

Your Hub

The Boathouse at Boulters Lock gives back during COVID-19

Situated on its own island, The Boathouse at Boulters Lock boasts a decadent al fresco dining and drinking spot, where everyone is welcome.

Its owners believe hospitality is about making customers feel at home away from home. They cherish regulars, but are just as welcoming to first time visitors.

The Challenge

The Boathouse at Boulters Lock had been open just one day when the directive to close came from the government. When its owners spent £750,000 preparing the building for the public, they could have had no way of knowing that a global pandemic would try to sabotage their plans.

It didn't take long for Managing Director, Hamish Stoddart, to decide that as he couldn't change circumstance, he could make the best of the situation by helping others struggling through the pandemic. While the public was suffering from a serious shortage of essential items in the supermarket, the catering supply chain had better access to these foods.

The Solution

Hamish established Your Hub, a not-for-profit group aiming to serve meals to those in need from The Boathouse.

The idea was a simple one. Your Hub would be run by hospitality workers and volunteers looking for a purpose while out of work or on furlough. It would sell meals to the public and plough any profits made into the production and delivery of meals to the homeless, local charities and the NHS.

However, as simple as the idea was, it was going to be labour intensive without a strong foundation of technology helping to streamline the process.

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Microsoft and Access Group, Fourth Tech all offered technology to assist the fledgling social enterprise, but there was one solution still to find: a digital ordering platform.

Hamish spoke to Access Group and explained what they needed: a simple piece of standalone software that could link to the Access Software Suite – but which stood alone in terms of customer facing interface. The volunteers needed to be able to easily run it themselves with just a modest amount of support. Access introduced him to QikServe. The platform was

The Results

The platform was simple and quick to set up, and, in Hamish's words: it worked. Within two months, the pub had served more than 1,300 digitally ordered meals and donated £2000 through YourHub.

The Boathouse also took public donations via the QikServe ordering platform; 389 meals were donated by customers to the NHS and other local charities, including The Brett Foundation. A further 180 people made financial contributions to volunteers at the hub and local groups.

Yourhub.pub opened 9 more hubs with the software and in total took £100k of Sales and served 8000 meals to NHS and the Homeless.

With lockdown lifted, the Your Hub and its not-for-profit operations were wound up to prepare for the opening it had hoped to have back in March. Of course, work won't be quite the same yet, and the team will have to adapt to the 'new normal, ensuring customers and staff are safe and protected.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, there had been no definite move to use digital ordering at The Boathouse. However, Hamish believes shifting types of demand are going to be the reality for the business over the next year: "As the rules change, finding a way to be flexible, fast and responsive will be really important."

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In their own words...

The Coronavirus pandemic highlighted and changed the hospitality landscape once and for all. Before, we considered the Order Ahead as an option, but had no immediate plans to introduce it; this event has accelerated the need and the desire to do so. We now see ourselves offering that, alongside other solutions such as Order at Table. These platforms will help us minimise staff-to-guest contact, ensuring social distancing guidelines are adhered to as far as possible.

The first few months at The Boathouse were not what we expected them to be, but thanks to the support of our community, the hospitality technology industry – including QikServe – and our host of volunteers, we have been able to deliver a lot of food, to a lot of people in need. We're proud to have achieved that.