

2018 Sir Ken Robinson Innovation and Creativity Award

WINNER: Coles Liquor

Serve Up!

Origins and principles

Coles Liquor Team Members are tasked with guiding their customers through the ever-changing world of liquor. They jump from party planners, pairing wines to their customer's party food, to whisky connoisseurs, offering customers insight into new and exciting products to try. Our team members are required to go beyond processing transactions and stacking shelves – they need to inspire customers with advice and confidence.

The previous training was an outdated online platform that hosted multiple choice questions featuring products no longer ranged. It was built with a rigid content structure, had significant information gaps and was overall dull and disengaging. The presentation exacerbated the perception of it being “just another box to tick”. As a result, store teams were not engaging well with the site, let alone retaining the product information, and felt ill-equipped at times to serve their customers.

The Coles Liquor vision is to be ‘Australia's favourite liquor stores’ by providing a customer-centric service. However, as the previous online training platform was built to align with a previous selling culture, it made no clear references to customer service and did not offer examples of typical customer scenarios and resolutions. This left team members with little guidance on how to tailor questions and answers for their diverse customer base and were dependant on prior retail experience or copying other team members around them. Tell Liquor, the customer survey measuring service and product knowledge, showed that there was scope to improve customer experiences in stores relating to: a friendly greeting and hello, availability to assist, product knowledge, team member presentation and acknowledgement if the customer had to wait at the checkout. Although the group's goal to ‘inspire customers in everything we do’ was a part of corporate strategy, there were no clear tools in place to react to Tell Liquor results and encourage team members to take action.

All the Coles Liquor brands – Liquorland, First Choice Liquor and Vintage Cellars - had different target customer demographics, creating the need for different product knowledge levels within team members. For example, Vintage Cellars team members require a more complex understanding of taste, aroma and regions than Liquorland who serve more ‘grab and go’ customers which requires a greater focus on customer service skills. The previous platform showed no consideration of brand knowledge requirements and went for a ‘one size fits all’ approach, often disengaging those who required more. Team members really had no place to foster their desire to learn and develop their industry knowledge. With “Transform Liquor” as one of the key strategy pillars on the Coles Strategy arc, the aim was to transform the frontline of the business – team members.

The idea of Serve Up was conceived and rolled out within 6 months, launched with a bang and still retains the same level of excitement and engagement it did at the beginning.

Implementation

After identifying the information gap in product information and customer service in March 2016, the Coles Liquor Operations team took action. Prior to development, messages had already been

received from store team members asking for a more robust training program as they often felt unsupported whilst being asked to sell a wider range of products. With this in mind, listening groups and surveys were conducted to get an understanding of the perspective of an ideal training experience. National calls with field leadership teams were held to hear how they encouraged and supported learning within their teams. Coles Supermarkets, Coles Express and other training programs were also included in the research. The ideation and planning of the training program allowed for a team of graduates to form a project group and provide their input. The project was then guided by a cross-functional senior leadership steering committee with the General Manager of merchandise as sponsor. A team member was given the opportunity to lead the development in a non-traditional project role, which allowed for others to rotate through his previous position.

The philosophy of upskilling through Serve Up was to create a platform encouraging team members' voluntary engagement with a broad appeal (team members range from age 18-80). The creation of the reward program was to recognise initiative. For each module completed, a relevant discount was unlocked, allowing both a reward for the team's effort but also furthering their learning and providing them an opportunity to taste the product and sell it more confidently to the customer. With these considerations, the brand Serve Up was built, along with guiding principles: natural, flexible, surprising and passionate, and content pillars: On Tap (product knowledge), On Point (service) and On Us (rewards). The tone of the platform was very casual, with the odd "dad-joke" here and there and bright, eye-catching colours, icons and sleek transitions were used to make it even more enticing.

The Operations and Learning and Development Teams worked collaboratively with experienced Category Managers, WSET (Wine & Spirit Education Trust) certified Sourcing Managers and a Master of Wine (one of only 368 in the world) to ensure a leading edge training experience was created. Coles Liquor focusses on Great People, Great Products and Great Customer Experiences. Serve Up was built to encompass all three; empowering our team members to have more meaningful conversations with customers, further their knowledge and develop key soft skills. This was achieved through quizzes, libraries and articles and with opportunities for team members to review products. All of this knowledge was then reinforced in 5 product learning modules. Serve Up breaks down typical customer profiles presenting them in animated 'David Attenborough-style' videos as well as describing the 'Steps to Sell' - from greeting to farewell - and testing knowledge in a customer service module.

Post launch, the focus remained on team member feedback and continuous content, which led to the launch of Serve Up SMSs. These transparent, humanising videos significantly broken down the barrier between office and stores with them getting in front of the camera together. This has given the store teams an opportunity to not only further their knowledge of the product or customer type, but of the broader business and its leaders as well. This functionality has been harnessed by the broader communications team as a way of communicating moving forward. Articles about trade events, product launches and range focuses, have become a part of the continuous content strategy, encouraging more frequent use of the site. The theming around knowledge also makes the learning more relevant as teams will use the information during that time. The store teams appreciate the continuous content with the site's average session duration at 10 minutes 38 seconds, indicating they are staying on the page and engaging well with the content. The program has also opened up opportunities for store team members to author content themselves, be a part of testing new functionality and even be seconded into the store support centre to work on the program. Serve Up has also seen two graduates work on the project, one of which was then offered a full-time role to manage the platform and ensure continuous learning.

Benefits and Outcomes

Team members have continued to show immense support through emails, feedback forms, and encouraging comments on Yammer. The warm welcome Serve Up has received is made obvious by the fact that over 90% of team members have engaged with the platform and completed all 8 modules. This amounts to 40,000 modules in total. Considering that the platform was specifically

designed to be captivating enough to inspire voluntary participation by team members, this has been a very reassuring outcome.

Serve Up's success is also demonstrable by the uplift by 314% in the annual visits to Tell Liquor Dashboard since its launch. Not only is valuable content being provided to teams and empowering them with tools for effective team-building exercises, but the customer-centric culture is also being embedded within stores. There has been a noticeable increase in customer satisfaction, with Tell Liquor Surveys revealing that 1 million more customers have reported being extremely satisfied with in-store services. This has in turn, equated to a 10% increase in the average Great Customer Experience Score over the year since the launch of Serve Up.

The increase in customer satisfaction is also evident at the transactional level, with more customers deciding to shop with Coles Liquor more often. Coles Liquor is growing, and a significant aspect of this success is attributable to the enrichment of team member knowledge and customer service skills that Serve Up has provided. The launch of the Spend/Get mechanic tips and tricks video and article resulted in a 4.6% rise just within a week. First Choice Liquor was the recipient of the Roy Morgan Customer Satisfaction Award for the Liquor Store Category showing the incredible effort of team members.

The launch of Serve Up has undeniably revolutionised communication within Coles Liquor. With the success of Serve UP SMSs, the internal communications team has comfortably embraced speedy video messaging to deliver weekly updates on sales performances and key focuses for the week ahead, rather than having to depend on several conference calls and documents. The positive feedback from team members regarding the engaging and easily accessible digital content has even prompted the business to consider investing in devices for team members to use in stores. This will not only further enhance the Serve Up experience but will also uncover a new channel for the execution of other functions (i.e. safety) by providing a more responsive environment for the provision of material.

Challenges and Opportunities

Implementing a social aspect to the site is the newest stage of development to enhance the platform. The new feature allows team members to like, comment, write their own product reviews, upload their own photos and start threads. Not only does this harness the energy and interactions received daily but also encourages collaboration and ensures a continuous generation of content. Additionally, highly engaged team members are recognized and provided with tools and support to create their own articles and answer questions about products, enhancing peer to peer learning.

Summary

With the catchphrase "Not just another frothy customer service platform", Serve Up was created by Coles Liquor, for Coles Liquor with the aim of developing service and product experts through an engaging, tongue-in-cheek learning platform. Liquor retail demands detailed product knowledge and attentive customer service where team members are expected to go beyond transactions and stacking shelves. The previous learning program was extremely outdated in content, design and functionality, often disengaging team members and not always providing the information required to provide great customer experiences. Serve Up was unveiled at the annual national store manager conference in October 2016 and since has been welcomed with over 40,000 modules completed, SMS functionality revolutionising the way Coles Liquor communicate with their store teams and a significant improvement in customer satisfaction, with more customers shopping with them more often.