

THE WEEKLY WAY TO BOOST YOUR BUSINESS - WITH OUR EXTENDED FIVE-PAGE MONEY SECTION IN THE FIRST ISSUE OF EACH MONTH



Boxing clever

Former amateur boxer Scott Murray tells Ewan Turney how he reached a £1m turnover at Bar Sport in Cannock, Staffordshire

How I got here

When I was an amateur boxer, I visited Houston, in Texas, for a training camp. I went to a sports bar and grill there and it sparked an idea. I realised that the concept would work very well in the UK if done in a stylish way. There was no one doing anything like a sports bar here until the Sports Café opened, so I decided it was time to make the move. I bought an old bingo hall in Cannock and opened Bar Sport in 1996. I then opened in Walsall, in the West Midlands, in 2001, in Rugby, Warwickshire, in 2006 and am due to open in Loughborough, Leicestershire, in November.

Why my bar is a success

1. Ronseal: We do exactly what it says on the tin. Unlike a lot of high-street bars, we know what we are, what we do and who our customers are.

2. Female friendly: We purposely designed the venues to be female friendly. They are glass fronted so women are not nervous about coming in, and they are bright and clean. We have a good drinks offering, including Pimm's, rosé wine, Champagne by the glass and in mini bottles served with a straw. Attracting females also helps keep the lads in after a game. I think some sports bars, like Heroes, failed because they were too male focused.

3. Location: We aim to be a big fish in a small pond, so we target secondary towns and not cities. That is because property is cheaper and easier to get hold of, and also our customer base is mainly working class in these areas.

4. Viewing: Everywhere you are, you can see one of the 70 screens, even in the toilets. If there are four different Champions' League games on at the same time, we can show them all. We also have a 24-hour licence for major sports events.

Why I don't mind Sky-high fees

I don't mind the high fees on Sky – and this may sound a bit greedy – but the more bars that cancel subscriptions, the better it is for us, because it gives us total exclusivity. When a lot of Marston's managed pubs cancelled their subscriptions last year, we had a massive influx on a Sunday afternoon. It was fantastic. Our entertainment is the sport, so the way I see it is it's like paying for a live band. It is our investment – that is what we are. That is what's drawing the crowd in.

I am pretty convinced that some of the breweries are fools taking Sky out, because they are just looking at the bottom-line figures and saying, "If we take that chunk out we have saved £1m a year", but they have also lost a lot of sales.

My sports stars

It is also what activity you do around having Sky that gets people in. For example, before the Ricky Hatton fight against Kostya Tsyu, we had Ricky Hatton himself down here. We had customers queuing down the street. It helps reinforce that we are the place for sport and it creates loyalty among your customers, and, of



course, generates a good bit of press coverage. You can book sports stars through agencies or just write and email them. Some do it just for expenses and free food and drink, but others do charge a fee.

My sports events

Here's what we do to take full advantage:

1. Bookings: We take bookings for tables two weeks in advance of a game. The only stipulation is that if you book a table, you must eat as well. For really big games we charge £10 a table.

2. Theme: We get all the flags out and decorate the place with helium balloons, plus the staff wear appropriate shirts.

3. Bottle bars: We have a bottle bar at the entrance so that people can buy a drink immediately when they enter.

4. Meal deals: For the Ricky Hatton fight, which was at 3am, we did a full breakfast for £10. It is ticket-only to make sure that we don't get those people leaving night clubs looking for one more drink.

5. Season ticket: We produced an actual ticket book guaranteeing entry for every game in the football World Cup last year, costing £10.

6. Premier suite: We have a Premier lounge upstairs. For the World Cup we had a sit-down meal for England games with a master of ceremonies and a 1966 World Cup winner in, such as Nobby Stiles, to give a bit of commentary. We charged £50 a ticket for that. The BBC even filmed live from here.

My staff

1. Table service: We are really hot on table service – you have to have a team on the floor. It is not hard, it just takes good training. What we try and offer is a city-centre service in a secondary town, where you wouldn't normally find it.

2. Quantity: We have enough staff so that customers won't be waiting long to be served.

3. Training: We do in-house training and are just about to start the Investment in People programme. Generally, we have a good induction programme, do job checks every three months and have monthly staff meetings.

4. Staff outings: Twice a year we take staff out. It is great for team building.

5. Qualities: I look for personality above all else. If they don't have that then they are not worth hiring. They need to have a nice smile, good teeth and eyes, and an interest in sport.



Scott Murray: aiming to rollout Bar Sport across the UK

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thinking of offering staff an incentive to hand out cards and become our MySpace ambassadors, to sign people up as their friends and encourage them to come down. The best part is, the cost is minimal compared to flyers.

3. Sponsorship: We sponsor a local rugby team and a Sunday league football team. It is so important to get in with the local community. You must choose the right club though – you want social teams who will be in every weekend.

My plans for the future

The next thing we want to introduce is internet betting. That way you can sit down, drink, eat, watch the game and place a bet. We want to become the ultimate venue.

On a grander scale we are looking to rollout Bar Sport as a national brand. As a private company we aim to open 10 sites by 2010, but we are also looking into attracting a partner to speed that up and offering out franchises.

My marketing strategy

1. Data collection: You can join our Premier Club for £20. Customers get the option to beat the waiting queues on booking tables and a discount on certain items. For us, it is more about data collection. We want to get away from spending thousands on print advertising and flyers. On the application form we can find out exactly what events they are interested in and then target our marketing.

2. Facebook: Our customers communicate by email, text and websites such as Facebook, MySpace and You Tube these days. We plan to use these to boost our marketing. We are

MY PUB

Tenure:	Freehold
Turnover:	£1m
Wet:dry split:	80:20
Average number of meals per week:	Circa 500 to 800
GP target on food:	60%
GP target on drink:	70%
Number of staff:	30
Wages as % of turnover:	18%
Training budget:	£20k per annum

