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## News for the Hospitality Executive

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## Lessons From the Field: A Tale of Two Restaurants

*by Dr. John Hogan, CHE, CHA, CMHS  
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While my career has been substantially in managing and working with full Service Hotels, I also learned a great deal from managing independent, free-standing restaurant operations as well as successful restaurants and lounges in hotels.

More than 150 years ago, Charles Dickens penned the story of two contrasting major European cities. *A Tale of Two Cities* (Paris and London in the days before the French revolution) has sold over 200 million copies and ranks among the most famous works in the history of fictional literature. The lesson here is of the contrasts

Today, we live in every large metropolitan area, with many hospitality business options. In the last 90 days, one of our favorite local restaurants closed and we discovered another that had been open for 25 years and is now it in its second location.

Both of these properties had good food, fair pricing and ownerships that hoped to be able to maintain success. In today's competitive markets, hope is not enough and owners of hospitality businesses must continually keep their product, marketing and offerings fresh.

Both of these were ethnic restaurants, although of two different nationalities in food types. They were relatively comparable in price, adequately staffed and there the similarity stopped.

The restaurant that closed had a good location near a major thoroughfare and many apartments. Over the years, we enjoyed the ethnic musical talent offered on a weekly basis. This restaurant had become part of the chain of three and enjoyed some success over a 15 year period. The second restaurant relocated four years ago from a challenging location to one that was closer to a larger population, but still in an off center location. It remains an independent with an involved owner.

Why did the first restaurant close?

- Ownership in challenging times chose to continue to cut services, promotions and staffing.
- The second restaurant actually had a change of ownership and the new owner maintained the quality, menu, staff and personality of the original owner.
- The first restaurant tried to regain market share and volume through a series of heavy discounts, and liquor promotions but it lost its loyal following to other restaurants that demonstrated appreciation for loyalty.
- The second restaurant in a less desirable location continued to explore creative and different marketing approaches. They have embraced some social media, but recognized that results need to be measured and one should probably not jump 100% into uncharted waters.

The first restaurant location is now occupied after 90 vacant days by a different ethnic offering, and to date, we've seen very few cars in the parking lot. The second restaurant actually now has a waiting list for reservations at least one day a week and continues to promote itself in both proven and experimental ways. It also has something the first restaurant did not, and that is a loyal staff that expresses its pride with every customer. The first time we ate at the second restaurant, we were served by enthusiastic 30 year-old who we thought was a member of the family. She had worked with the business for four years with both owners and had such enthusiasm that she genuinely made this independent restaurant something unique in a time of ordinary sameness

These lessons from the field demonstrate that it is so often the example, vision and presence of the owner that makes such a difference whether a hotel, restaurant, lounge, spa or other hospitality business is successful.

Many of us are preparing the budgets and marketing plans for next year this month. I encourage creative thought in the process this year as we all plan to tackle new competitors, new marketing gimmicks and a growing global marketplace.

**Success does not come by accident or chance. We can help.**

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John Hogan is a successful hospitality executive, educator, author and consultant and is a frequent keynote speaker and seminar leader at many hospitality industry events. He is CEO and Co-Founder of [HospitalityEducators.com](http://HospitalityEducators.com), which has more than 1600 resource pages and has become the #1 independent website for hotel owners and managers. He is also the Principal of [HoganHospitality.com](http://HoganHospitality.com), which offers hospitality consulting and hotel expert witness services.

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