

The benefits of smoke free restaurants

The issue of smoking in restaurants is a difficult one: for restaurateurs because they (at least seemingly) can't satisfy both factions of the public, and for non-smokers because the scope of their lifestyle is often restricted to smoke free places.

However, this latter fact is what has made smoke free restaurants so profitable. No matter how much money an operator may put into separating the two factions, nonsmokers will continue to gravitate toward 100% smoke free eateries, and sales will continue to dwindle for the smoky restaurant.

Restaurant operators are not totally to blame. For far too long, society itself has tolerated a product which, when enjoyed by its user, disperses toxic chemicals into the air that either irritate or disable nearby non-users. Simply, non-smokers are no longer willing to tolerate it, and they go elsewhere.

The misjudgment is with operators who insist on not losing even one smoker, no matter how many non-smokers are lost, and no matter what the health risks to employees. However, the costs of *not* making the move can be much higher than doing so.

We estimate that every smoking customer will, over time, chase away five nonsmoking customers. Of course, the smokers keep returning and the non-smokers do not, so restaurateurs are left with a false sense of where their majority customer base really is. ***The smaller the restaurant, the higher the price they will pay.***

Historically, the tobacco industry has done an excellent job of convincing restaurant operators that since 25% of the population are smokers, going smokefree would cost them 25% of their business. Clearly erroneous, but it is easy to see why operators would balk at making such a drastic change.

But why isn't the restaurant operator equally afraid of losing the 75% who do not smoke? Because rather than complain, these folks just quietly slip away to cleaner air down the street. Operators see the smokers return; but they do not see the nonsmokers who stay away, thus creating a false impression of where their market really is.

Who is the wiser?

By allowing smoking at all, many restaurateurs have painted themselves into a corner by unwittingly catering to a declining population of smokers while those who are smoke free are expanding their market place.

Operators who themselves smoke, and even some who don't but have smoker lungs because of their work environment, seem extraordinarily slow at getting the message.

Fortunately, increasing numbers of operators are understanding the health and financial benefits of being smokefree. Even operators who smoke, but nonetheless put good business judgments ahead of personal habits, are being won over.

Many restaurateurs now recognize that a growing number of non-smokers will no longer tolerate eating in a smoke-filled room. If not becoming smoke free, they are going to great costs to try to separate the smokers — while simply going smoke free would cost zero dollars. Clean air can be tolerated by everybody!

Depending on the extent to which they recirculate the smoky air through the nonsmoking section, they may or may not reduce the ire of the non-smoker. (They need to know, however, that providing smoking rooms and sections increases the risk of the staff who serve the smokers. This new concentration of smoke in the air will significantly increase worker health risks, even for the smoking staff.)

The facts are clear: if restaurants go smoke free the right way, they will at least retain their current level of business, and will often increase it. Maybe only by 3-5%, but an increase none the less:

- 76% of Wisconsin adults do not smoke, and that number is growing.
- 20-30% of smokers prefer smokefree dining (Gallup and National Restaurant Association polls).
- Most other smokers will acquiesce to the smoke-free eatery at the request of their friends or family.

- Only 2-3% of the population are die-hard smokers who would actually avoid a smokefree restaurant.
- For every smoker a restaurant might lose, they stand to gain two non smokers in return. (That's a pretty good trade, and one that is substantiated by the restaurant industry's own polls.)
- Waitresses, who work in restaurants which allow smoking, have four times the lung cancer risk and nearly three times the heart disease risk as do women in other occupations (per a University of California - San Francisco study).
- Since 1992, the number of smoke-free restaurants in Wisconsin has grown from 65 to well over 2000 today. Why would these restaurants remain smoke free, were it not profitable?

In over 200 U.S. communities and three states, smoke free restrictions have been implemented with out a loss of restaurant business. *Indeed, most smokers do not quit eating in their favorite restaurant when it goes smoke free, they just quit smoking in it.*

What is the right way to convert?

In all of our discussions with restaurant operators, one thing stands out loud and clear: those who go smoke free quietly do not fare as well as those who do so with a splash.

If they simply hang a sign saying "We are now smoke-free," the only people who will know about it are their current customers. While they may lose a handful of these folks, they will usually regain the losses as word slowly filters out that they are now smoke free.

But this is a foolish waste of time and revenues. Why wait even one day? They should hang a large banner on the building saying "Enjoy Smoke-Free Dining." They should boldly print it in every ad, build it up in radio ads and seek out talk-show for mats.

Why not tell the world? Why keep it quiet until the smokers reach the door? Why avoid getting the word to the people who would be attracted by it? Even if they are just passersby who notice the banner, they are new customers who otherwise wouldn't exist!

Some operators erroneously believe that by doing it quietly, they will offend fewer smokers. But those who will be offended will be offended no matter how it is

done. The secret is an affirmative action to replace them even before they are lost.

When operators are bold about their new policy, word gets out in record time. They will be gaining growth in three areas: (1) Old customers who were previously chased away by the smoke will be gaining return to their once-favorite eatery; (2) new customers will be attracted from the competitor down the street who still allows smoking, and (3) nonsmokers who have avoided restaurants because of the smoke problem will start venturing out.

It's a win-win situation. Especially for the lungs and cash register.

Smoke-free Restaurants: Profits or Peril?

The health and financial benefits, and how to maximize profits when making the conversion.

Sitting in a non smoking section is like swimming in the non chlorinated end of a swimming pool.

In 1992 we began collecting the names of restaurants that were smoke-free, and our first "dining guide" began with a grand total of 65 restaurants. We interviewed many of those operators and found an exciting parallel: rarely did a restaurant lose business when it removed the ashtrays, and when it did it was only a temporary dip. The majority of operators reported that revenues either remained the same or increased slightly.

As we took these success stories to other operators, they slowly began making the same decision, and today we have over 2000 in the state.

When we talk to restaurant operators, roughly 70% want to eliminate smoking in their business. Many want the government to do it, partly to level the playing field to protect against losses and partly to remove themselves as the bad guy.

However, smoke-free is more popular by a 4:1 ratio, so why wait for the government to act and lose the opportunity to beat your competitor to the punch? Why not take advantage of an idea that has proven to increase

profits? Why wait another day to reduce the work place hazard and anti-marketing effects of secondhand smoke when you can do it and increase sales *today*?

[The main reason the 70% don't convert on their own is because of the unfounded fear of lost sales, and in some cases they have old customers they don't want to offend. But these concerns are unfounded.]

The trick is to go smoke free while maximizing profits and offending the fewest number of smokers. Keep in mind that most of your smokers will understand your obligation to reduce major workplace hazards and will remain long after the ash trays have been removed. You'll be pleasantly surprised.

Note: being smoke free does not offset lousy food! Many nonsmokers still patronize smoky restaurants with good food (although less often today). So, why would it stand that smokers will stay away from a smoke-free restaurant with good food?

It doesn't. That smokers are still an unyielding population is simply not true.

In every patron survey that we've seen taken by restaurant operators, the numbers are the same:

- 88% of patrons range from adamant nonsmokers to indifferent smokers,
- 9% would not be happy with the decision but would not necessarily stay away, and
- only 3% are die-hard smokers who claim they will never return (some will never return, but so what?).

Even more important than those numbers are the answers to the following question:

New health studies show that waitresses have almost 4 times the lung cancer risk and over twice the heart disease risk when working in restaurants that allow smoking. Given the significant health risks secondhand smoke poses to our employees, if we were to go smoke free would you:

- Eat here more frequently?
- Eat here about the same?
- Eat here less frequently?

[Note that two significant groups are missing from this survey: the nonsmoking customers you once had but have no more, and your competitor's patrons who will come over after you convert. Still, the numbers will come out in favor, and after conversion old customers will be the first to return.]

Ask the experts: Your customers!

The responses to the second option should be ignored. What matters is the difference between options 1 and 3. If the first exceeds the third by even one percentage point, the results can mean only one thing: a gain in business! Consistent with the National Restaurant Association's own polls, the numbers are roughly:

- 56% will eat there more frequently
- 27% will eat there less frequently

No matter how you cut it, that's a 2:1 advantage for smoke free. It is not unreasonable to expect that for every smoker you lose, you can gain two nonsmokers. [Most business people will accept that trade any day.]

Successes in the smoke-free world are everywhere. The reason: the ratio of nonsmokers (76%) to smokers (24%) is an overwhelming 3:1. One is an increasingly bigger pie to draw from and has fewer smoke-free competitors, while the other is a declining marketplace.

Which operator is the smarter? Being smoke free makes good business sense, even if you are a smoker yourself.

Going smoke free must be well planned

Importantly, if you go smoke-free quietly, only your current customers will know about it. Even your old customers that you previously lost because of tobacco smoke problems will be unaware of your new smoke-free policy. ***Don't keep it a secret!***

To regain your old customers and get new ones from your smoky competitors, you must tell the world about your new smoke-free policy. Advertise it. Place signs in the windows - the larger the better. Even a banner across the front of your building, and a message on your marquee.

Don't underestimate this vital step!

Deception will backfire

We have seen some operators purposely omit their smoke-free policy from their ads and coupons in the hope that when smokers are told at the door they will not turn away. Perhaps some won't, this time. But if they are of the few strong objectors, they'll not be back again any way.

Don't lose your opportunity to attract the population who cares about dining in a smoke free setting! As mentioned before, 88% of the population either favor smoke free dining, or are indifferent to it. Why miss this group with your ads simply to attract the small percentage of smokers who might stay after they get to the front door? It doesn't make sense.

It surprises us that some operators fear that advertising a smoke free policy would turn away smokers, when the smokers you'd lose will be lost any way. If you do it right, you'll replace them with non smokers even before they are gone.

We've also seen a few restaurants go belly up and, to the day they closed the doors, have refused to give smoke-free a try. That's not real smart. What would they have to lose?

Astute operators know a month or two in advance when they'll have to close the doors. But how many will say *"Gee, I've got nothing to lose. Why don't I give this dumb idea a try. Even if an increase doesn't occur, or doesn't save me, I can use the experience on my next venture."* Why has not one operator tried this last-ditch strategy?

A short age of help?

We often hear that "most waitresses smoke," and that "help is hard to find." Could it be that smoky restaurants are severely limiting their work force to the 24% of the population who smoke, and that nonsmoking workers avoid smoky restaurant jobs? Indeed that is the case.

Smoke free restaurants have significant advantages and can attract the best of the workers. There is clearly a savings as so cited with this benefit, as well as a savings due to the lower absenteeism rates of non smokers.

First things first - Restaurant Worker Risks!

Don't ignore the facts, even restaurant operators face these high risks. For operators who smoke, the added to tobacco concentration places them at even greater risk than that which their habit creates!

According to a study by Michael Siegel, M.D., M.P.H., University of California in San Francisco:

- Restaurant environmental tobacco smoke (ETS) is about 3-5 times higher than typical workplace exposure (which adds both the smoke of the worker with the smoke of the patrons).
- Restaurant employees' ETS exposure is about 8-20 times higher than domestic exposure (where a member of the family smokes).
- The most heavily exposed restaurant workers inhale the benzo(a)pyrene equivalent of actively smoking 1 to 2 packs of cigarettes per day.
- A University of California study shows that waitresses have the highest mortality of any female occupational group. Compared to all other women, they have almost **4 times the expected lung cancer mortality and 2 1/2 times the expected heart disease mortality rate.**
- Preliminary evidence suggests that waiters and waitresses have about a 50-90% increased risk of lung cancer that is most likely attributable to restaurant tobacco smoke exposure.
- The mutagenic potency of restaurant air is 5-10 times that of "high risk" in dustrial workplaces.

Note 1: Restaurant air contains six times the carbon monoxide that you'd inhale standing in the middle of California's busiest freeway! While the health risks alone are compelling reasons to convert, increased sales and profits can be had for those who convert today. Don't wait.

Note 2: Tavern owners who have many multiples higher levels of tobacco smoke in their work environment should be very concerned. These are employee "class action lawsuits" waiting to happen. This industry needs a major overhaul of its thinking on tobacco smoke.

For the same reason you wouldn't allow someone to spray radon or asbestos dust in your restaurant, you shouldn't allow the dispersement of toxic tobacco carcinogens.

The Many Benefits of Smoke Free

- Non smokers do not linger for coffee refills.
- Patron turnover is faster.
- Non smokers will more frequently stay to enjoy dessert or an after-dinner drink.
- Non smokers will not get angry and walk out because of delays getting a smoke-free table.
- No more lost or broken ash trays.
- Cigarette burns on furniture and carpets are eliminated.
- Curtains, walls, floors and upholstery need fewer cleanings and replacements.
- Reservations and seating are simplified with only one class of seating, and no single employee feels shortchanged by his/her table assignment.
- Restaurants do not become teenage smoking dens or hang outs.
- Employee absenteeism is reduced, and employee productivity is increased.
- The risks of a devastating fire are substantially reduced, likely reducing insurance premiums. (14.2% of restaurant fires are caused by smoking, per National Fire Prevention Association).
- Patron and employee liability risks are reduced.
- Patrons and employees alike will be much happier, and they will dine out more frequently as a result (36% more, according to the Madison, WI survey).

The successful way to go smoke free:

Take a survey of your customers in advance to show them that they are part of the decision. Let them know that you are only considering this move in order to reduce the health hazards for your employees, who must breathe the environmental air 40 hours per week.

Ask them if they would eat there “more often, less often, or about the same” if you become 100% smoke free.

- Once decided, give two weeks advance notice with a sign at the door and on table tents. Let the idea settle in.
- Advertise. Advertise. Advertise! (And, no, I’m not in the advertising business.)
- In your ads or coupons, your smoke-free policy should be 80% as large as your restaurant name.
Don’t keep it a secret!

- Send press releases to radio, TV and newspapers.
- Run 10-second radio/TV spots touting your new smoke-free policy.
- Get on radio talk shows, even if it creates controversy (but stress the health issues).
- Call in to newspaper “sound off” columns.
- Place a large banner on your storefront saying: “Smoke-Free Dining!”
- Write a letter to the editor of your local paper explaining why you made this decision.
- Let your smokers take home the ash trays.
- Have a “recycling” party to have fun with the idea.
- Don’t fear controversy. Promote it! The more people talk about it the better. Even the complaints from smokers will work in your favor. Let them sound off in the press and on radio; it’ll further spread the word.
- Show unhappy smokers the health statistics leading to your decision, and ask for their understanding. (Available from WISH)
- Never, never, never make this a smoker versus non smoker lawsuit. It is a health issue only!
- Always relate your decision to the safety of your employees (rather than the comfort of your non-smoking patrons). Smokers can empathize with the health risks of your staff, but they will be offended if they feel that you’ve chosen non-smoker business over smoker business.
- Although many smokers may prefer smoke-free dining, don’t needlessly upset the others. Smart planning will let you save all but a few of the heaviest smokers (the few that created most of the smoke anyway).

Don’t get hung up on the potential loss of the die-hard smokers who complain and complain. They will try to wear you down, and they are the problems in the first place. We estimate that every smoker, in repeated visits, will ultimately chase away five nonsmokers. That’s not a very good trade.

Operators have historically been fooled by the ratio of their smoker versus nonsmoker patrons. Remember that it is not the smoker who is being offended by the air quality, it’s the nonsmoker. The smokers will continue coming back, and it is this population that the operator mostly “sees.”

But operators fail to see the nonsmokers who quietly slip away to cleaner air and never return. Thus, operators are left with a false sense of who their market really is.

By virtue of the smoking policy, the smokers continue to return and continue to chase away other nonsmokers. To the detriment of their cash register, operators inadvertently drive their market toward the declining 24% of the smokers. This does not seem to be a very good long-term strategy.

Only a state law or local ordinances banning smoking in restaurants will save them from being ultimately overrun by this deadly product and future employee law suits. Despite the restaurant association's position, operators should unite behind universal laws banning this workplace hazard.

Why not have a clean air environment that 100% of your patrons can breathe? Why exclude any patrons at all?

When we hear smoke-free restaurant operators boast that business is up, and operators who allow smoking complain that revenues are down, it is not hard to see which way the trend is going.

If you are really looking for an excuse, try one of these....

We're too small to have a non smoking section!

Think about it. If your restaurant is really that small, should you even allow smoking at all?

The smaller the restaurant, the less air space there is to dissipate the smoke, and the more nonsmoking customers you will chase away. Guaranteed!

Remember: Nonsmokers represent 74.9% of the adult population. Why limit your marketplace to the 25% who smoke and the few nonsmokers who don't mind being around smokers?

Why not expand your market to the 74.9% who are nonsmokers, plus the fourth of the smokers who prefer smoke free dining themselves, and the few smokers who will gripe but continue coming back because they like your food?

Don't bury your head in the sand on this issue. Do your math. That's over 90% of the market!

Smoke-free restaurants aren't doing so well!

That's exactly what the tobacco industry would want you to believe, but it's not true.

In Wisconsin, we've grown from 65 smoke-free restaurants in Wisconsin in 1992, to over 2000 to day! Do you think these operators would continue being smoke free if it weren't profitable?

Virtually all of the smoke-free restaurants in Wisconsin have reported unaffected or increased revenues as a result of removing the ash trays. Some have experienced significant increases (when they go smoke free with a splash). Only a handful have reported problems, and these could have been avoided with smarter planning. Even if sales remain the same, a decrease in cleaning costs will still yield an increase in profits.

I can't afford to lose even one customer!

Wrong! You can afford to lose any customer who chases away other customers on a continuing basis. Smokers chase away nonsmokers, and as smokers return they chase away even more nonsmokers. A serious, repetitive cycle sets into place, sometimes resulting in closing the doors.

Why do restaurant operators fear losing even one smoker, yet they can ignore the many nonsmokers lost because of that smoker? We estimate that, because of this repetitive cycle, each smoking customer will eventually cost the average restaurant five nonsmokers in exchange. Is it a wise decision to allow this trend to continue?

I'll win my smoke-free competitor's smokers!

That's real smart. For every smoker you get of his, he'll get two of your nonsmokers. The math doesn't seem to be in your favor. And, what's going to happen when your customer base is 100% smokers?

In Madison (WI) on State Street, as more and more restaurants went smoke free, the hard-core smokers migrated to the few eateries that would still allow them. But then, these owners started to lose even smokers who could no longer stand it — until they, too, joined the smoke free trend. While they did ultimately switch, it cost them business before they made the conversion. There is no reason to let that happen to you.

I can't afford to offend any of my smokers!

Now come on. Better to ask, can you afford to offend the 76% of the population who are non smokers? Think about it.

First, you're assuming that all smokers will be offended by a smoke-free policy, when that is not even close to being correct. About one-fourth of smokers prefer smoke-free dining, and a large number will sit in the non smoking section with their friends and family. Only 2-3% of the entire population are hard-core smokers who will stay away from a smoke-free eatery. And for every smoker you could lose, you stand to gain two non smokers in their place. That kind of math is on your side. Don't let that 2-3% destroy your logic.

Secondly, smokers are becoming increasingly aware of the problems created by their tobacco habit. They can't smoke in movies, retail stores, theaters or planes, and they understand why they are finding fewer restaurants in which to smoke. Besides, most smokers don't quit eating in their favorite restaurant when it goes smoke free, they just quit smoking in it.

Most of my customers are smokers!

First, that's probably not correct, but if it is, you are in even deeper trouble than are most of your colleagues. If you have allowed your smoking clientele to take over your establishment, you and your staff are at greater health risk than ever before. Under normal circumstances, waitresses are only at four times the risk of developing lung cancer. What is it with a higher ratio of smokers?

Also important, if you have lost that many non smokers already, you should be poised to regain a greater number of them when you do go smoke-free! And a number of your smoky competitor's patrons, as well.

We want to accommodate all of our customers!

That's what the tobacco industry wants you to do, too, and Philip Morris and R.J. Reynolds even provide decals for your doors to show your customers how "accommodating" you are to smokers.

But don't kid yourself into believing that this will work in your favor. What smokers and nonsmokers choose to breathe into their lungs are mutually exclusive. One wants clean air; the other wants tobacco smoke. You cannot satisfy them both.

As well, these signs will actually lead to increased smoking in your establishment (exactly what the industry wants), with a resulting decrease in non smoking patrons. Don't let the tobacco industry trick you into putting their profits ahead of your own. Many non-smokers will avoid (even boycott) restaurants that encourage smoking with these tobacco-industry signs.

My customers don't complain about the smoke!

Few will. Only 1 in 25 nonsmokers will speak out when offended by tobacco smoke. Most nonsmokers just quietly walk away to a non smoking restaurant — and the operator never knows why they've left. Silent losses, indeed.

However, since some smokers complain when not allowed to light up, operators are often left with the false impression that they are satisfying more people by allowing smoking and reducing complaints, when in fact they have only reduced the number of people to complain.

The owner is a smoker!

That may be true. But it's our guess that the owner is also (or wants to be) a good business person, and if removing the ashtrays increased revenues, that owner would satisfy his or her smoking habit elsewhere.

Besides, there is only one thing worse than having a patron light up and ruin your meal: it's having the owner or an employee do it. Even if smoking is allowed in a restaurant, it is absolutely foolhardy for owners or employees to contribute to the problem and themselves chase away non smokers.

Smokers have rights, too!

Of course they do, but they do not have the right to disperse into the air a known toxic substance for others to breathe — regardless of how long the practice has been tolerated in our society. You wouldn't let non smokers disperse radon, asbestos or any other annoying substance into the air; why must you allow smokers to do it?

To the contrary, nonsmokers (but mostly, your employees) do have the right to breathe clean, safe air. That right is guaranteed by both state and federal laws, you have an obligation to provide it, and restaurant operators will see in increasing numbers of law suits from employees if they fail to address this safety issue.

Importantly, employees must breathe the smoky air 40 hours per week, and the cumulative effect can be deadly. It is precisely because of employee safety that most smokers understand why you've made the decision to go smoke free. Few, if any at all, will challenge a decision based on employee safety.

Why not have clean air, which everybody can breathe?

I can't afford to make any changes!

Can you really afford not to?

If things are not going well, being smoke free will likely make them better. It could even make the difference between staying in business and closing the doors. Ironically, we've seen numerous restaurants close their doors, while at the same time refusing to try something new, like a smoke-free policy, to turn things around. Does that make any business sense? Is it any wonder that the failure rate for restaurants is so high?

If business is already good, are you not open to making it better? We've even had some say that "business is too good," and they couldn't stand to make it any better! Well, then, how about just making it safer and cleaner without losing any business?

I'm waiting for it to become law!

Why wait until the playing field is leveled, when you can capitalize on the trend and gain a competitive edge before everybody else is doing it too?

The restaurants in Madison that led the smoke-free trend, long before the ordinance was passed, developed a loyal following that remained even after the ordinance leveled the playing field.

You, too, can be a leader and capitalize on this profitable trend. Don't be the last one to make the move.

And our favorite.....

We've got to be fair to everybody

Is it really "fair" to force nonsmokers (and your employees) to breathe second hand tobacco smoke, just so you can be "fair" to smokers? Is it fair to force nonsmokers to sit on the patio, so smokers can light up inside? Isn't maximum fairness providing everybody clean, safe air to breathe while enjoying their dinner?

The National Restaurant Association findings...

According to a February 12, 1993 memo from the NRA to its members, citing a New York Times/CBS poll regarding smoking in restaurants:

A full 67% of those polled favor a complete ban on smoking in all public places — including 39% of current smokers, 74% of former smokers, and 78% of those who never smoked.

According to a study fielded by the National Restaurant Association in January 1993,

- 56% of adults said they would be more likely to go to a restaurant that voluntarily banned smoking as opposed to one that continued to permit smoking, and
- 26% would be less likely to go to a restaurant that voluntarily banned smoking as opposed to one that continued to permit smoking.

Now plug in your calculator!

If you are not smoke free, you are losing business you need not lose. While the above illustrates a 215% greater (56% vs. 26%) preference for smoke free dining, even if the former exceeded the latter by only 1%, it would translate to an increase in sales!!! **For every smoker who would eat there less frequently, two nonsmokers will take their place.** That results in a gain no matter what language you speak.

Smoke-free Bars? Bars with nonsmoking sections?

Not out of the realm of possibility...

For far too long, restaurant operators have assumed that banning smoking in their eatery would cost them business. Now they are learning that most smokers do not quit eating in their favorite restaurant when it goes smoke-free, they just quit smoking in it. Smokers really don't have to light up everywhere they go, they just do because they are allowed to.

Bar owners have traditionally felt the same concern, perhaps being even more cautious because it so often seems that a large percentage of bar customers are smokers. But they must realize that nonsmokers are not necessarily nondrinkers; they just seem that way because most non smokers avoid smoky bars at all costs.

According to a San Jose (CA) State University study, on a "per person" basis, one smoker will consume twice the level of alcohol than one nonsmoker. However, non smokers outnumber smokers by 3:1.

Think about that: Using the 3:1 numerical advantage of nonsmokers, for every three beers downed by three non smokers, two beers are downed by one smoker. No matter how you cut it, the non smoker market is greater than the smoker market! ***As a group, non smokers consume 60% of the total alcohol market.*** That is a significant oversight being made by most bar and lounge owners, and a lot of market to chase away.

Moreover, owners must recognize the dire shortage of smoke-free bars in most cities. Taking advantage of the larger nonsmoker marketplace and advertising your new smoke-free bar will surely draw nonsmoking patrons away from your competitors, and your food sales should increase even more. Nonsmokers are desperate for good places to go where they will not be assaulted by tobacco smoke.

The fact is, smokers chase away non smokers, both in the bar and restaurant settings. As the smoker returns, the cycle repeats and even more non smokers are lost. This creates the significant imbalance bar operators see between smokers and nonsmokers. The attrition rate of nonsmokers is high and the effects harmful to employees and costly to the cash register. It makes no sense to let this continue.

Any smoke can be detrimental...

Non smokers have various degrees of sensitivity. Some are totally disabled by smoke, and can not breathe in its presence. Some have asthma. Some are only sensitive and develop watery eyes, sneeze or get stuffed-up heads. Some are neither, but are simply offended by the mere presence of smoke in the air.

None the less, everybody in these categories have made a life choice to not breathe tobacco smoke, and they go out of their way to patronize non smoking facilities.

That leaves the bars with the smokers, the few non-smokers who are indifferent about smoke, and those who have just quit smoking themselves and thus are not yet bothered by the smell.

But the majority of non smokers are a vast marketplace that smoky bars and restaurants will simply lose as more and more places go smoke free. In fact, WISH's goal is to divert as many non smokers from smoky restaurants as we can, and send them to smoke-free restaurants instead. We hope to create a major market shift toward smoke-free restaurants in order to give owners of smoky restaurants financial reason to change.

When smoke is even allowed in a building, it permeates the air and patrons in the non smoking section can still go home with residual tobacco odor on their clothes and in their hair. When non smokers get home, they know all too well that they've been in a smoky restaurant. Just one cigarette from a discourteous smoker is enough to engulf 100 nearby non smokers.

The trend is firm. Most non smokers will, in the future, favor and patronize the totally smoke-free facilities before settling on one with a smoky bar. Smoky places will be the last resort to many.

Importantly, changes in bar smoking policies can be made without sacrificing any of your smoker business. Although it might be gutsy to make a "bar-only" setting smoke-free, there are compromises that can and should be made.

Smoke-Free Bars with attached restaurants

Most bars that are a part of a restaurant can and should go smoke free. If an operator determines that being smoke-free will increase the food marketplace, going smoke free in the bar extends just one more service to the new non smoking patrons thus attracted.

As with the restaurant decision the same fears exist here. But so can the results. Restaurant owners whose business increases only moderately when going smoke free, are very likely not receiving the full impact of their new policy because they left the bar smoky.

After getting new nonsmokers into the restaurant for dinner, many of these patrons avoid the smoky bar — both while waiting for their table and for after-dinner drinks. It seems a waste to see these non smokers walk past the bar on their way out, maybe even going to a smoke-free bar elsewhere in town.

In cases where non smokers go out to eat and then to a bar, they can come to your place for both if your bar is also smoke free. You'll attract new customers both from restaurant and bar competitors.

Bar-Only settings

Oh, but you say, "most of my bar customers smoke!"

Is there really any wonder as to why nonsmokers are avoiding your smoky bar? Many nonsmokers absolutely refuse to go into smoky bars. Probably half of the adult population stay away from bars, and that is a significant loss of marketplace, when it need not be lost at all.

Even without going to tally smoke free, bar owners can increase sales by tapping the vast nonsmoker marketplace. And yes, even without giving up the "heavy smoker" marketplace, if they really want to keep it.

How? First, by getting the words "ventilation and recirculation" out of their vocabulary. Think "exhaust!"

Separate the bar into smoking and nonsmoking sections and place a heavy exhaust fan at the smoking end to extract the smoke totally out of the building. The clean air will then travel through the nonsmoking section, then the smoking section, and then out of the building. Don't recirculate the smoky air!

Everybody will be pleased with this arrangement, even the smokers.

Yes, this will increase heating and ventilation costs, but the increased non smoker marketplace should more than offset those costs. Or, you could decide just to go 100% smoke free, which involves no additional structural costs.

There is no good reason why the smokers need 100% of your bar area, and most would rather have the non-smokers away from them anyway.

Note, however, that even if the above suggestion does satisfy smokers and nonsmokers, it does not remove the significant health risk imposed on the staff.

Employer liability?

If you thought the air supply was bad in the restaurant setting, brace yourself. It's likely triple that in the bar.

According to the University of California, restaurant environmental tobacco smoke (ETS) is about 3-5 times higher than typical workplace exposure; restaurant employees' ETS exposure is 8-20 times higher than "at home" exposure; the most heavily exposed restaurant workers inhale the benzo(a)pyrene equivalent of actively smoking 1 to 2 packs of cigarettes per day, and waitresses have the highest mortality of any female occupational group (with almost 4 times the lung cancer mortality and 2 1/2 times the expected heart disease mortality rate).

How does all of this translate to the bartender? Or to the owner who runs the bar?

We don't know the answers yet, but it certainly can't be good. And it sure could be a deadly mistake to ignore the issue just because you haven't developed lung cancer or emphysema yet.

Visit the online Smoke Free Dining Guide at: www.wish-wi.org/RestaurantSearch.asp

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