

Premium BREWS

How restaurants can boost sales and loyalty with an enhanced tea service

By Frank Weber

The image of tea as being the preferred “granny” choice of beverage has long been shed and “Tea Culture” is now omnipresent in artisan coffee shops, fine food emporiums and slowly even mainstream grocery stores.



The Canadian tea industry grew past \$1.3 billion in 2015 – a 23-per-cent increase over the year before and it has seen a steady increase in specialty tea since. Leading the way are Millennials, who are drinking more tea than ever and seem to love the hip-and-healthy tea culture. Premium loose leaf tea has already become a staple in this demographic – a part of the new normal.

A GROWING INDUSTRY

In many instances, the flavours and scents of tea have become intrinsically interwoven into memory, habit and personal identity. By 2020, Euromonitor forecasts that the tea industry will see \$20 billion (US) in growth, and calls it the most dynamic category in global beverages, adding that it is now in “an era of value creation,” with ultra-premium and luxury tea claiming a share of the increase

That said, you would never guess the above to be the case if you visited most Canadian restaurants.

Here in Canada, the old mainstream tea dinosaurs have maintained a firm grip on the market with sub-standard tea dust in Granny’s favourite tea bag, often falsely labeled as “orange pekoe” (which isn’t actually the tea that is found in said envelope). Orange is actually a higher grade leaf cut which has become synonymous with mainstream black tea. It’s puzzling to think that this miscommunication is still happening in a world where chefs place the utmost importance not only on quality and freshness but also on the origin and traceability of their ingredients. It seems that in the world of tea, secondary ingredients are still largely ignored.

GLOBAL POPULARITY

Tea has been second for a long time; in fact, it is the second-most widely consumed beverage on the planet, just after water. Canada has some catching up to do here, but as they say, “the times they are a

changin’.” (Bob Dylan must have sipped on a good old cuppa when he wrote this tune).

Carrying a good selection of fine loose-leaf tea is becoming an expectation, if not a requirement, in any better restaurant. Those ignoring the changing landscapes have always been left behind. Some innovators are already taking advantage of those added-value experiences such as Matcha prepared tableside and chai lattes in a multitude of flavours. These beverages don’t require more time and effort than a cappuccino and the customers interested in these choices are plentiful. The opportunities in the after-dinner segment are staggering. Customers, not looking for a crème caramel, may just be interested in a low-calorie version of these “liquid desserts.”

PROFIT POTENTIAL

Profitability is, of course, the major benefit here, where food cost is in the low teens and perception of value and innovation rise beyond expectations. Why charge \$3.00 for a tepid old bag when one can deliver an outstanding experience for \$8.00-\$12.00 and reap five times the profit. These are incremental sales that would have been lost, as this customer would not have settled for the bag in the dusty old tea box.

The right tea supplier will be able to make such an enhanced tea program easy to establish, promote and maintain. In the current environment, your tea supplier should be able to live up to the same high standards restaurants have come to expect from their other quality suppliers of produce, meat and seafood. Oceanwise, USDA, Fair Trade, non-GMO are terms of transparency consumers have come to expect. Why stop at the main ingredient when your tea service can also be more profitable, fun and a better experience for your customer? The rapid growth in this market has given restaurants greater choices and better partners to make this simple and sensible change.

If not now, then when?

Frank Weber is the owner of Toronto based importer and wholesaler Tea Squared. Frank has been a pioneer in the Canadian tea industry and regularly travels the world to bring the purest and most exquisite teas to restaurants and retailers. For more information, visit www.teasquared.ca

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