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bar

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Developing premium bar excellence

Keep up with cool

From sorbet and sake to exotic fruits and herbs, British bartenders are constantly exploring new cocktails and serves

Also inside: smoking report – marketing – club technology – bar show preview

Caught in the net

Digital and social media are providing new opportunities for bars and clubs to attract and keep customers, reports Mark Ludmon

The Old Brewery in Greenwich taps into Foursquare

Forming a new Government proved a challenge last month, but the voting went more smoothly at the Old Brewery in Greenwich, east London. Leo Nicholson, a young pianist, was named as Mayor at the end of a marketing campaign harnessing the power of the latest social networking phenomenon, Foursquare. It works like a social city guide, in which people share information about their favourite places based on their location, using the GPS technology on devices like the iPhone and BlackBerry. Points and badges are awarded for "checking in" at venues with the goal of become the "mayor" of that location by checking in more often than anyone else.

"People referring products and services

via social media tools are the new king," explains Alec Fleming from The Old Brewery, which was opened by the Meantime Brewing Company this year. "The world's largest referral programme in history is now under way and there is no reason why this should not be applicable to the hospitality industry. We at Meantime aim to harness the power of social media in a fun, friendly and word-of-mouth format through which we can offer our loyal customers deals."

The Old Brewery awarded a prize of a free meal for two to the "mayor" who was at the top of the leader board on May 6. This is relatively new for the UK but Foursquare, which started only last year, has seen a lot of bars and cafés in the US offering "Mayor

Specials", such as a free coffee, a free appetiser or a discount for the "mayors" of their venues.

The opportunities of social media have been grasped by Barracuda Group, which has created the position of digital marketing manager for its 220 outlets. With a background at bar and club operator Novus Leisure, Simon Gaske has taken on the new role partly to make it easier for people to make pre-bookings for areas, booths and tables but also to link into social media, which is particularly important for younger customers using its Varsity brand. "Our audience communicates via sites like Facebook and Twitter so we must as well," he explains. "This leads perfectly into the tools they use to communicate. The smart phone and app world is too large to ignore and we plan on stepping into this world head on."

The newest social media tool is Crowdity which was launched last month by a team with a background at restaurant website Toptable.co.uk. It works by posting offers from restaurants and bars at www.crowdity.com but the offer can only be used if enough people respond to it by sharing it with friends. "If we can convince enough people to buy the deal that day then everyone gets it. If we can't convince enough people then nobody gets it," explains co-founder Emma Kennedy. Another new website offering an opportunity for promotion is www.PrivateDiningRooms.co.uk which lists venues with separate dining rooms available for

Customers of Varsity bars are switched on to social media

