data from all your sources, to provide a true 360 degree view of the customer. A customer data platform will allow you not only to collect but enrich your customer profiles over time – understand the products your customers are buying, their behaviours and transaction habits.

Understanding consumer sentiment and being able to analyse consumer and product trends is also critical, platforms like Review Trackers allow you to pull reviews from a variety of internal and external sources into a dashboard and respond in real time. Some kind of review management / sentiment analysis tool would also be a really valuable investment.

2 How does AVC use technology in its customer engagement?

Before the widespread adoption of technology in the night-time industries, a majority of customer engagement and relationship building was based on a venue manager's knowledge of their regulars and their habits. This will always have a place in the hospitality environment, but in a world of a largely casualised workforce we were eager to provide our full team with as much valuable information as possible to leverage in order to surprise and delight their guests.

At AVC, we use SevenRooms, a reservations and guest experience platform that we consider best in market. When someone books at any of our venues, and they have visited us before, we know what their drink and food preferences are, and if they have a preferred table. On the whole we are using the data to ensure the in venue customer experience is as personalised and memorable as possible.

3 How does technology help AVC communicate with its existing customers?

Marketing technology helps operators leverage customer insights in order to personalise customer communication. Different customer segments will seek different venue information and be motivated by different offers. For example, a customer who has ordered kids meals at a venue is more likely to readily engage with family deals or school-holiday discounts than they are with late night, live music line up. Beyond a great in-venue experience, you need to offer relevant content to your customers.

4 How does technology help AVC reach new customers?

On the whole, as a result of technology, we have a strong understanding of our ideal customers and use this information to prospect for new customers that have similar attributes. We are quite lucky that unlike many of our competing industries, customers are opting in to provide data in a range of ways, whether that be through bookings, ticketing, content engagement, our technology platforms, systems and marketing channels allow us to capture this information and remarket to these guests.

5 If you had one piece of advice for new operators building a marketing strategy what would it be?

I'd recommend investing in technology early in your growth stage. There'll always be teething challenges but the value of rich customer data cannot be overstated. Ultimately, service comes in many forms and while customer experience will always be critical, you need to understand the customer journey that led them to you in the first place to tailor your offering to them.

Top 10 Tips

1 Start with a clear vision

Your vision can be based on intuition or analysis of a gap in the market. It should be something you are passionate about and willing to work towards.

2 Be authentic

Your venue has to reflect your values. Guests pick up on what's genuine and what's a gimmick. Stay focused on creating value for them.

3 Build your team

Surround yourself with people who share your values. Create a culture of working together toward a shared vision.

4 Develop profiles of your ideal clients

If you want to put guests at the centre of what you do, you need to know who they are.

5 Collect data

Use technology solutions and interpersonal interactions to learn more about your guests. This will lead to more informed choices. Be sure to make technology decisions that work in an integrated way so extracting data and insights adds value, not headaches.

6 Personalise your service

Demonstrate your appreciation by trying to personalise how you engage with guests. Welcome return guests back when they walk in the door. Respond to online reviews. Create personalised marketing campaigns based on the profiles you've developed through smart technology solutions.

7 Listen to your staff

They see what's happening, what issues keep coming up, and what opportunities can be unlocked. Tap into this resource.

8 Give back to the community

Become a part of the local community by contributing to local initiatives or even take proactive steps to make your venue a community space.

9 Never underestimate the value of a good mentor

There is no substitute for experience. Reach out to someone who is willing to share their knowledge and their network.

10 Remember the drink test

When in doubt about a new team member, ask yourself if they will gel with the vision and values shared by the rest of your team.

Participants

This guidebook was developed by the Office of the 24-Hour Economy Commissioner and the Night Time Industries Association through consultation with industry leaders. Thank you to participants for sharing their expertise.

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Further Resources

There is a wide array of further reading and resources available in this space:

- **Setting the Table: The Transforming Power of Hospitality in Business, Danny Meyer**
- **Start with Why, Simon Sinek**
- **Be Our Guest, Theodore Kinni**
- **Digital Solutions - Australian Small Business Advisory Services¹**
- **Service NSW Small Business Concierge, NSW Government²**

¹ Business.gov.au

² service.nsw.gov.au/business/business-concierge-service



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