

# Start Flipping Those Bottles



Ours is a business of subtleties and intangibles, where small things often make a huge difference. After all, we tend to stock the same products on our back bars, carry the same styles of glassware and rely on the same types of drink mixes. So what differentiates your operation from those on either side of you?

Before you answer, ask yourself what most people are looking for from your bar, lounge, or club. In my experience it's connectivity—the pervasive feeling of belonging and being at ease. Ultimately guests are looking for a place with which to identify, a place they can call their own. That connection is facilitated by dousing their experience with liberal amounts of panache.

In this context, panache is a magical and often unexpected spark of electricity that turns an ordinary night out into something extraordinary. That's what gets people talking about your place the next day around the water cooler.

If you've checked your pockets and desk drawers for a healthy measure of panache, but seem to be coming up empty handed, worry

not, ample amounts of kinetic, crowd pleasing pizzazz are close at hand.

I'm specifically referring to teaching your staff the secrets of flair bartending. Like an untapped reservoir of excitement, grace and dazzling dexterity, flair bartending is a time-proven means of wowing guests, building repeat business and driving sales to new heights.

If by flair bartending you're thinking about the liquor wasting circus routines featured in the film *Cocktail*, well, forget it. Those kinds of side show performances best belong at sponsored events and competitions, not behind working bars.

No, by flair bartending, I'm talking about the admirable ability to flip a few bottles, toss a mixing set now and again, and conclusively demonstrate to the clientele a complete mastery of all things behind the bar.

Perhaps no one better illustrates the point than master mixologist and flair guru Scott Young. Watching this tall, intelligent young man work a bar affords a rare glimpse into just how graceful and exciting the profession can be.

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His occasional bursts of flair are well timed and invariably draw smiles of appreciation from guests throughout the lounge. They seem captivated by his abilities to defy at gravity, all the while keeping in time with the music and not missing a beat preparing a drink order.

“I don’t think there’s any question that flair bartending gives guests a reason to stay longer, spend more money, tip better and leave talking about what a great experience they had,” says Young, president of *extremebartending.com*, an international concern dedicated to training flair bartending. “The way I see it, if a bartender isn’t helping you build your business by making a connection with your guests, find someone who will. Otherwise you’re leaving money on the table and shortchanging your clientele.”

“It’s the ability to create and serve drinks in a stylish and interesting way. Working flair doesn’t have to be complicated, or risky to look good,” contends Young. “It involves tossing, spinning, flipping of glasses, bottles, shaker tins, garnishes, straws, napkins, strainers, ice and ice scoops, that sort of thing. A good flair bartender should be able to do something cool and captivating with every object behind the bar.”

Watching Young in action illustrates his point. While the actual flair moves are a matter of gravity, trajectories and physics, he moves and

grooves in time with the music and interjects a healthy measure of fun. It’s a skill that energizes a crowd, one that people typically pay to watch.

Vance Campbell, hospitality consultant and co-creator of the *Granville Entertainment Zone* in Vancouver is a proponent of Young’s teaching regimen and asserts that working flair is an invaluable management tool. “The biggest lesson I’ve learned is that your front line is your bottom line. The entire power of your team is based upon the experience and professionalism of the people you hire. This is a ‘people business’ and your staff is the single most important asset you have, so you’d better make the most of them. Working flair does just that.”

“The results far exceed our expectations. While it definitely boosted sales and greatly enhanced the guest experience, I noticed an unexpected benefit of the training. Armed with these newfound skills, our bartenders collectively became more capable behind the bar. They’re now a more confident bunch, which people obviously respond well to. It’s proved most beneficial at all of our properties.”

If you’re looking to hedge your chances of success, consider arming your bartending staff with a dynamic new set of skills. Working flair is easily learned and has an immediate impact. Do it before those competitors on either side of you catch wind of it.

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