



nus *tradinginsight*

Commercial info for students' unions

March 2021

Inside:

*Understanding digital and how
it can transform your business*

*Click N Drink helps students'
unions*

Helping students to link and live

Best Bar None 2021

Welcome to Trading insight

Welcome to the first issue of
Trading insight in 2021!

When I wrote to you in last Autumn's edition, I had no idea we'd enter another lockdown resulting in the hospitality industry and commercial outlets closing for business once again. It pains me to see how hard this is for everyone – not only from a revenue perspective - but the impact it is having on our personal lives too.

We have a shared anxiety about the future. We're very much in the hands of the 'powers that be' which makes decision making and planning incredibly difficult. But, while some decisions are out of our hands, there are things we can do to keep things ticking over.

In this issue, I hope you'll find the suggestions and guidance we've provided useful. I appreciate not every students' union has the resources or environment to implement certain activities, but hopefully it will be food for thought, and you never know, may spark some new ideas!

We'll be organising online Communities of Practice in the Spring so we can come together and discuss the challenges, share ideas and explore what support is required and available. Look out for your invite and

remember the Trading Support team is here to help in any way we can.

Enjoy the read.



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nus
national union of students

Understanding digital and how it can transform your business

NUS' virtual trade show in December may seem like a lifetime ago, but the sessions delivered in the auditorium can still add plenty of value to your strategic and operational plans for 21-22. This year has shown that passing trade is no longer something that can solely be relied on if you want to keep your business healthy. There is now an undeniable need to ensure your plans include digital.

As student consumers can buy food and drink anywhere, we invited Ann Elliott, Hospitality Strategist and Trading Support Strategy Partner, to ask industry digital thought leaders for their views on staying relevant and compelling in the face of stiff competition. Here's **five key areas** to crystallise learnings of the sessions. You can access the full session [here](#).

is how these consumers quickly disseminate information that interests them. For example, if you send them a lengthy email, they're unlikely to read it. Your strategy needs to take in the social channels they use and the construction or format of your message.

Gen-Z is liberal minded and

influenced by thought leaders, academics, athletes, sporting figures and causal figures. The students' union is exactly the right place to harness and enhance the dialogue, and along with not-for-profit messaging and its values, there's a lot to leverage that will engage Gen-Z in meaningful relationship building.

Gen-Z and digital

Every strategist started their interview by describing the role digital plays with Gen-Z. They all agreed they are the most native generation with mobile technology as it's part of their

everyday lives. It's **expected** and is **second nature**. Nothing new about that, but the point to note



1

Operators on the high street are using data and digital to add value to the experience of customers who are using them

Data is the bedrock of any business. Put simply, this is a curated list of customers who have visited you over time and given permission for you to keep in touch with them. This data base can always be leaned on to support the business at any time with a promotional push or brand message; imperative during the pandemic.

When a customer agrees to give you their data, there's a value exchange. Basically, this means **the value they get back from you must be more than the perceived price of giving you their details in the first place.** You must add value to their experience when they're with you.

Dan Brookman, CEO of Airship and Toggle, believes there's real value in the collective approach that takes in the messaging of the union as a whole and not just the bar or venue saying; 'businesses can't just think about themselves. Being part of a collective is liked by public and students alike'.

So how do you get started on this journey? Dan affirms that 'it starts with a single sign up, when the venue or any other part of the union first engages with a student be-it freshers or whenever. Ensure they are signed up to the union as a whole, not just one part of it, so that all entities of the union can then use digital to engage with that student and begin the relationship in understanding which bits of the union are most relevant to them.

'Building up a picture of a student and allowing them to feed into that profile is key so that when they are marketed to, and when you have a dialogue (not monologue) via digital, they are seeing relevant and contextual information they're interested in'.

Planning out the value exchange is another important step; what will they get in return for giving you their data that adds real value to them? Map it out over the three-year life of a student customer. What are the engagement points along that journey that show success?

Looking into a post-Covid world, Dan believes that subscriptions will play a significant part of service marketing in the life of Gen-Z, who favour convenience and curated content at a price. Pret

a Manger and LEON and their coffee subscription services are examples in practice. Dan's platform Toggle is about subscription and pre-paid loyalty, such as DIY cocktails in a box etc and has grown as brands come into their own in keeping customers engaged via digital even without a visit.

Dan's advice is to look at subscription services, 'bundle up everything you do in to a fair subscription. Gen-Z love that as they know what their costs are.'



2

Operators use the 'right message, right person, right time' approach and they're using technology to do this

In the last five years, digital has evolved to land marketing at the exact time when Gen-Z want to hear from you. It's key to ensuring turnover doesn't gradually start to creep in the wrong direction.

Operators are getting better at understanding who their customers are, and the pandemic has accelerated that with click and collect, order and pay, Table bookings and guest wi-fi. These are the majority of data points for hospitality. Understanding who customers are, how long they stay, and what they buy is giving operators the opportunity to move away from this one-size-fits-all approach.

Julian Ross, Founder of Wireless Social believes it's about landing the right message, right time, right person and technology makes that easier to achieve. Operators who are doing this have seen the returns.'

Julian believes that the trade-off for data is an open and honest approach that adds considerable value to your customers life without them feeling that they

are being steered. Whenever guests come into contact with your union via click and collect or they want to get onto the guest WIFI or they want to get a delivery these are ways that unions as operators can gather information about somebody in an honourable fashion and use the information to help the student have a better experience and relationship with you.

There is importance in recognising your advocates as the mainstay or 10-15% of people who drive the rest of the group as a lynchpin, they invite everyone out. When you understand who they are, treating them well is a pivotal part of strategy. **'This is about understanding the core of your loyal users as they will visit you more often, spend more often, and talk about you more often.'**

There's a community in students' unions and an enormous capacity for unions to benefit from understanding who their customers are by using technology. Its identical to any other venue except you have an amazing captive audience that you can invite to be part of the conversation." It all starts with data capture and building a network – then it's about building a communication strategy that is one to one with checks and balances along the way.

Digital should be at the forefront of any marketing strategy. Everything else in the marketing mix is secondary. Communication needs to be low friction and technology can help you to do this in a relevant format such as Instagram stories etc.

James Sandrini, Digital strategist at 48.1 Digital Agency believes that part of success is about ensuring you are using young people to create your social messages. Gen Z is part of Gif culture, they can be serial entrepreneurs, and there is an expectation for personalisation that goes beyond just ensuring their name is at the top of the email.

Authenticity and making sure customers feel like people rather than data is key.

Mobile has meant that you can have multiple personas on different channels. Gen Z are comfortable showing their lives and are fluid between these platforms Facebook is not necessarily where they are, its where their parents/ grandparents/ other family members are so they use it to communicate with them. The same is true of International students and messaging platforms, think about the most convenient options. If your audience use twitch, then that's where you should be.

3

An omni-channel approach

Relying on passing trade is a thing of the past. Operators now need to have multiple ways for a customer to buy from them not necessarily having the customer present. Click & Collect, Book-a-Table, Pay at Table, and delivery and subscription services are the main ways hospitality has created a multi-channel approach.

4

Aiming for the 'single customer view'

Prask Sutton, founder of mobile ordering platform Wi-5, observes 'whilst SUs are competing with the high street, they're also in a sweet spot with a relationship with students that the high street cannot have. He says: 'Everyone can go to the high street but not everyone can go to SU bars, so there's something there that unions can really take advantage of.

'High street operators have

to market to students as part of their customer base, whereas SUs are very specifically targeted at students so can be much more focussed. 'Using data to get under the skin and understand exactly who customers are is key (and is a gift in terms of winning advantage)'.

Elaborating on the *single customer view*, Prask explains there are many touchpoints where a student interacts with the SU in different locations and at different times. A single customer view allows you to wrap all those touchpoints together to provide an understanding of their behaviour, what this person does, what they like or don't like, what they're likely to do, and when they're likely to do it.

Taking all the interactions, you can build a colourful picture about who they are so you can give them what they want. It's not about viewing this as an opportunity to sell, sell, sell; it's about giving them the experiences they crave. It creates a win-win as SUs refine their offer

from understanding behaviours while giving the student what they want.

But food and drink is not the only reason a student goes to their SU...They go to sit and work, to be part of a community, to feel part of a campus environment, meet friends – all of these are touchpoints. The SU represents socialisation, learning, and independence.

You can know how many pints of Guinness you sold, but you can't do much else with that. Knowing when a person comes in, when they left, allows you to see seasonal or other influential factors. Friendships grow by the exchange of information and you can use this rich value exchange to grow your relationship and move beyond food and drink.

Prask observes that SUs have 3 years to really get to know someone. Having this kind of information helps you to move in sync with your audience and you then don't ever find yourself on the back foot. You can only get to know them by listening to them.

5

Plan your relationship over three years

Henry Seddon, MD of The Access Group, believes that plotting your relationship with a student consumer over their lifetime is a cornerstone of strategy. He elaborates: 'Students' unions have captive audiences but only for a period. Knowing how to capture and build on that initial interaction is key.

'If you told Wetherspoons that they had access to a set of customers for three whole years that they could market to with offers, you can bet they would be creating personalised offers and looking at that journey from first to third year. They would be looking at the value they give to

that student and the revenue they can create over the course of that journey.'

Henry observes SUs as having great spaces: 'They have tables they can book out; they can offer the same - or better coffee at a cheaper price than the high street; they can offer wi-fi; they can offer discounts on beers etc. To be relevant, you've got to be in their face and be building this as part of your total offer'.

To be successful he recommends that students' unions ensure they have a customer relationship marketing (CRM) solution that allows them to understand what their students have purchased and then be able to market to them in an automated way.

Where possible, students' unions should also run a table booking service, alongside a pay-at-table and click and collect solution. Help students to come and work at the union, make it easy for them to do that, and then upsell lunch /coffee etc. Always ask the question: 'How can I enable students to have experiences outside of the union from inside the union?'.

For more information and contacts for any of our speakers contact jo.heuston@nus.org.uk



CLICK N DRINK SUPPORTS STUDENTS' UNIONS

NUS Services has partnered with national on-trade wholesaler LWC Drinks to offer students' unions the opportunity to drive revenue through online sales.

Using Click N Drink (an LWC Drinks pre-built B2C e-commerce platform), any students' union that encourages purchasing via the dedicated student portal will receive income in the form of sales rebates.

By purchasing drinks through Click N Drink's NUS portal, not only are students able to shop in a virtual, COVID-secure environment, they'll also receive discounts and experiential added-value bundles. On top of this, they'll be actively supporting their students' union, as all purchases made with a university

email address will generate sales rebates for the attributed students' union.

Adam Alexander, H&FE Channel Controller for LWC Drinks, said: "We're absolutely thrilled to be partnering with NUS on this initiative.

"LWC has been operating the Click N Drink platform for a number of years, retailing a wide range of spirits, beers, wines and soft drinks – including LWC's owned brands – for home delivery.

"The platform has naturally experienced quite a significant surge in both users and sales over recent months as a result of the pandemic, as consumers choose to purchase and drink from the safety of their own homes. So, when NUS Trading Support approached us about collaborating on a digital initiative to maintain engagement between union bars and student consumers, our existing platform made perfect sense.

"The platform has been built with the aim of ensuring end users have access to their favourite brands of

CLICK (N) DRINK

your
UNION



wines, beers, ciders, soft drinks and much more. Further to this, in addition to supporting the student movement, we're really looking forward to the opportunity to bring LWC's own range of products, including Old J Spiced Rum, Agnes Arber Gin, and our vast range of wines to students, and will be taking an experiential approach to activating our brands via the [NUS student portal](#).

"As the exclusive wholesale drinks supplier for NUS, we've got a great working relationship with students' unions and are, of course, devastated to see the impact COVID-19 is having on trade. We really hope the launch of this new e-commerce partnership will give union outlets the boost they need."

Jo Heuston, NUS Trading Support Commercial Marketing Manager said: *"We know how important online channels will continue to be as we move forward, hopefully out of the pandemic. This service allows member students' unions to benefit from an additional new sales channel and offer their students experiential hospitality they can enjoy at home whilst still supporting their local student services"*.

In addition to the pre-applied NUS discount students receive when they log into the site, the new Click N Drink student portal will also host a number of added value 'bundle offers' in which brands are brought to life at home through subscription boxes, virtual tastings and masterclasses. These bundles will also include an experiential element with branded point-of-sale items not usually available with standard purchases.

Digital assets are now available to actively promote the platform across your channels. ([include link to NUS Connect asset library](#))



Helping students **LINK and LIVE**



Dropping your child off at university for the first time is heart-wrenching stuff, but when they're back home within weeks, with all their lessons online, and having spent most of their short time in halls cooped up in a tiny room, it's a much greater worry.

What's even more concerning is that we're now in March. In normal circumstances, most students would have made friends and be looking for accommodation for the next academic year, but for many, limited opportunities to bond (bar online interactions) is causing another layer of stress. My daughter is one of these students.

So...this got me thinking... Students' unions are a fundamental part of the student experience: A safe space to meet for coffee, eat out, have a drink, and most importantly, meet others. We've all been missing a visit to the pub, a coffee with friends, but for first year students

especially (my daughter included), the opportunity to meet and socialise in their students' union is a critical part of their journey - an opportunity sadly taken away from them. Not having that support a students' union provides has resulted in many feeling anxious about how they even return to socialising, let alone finding suitable flatmates and somewhere to live in what is probably still a new town or city.

If conditions permit, **students' unions may have the opportunity to help by using their safe social spaces to bridge the gap.**

From 12 April (based on current roadmap timescales), you could consider using

outdoor areas to help students make acquaintances and meet accommodation providers. And from 17 May, indoor spaces can be used. By hosting informal events, where students can meet potential house buddies and like-minded cohabiters, you would also be driving footfall to your venue so it's a win, win!

While restrictions are still in place, starting the journey online would generate traffic and interest, allowing students to interact before the event. Providing students with useful guidance on reliable accommodation providers in your local area and renting advice is also a good idea. If you don't have this already set up in your

students' unions, you can find further information on the [NUS Connect housing hub](#).

If circumstances don't allow the full re-opening of venues, but rules are relaxed so larger groups can meet outdoors, these spaces could be used to offer safe take-away options such as coffee.

As a student myself (many moons ago), and now as a parent of a student (who is coincidentally studying on my old turf), it's heart-breaking to see the impact COVID-19 has had on my daughter and the wider student population. What should have been one of the most exciting times of her life has become an extremely stressful experience. She is desperately trying to start online conversations with potential

housemates, but without that opportunity to meet up and interact properly, she's now starting to worry time is running out. It would be great to see students' unions, that have a duty of care, and in the perfect position to help, supporting students in making their transition back to study as easy as possible.

If you've identified this as an issue already and have similar events in the plan for your students' union, do [let us know](#) and we can share this with other unions looking to do the same.

*Alison Hibben
NUS Communications Exec*



Best Bar None 2021

Here to support you through challenging times...

Back in October at the Community of Practice (COP), it was decided that we would plough ahead, albeit in a different format, with Best Bar None in 2021. Looking back, we had no idea that there would be another lockdown and further closures!

After contacting all entrants, it's now clear we need to alter the time scale further to ensure all unions can remain in the scheme. We'll be in touch soon, ahead of the 1-2-1 calls, to agree timings for the paper-based parts of the assessment to be submitted.

The Best Bar None scheme ensures that licensed operators have all the documentation and policies in place to operate a safe and responsibly run outlet.

We've seen over the years when a union drops out of the scheme for a year or two, or there are staff changes; policies and procedures can slip out of date. As a lot of the assessment looks at paper-based compliance, it's

important to keep these documents updated annually as they're critical should you need to demonstrate due diligence.

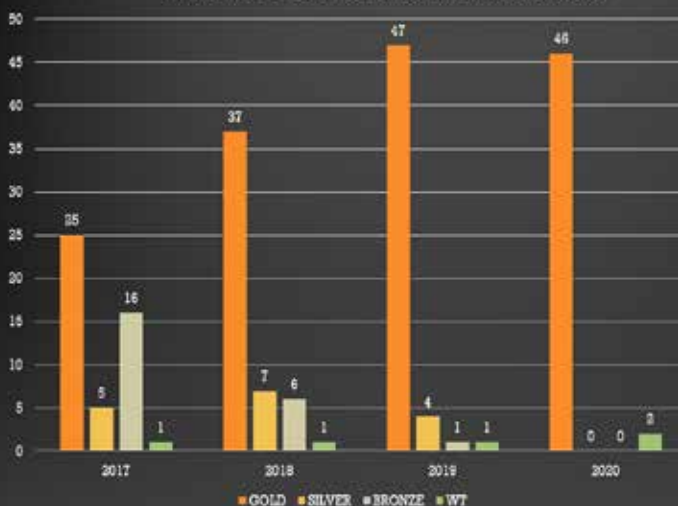
Time to Celebrate

Over the last four years we've seen a shift in engagement from participating students' union licensed outlets. Teams have upped the ante with the driving desire to achieve gold accreditation and gain entry into the 100% Club.

The graph below shows that commitment and how the scores have increased.

Well done to all our entrants who have shown commitment to the scheme, and commitment to ensuring that their licensed spaces are managed in a safe and responsible way for their students to enjoy.

Entrants to Best Bar None Scheme 2017-2020



- In 2017 Gold Accredited Unions were 53% of total entrants.
- In 2018 this had moved to 73% and in 2019 sat at 89%.
- For the 2020 scheme an outstanding 96% of entrants achieved Gold Accreditation.

Best Bar None 2021

The 2020 scheme saw a record number of unions achieve both 100% in their assessment and 100% in their mystery customer visit. The Platinum Club was introduced to acknowledge these exceptional results.



To celebrate these fantastic achievements, the Best Bar None awards were held online at [Trade Show 2020](#). Special recognition awards were presented to the following unions:

- **Bath Spa University Students' Union - Most improved assessment score**
- **University of Westminster Students' Union - From bronze to gold award**
- **The Union, MMU - Most improved mystery customer score**
- **Durham Students' Union - Highest new entrant award**

For further information on BBN 2021 and how to submit your evidence please contact alison.inch@nus.org.uk

