

Few Things Are Clearer Than the Bottled Water Trend



I was having a late night dinner at the Hudson Hotel in Manhattan. After the server took the food order at the four-top next to me, he secured my unyielding admiration with his next question.

“And finally, would care for a bottle of sparkling water, still water, or would you prefer to drink New York tap water?” The host looked at his guests, the guests looked at the host, who in turn looked at the server and said, “How about a bottle of each.” The server nodded as if they had made a well-informed decision and left.

Over the course of their dinner they had a total of four bottles of water, which added \$16 dollars to their bill. It’s an urban tale with a happy ending. The server bumped up his ticket average and undoubtedly his tip, the host and assembled guests left well hydrated and the house raised their beverage sales without incurring additional liability. Welcome to life in a .09 universe.

Twenty years ago selling water in a restaurant or bar was practically unheard of. Now bottled waters are hot commodities. Their surging rate of growth dwarfs all other types of beverages.

Doesn’t it only stand to reason though? Spring and mineral waters are bottled at a natural source and typify all that is pure and untainted. On the other hand, drinking tap water is entirely a matter of faith, a hope that the water traveling through the aging pipes and concrete aqueducts far below our city streets is relatively free of contaminants and therefore safe to drink from the faucet.

Tapping into the bottled water phenomenon makes good business sense. If you have yet to develop a strategy on how to cash-in on this alcohol-free boom, we have a few pointers to share.

- **Selecting a Team** — The days of stocking one type of bottled water are long gone. To make a bona fide stab at increasing bottled water sales, you’re looking at a minimum of three, four would be better. The water world is divided into still (non-carbonated) and sparkling. You need to carry a selection balanced between highly effervescent waters, such as Perrier and San Pellegrino and those

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with light carbonation, such as Ramlösa and Calistoga. While some opt to market one brand of still water—Evian, Saratoga or Poland Springs—providing guests with a choice is advisable. In the dining room, liter bottles are preferable, while in the lounge the smaller bottles are more advantageous. The bottles should always be kept refrigerated.

• **Watering The Guests** — If possible, serve bottled water in stemmed glassware, such as a wine glass or water goblet. Do not add cubed ice made from tap water to a guest's bottled spring or mineral water. It essentially defeats the purpose. After serving all of the guests at the table, keep the open bottle of water in an iced wine bucket and refill the glass frequently. Attentive, yet unobtrusive service is the objective. When a bottle is emptied, open another. The key is to not let a guest at the table go without water. It is typically

not required to interrupt the host asking for approval to open another bottle of water. If it is house policy to garnish water with a thin lemon wheel, always ask the guest first.

• **Marketing Impetus** — One of the most effective marketing techniques is to set your tables and include a bottle of still and sparkling water. When the guests are seated, the server or hostess asks if they would care for water with their meal. It is a service technique that both anticipates a need and stimulates sales. Some operators go so far as to suggest certain types of bottled waters with different cuisines. For example, pairing Italian San Pellegrino with pastas or Evian with French cuisine. Since the water represents the quintessence of the specific region, an amalgamation of the minerals and salts of the land, it is a worthy cross-promotional concept.

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