

If the Titty Bar is Dead, Long Live the Titty Bar ... Now What?

I believe that the old school titty bar, while not *dead*, is on a serious morphine drip. Or to put it diplomatically, there's a decreased demand for this particular type of entertainment that was once a license to print money. But we're not here to sugar coat, are we? So, if you're an old school operator who is happy with his or her returns, skip this article. If unfavorable trendlines are causing you concern, here are five realities we must all come to embrace:

Programming ... Gotta have it.

Gone are the days when you could open the doors and they'd come. A public with many entertainment options needs a compelling reason to make your club a destination; so, you need an event, special, or illusion of the same. An event could be a headliner, celebrity appearance, UFC fight, frozen t-shirt contest or white party. A special could be Fifty Shades of Grey with Goose bottles on special. An *illusion* could be Goose on special with staff in lace masks. Whether you've got a blockbuster or shoestring budget to work with, there's always an excuse to throw a party, which in turn creates promotional content.

In New York, our Fifty Shades promotion started as a luxury drink special with lots of jokes about ball gags and fuzzy handcuffs, but eventually morphed into a lifestyle night which required guests to sign waivers agreeing to be amicably injured, because it turned out a significant part of our clientele

was interested in SMBD. The recurring event hit a snag when one of the managing partners was inadvertently whipped by an overzealous entertainer; so, we turned it into a cosplay night which emphasized fashion over physical interaction. The point is, whether your event doesn't quite work at first—or works TOO well—you will ultimately figure out what it's meant to be.

You must appeal to millennials.

Yes, those dreaded creatures with their craft beer tastes and live-at-home budgets are back to ruin our lives. Millennials are a problem because both males and females are unimpressed with adult clubs unless there's a reality star doing a surprise set onstage and they can stream the whole thing live. They expect more for less, and we have no choice but to give it to them. Why? Because NO ONE is impressed with adult clubs anymore. They lost their novelty forever ago, and the hardcore regs have the internet now. If we don't find a way to resonate with new guests of both genders, we are dead clubs walking. Consider the following: more lights, less décor; more craft, less Dom; more tapas, less steakhouse; more snap filters, fewer billboards; less "fourth wall", more interactive.

There is an aspect of appealing to millennials that requires a don't beat 'em, join 'em philosophy. Sick of all those selfies taken in the dressing room mirror? So was my client, but we knew they weren't going away, and wanted to encourage the promotional impulse, so we just slapped our logo on all the bathroom and dressing room mirrors. Branding is branding,

wherever you get it. The only catch was, due to the angle and the nature of selfie taking, the club's name needed to be applied backward as well as forward. Go ahead and TRY IT—it's harder than it sounds.

Marketing is all about layers.

Yes, marketing is essential today. (*And, why do those of you who continue to insist it's all about word of mouth have the WORST word of mouth? Asking for a friend.*) But there is no magic bullet. Marketing is about layers. This is probably an article in itself, but here are my layers:

Print/Mass Media – I advocate less of this, but in some markets, there *is* an influential alternative weekly or sports page which still allows adult ads.

Digital – This includes your email, SMS and social ... Different media and platforms wax and wane in popularity, so I just do them all.

Street Teams/Guerrilla Marketing – There's a time to create a presence, and a time to go on the down low. Whatever time it is, you need a reliable promotions team.

Ambassador Programs – You know many people who turn down extra cash? Use influencers like bartenders, hotel staff and drivers to refer business to you. There are apps designed to do this without utilizing incriminating passes, and even generate 1099s, but the paper method still works.

Events – Seize every occasion to throw a party--or invent one. Even a fairly

elaborate event simply consists of a graphic, call to action, special drink, special food if applicable, decorations/balloons, theme attire and swag. Boom.

Internal Marketing – Don't overlook this one ... your door hosts, floor staff, bartenders, servers and DJs all influence guests in a specific way. Train them to be your ambassadors.

Staffing is now a full-time job.

Stop waiting for the right candidate to walk through the door the moment you need her, because it doesn't happen that way EVER, and it's why you are always short-handed or putting up with substandard staff. I still run ads online just to see who's out there, but my website has become a great recruiting tool as well—and it's free. Inquiries to both go directly to my phone and I answer within 24 hours, always. I conduct every orientation personally if I can, and have designated trainers with the correct, nurturing temperament. I do quarterly group trainings and continuing education. I still have to hire three employees for one that sticks, but so what? I am ALWAYS hiring, always weeding, and will invent a job for someone who seems talented and qualified. It works for me, and it will work for you. Promise!

You must incorporate elements of mainstream nightlife ...

This one's a little controversial, but not even d) all of the above is enough to save us, ultimately, from extinction, unless we strive to evolve and become something new. The most successful expressions of

adult entertainment incorporate elements of mainstream nightlife alongside adult which means ... relevant music, popular entertainment, current aesthetics and innovative ideas. I know some of you are resistant to this, but come on, have you BEEN to Club E11even? And if you don't have size E11even funding, no fears; ultra-clubs and dive bars alike can all update and expand the look, feel and scope of their experience.

How?

My resort town client was lucky enough to ink a deal with an EDM DJ who'd hosted his own show on MTV back in the day, to considerable acclaim. We put him and his turntables up on stage, which initially caused a little bit of culture clash—the entertainers, remember, are millennials as well. Luckily our superstar of yesteryear was so skilled at showcasing the performers and mashing up multi-generational tracks that he was paid the highest compliment by a 22-year-old-dancer: "You're gonna be HUGE once you get your followers up!" Whatever. Combining mainstream and adult, old school and electronic, was a home run for us every night of the week.

Since you've read to the end, I'll throw in a six reality as a bonus: we all have to become experts in everything—or hire someone who is. What started out as the easiest job on the planet now requires us, regardless of education level, to become legal eagles, marketing gurus, nightlife impresarios, F&B directors and financial analysts. Maybe it's not what we signed up for, but by failing to adapt quickly enough, we collectively did it to ourselves, and it

may take years for us to turn our fates around. So, saddle up, buttercup, it's gonna be a long ride



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