

## **NORTHERN TERRITORY ALCOHOL POLICIES AND LEGISLATION REVIEW 2017**

### **Written Submission on behalf Discovery Nightclub Darwin.**

I have been tasked to put forward a brief written submission from the perspective of the management team of the Northern Territories single largest licensed Tavern, that being Discovery Nightclub.

It is hoped that through this submission, the panel may gain a better understanding of some of the strategies that have been adopted by Discovery Darwin, in order to help to curb social violence in and around late night venues.

The up-swing of social violence we have encountered over the last decade, is we feel, all too often poorly labelled as simply the symptom of the over consumption of alcohol, and that nowhere near enough emphases is placed on the ever-growing trend of a lack of personal responsibility displayed by late night revellers.

It is even more unfortunate that so little interaction has occurred between those such as ourselves who are immersed in the social idiosyncrasies of late night venues and entertainment precincts on a nightly basis, and those that would seek to bring about reform to an industry that is already facing both increasing downward financial pressure, as well as battling the gauntlet of constant and unwarranted media berating.

### **The Adoption of Biometric I.D. Scanning**

In 2002 while being involved with our previous venue, Metropolis Fremantle, we established that although we were, at the time, utilising a state of the art Video Surveillance system to monitor patrons, simply being able to view incidents post event was not enough to properly manage the large number of patrons who frequented the venue.

It was at this time, that we first conceived the idea of "ID" scanning as a possible tool for patron management. The thought process was, that you would never be able to manage a crowd properly, unless you were first able to identify each individual within that crowd.

After then being able to identify each individual you could then manage each person appropriately, whether it to be reward a customer's loyalty, or exclude a patron based on their behaviour.

To put this innovation into perspective, at the time, we were the only people considering investing heavily into a system that would keep patrons out, while all other venues were investing in ways of trying to get customers in.

On several occasions at the time, the notion that we would be broke in a short period of time if we adopted this system was readily bantered around.

Following the conception and subsequent installation of ID scanning, we didn't, as many had hoped, go broke, but in fact went on to put in excess of 3000 patrons every weekend through the venue. The venue was sold in 2009, we however continued to manage the venue with great success until 2011 when the purchase of Discovery was arranged.

Fast forward to 2017 and we now have the most advanced biometric I.D. scanning system on the market, as well as a worldwide patent on biometric entry to licensed venues.

In fact, the concept of ID scanning is now legislated, although be it very poorly by some state governments, and now operates in entertainment precincts throughout the country.

Some interesting statistics correlated during the period that Nightkey in it's present form, encountered between 2004-2011 in its use at Metropolis Fremantle:

Of our 3000 patrons,

- a) Less than 2% of that number patrons were asked to leave the venue over the course of a weekend.
- b) Less than 0.25% of the 3000 patrons per weekend who attended, entered into behaviour that required them being excluded from the venue either permanently, or for a period of time reflective of their behaviour. This generally being 3 months, 6 months or 12 months.
- c) Less than 0.025% of patrons were ever excluded for a second time from the venue, in fact on several occasions, patrons who had once been banned went on to be loyal customers for an extended period without any further incident.
- d) When an incident did occur, and there was a requirement for a Police investigation, a closure rate of 97.5% was achieved through the use of I.D. scanning. This meaning in 97.5% of occasions, we were able to provide both high quality CCTV footage of the incident, as well as positively identify persons of interest involved. In addition, through the use of Nightkey we were also able to positively establish what time all persons involved entered the premises.
- e) On a broader overview of statistics, Nightkey now has approximately 1.6 million individuals over all of its databases, encompassing multiple venues across Australia. Of that 1.6 million, only approximately 2000 patrons appear on the banned person register.

Throughout the Northern Territory we are about to witness the roll out of the Banned Drinkers Register for the second time. I truly feel that although the concept itself holds great merit, the way the government is choosing to utilize out dated technology instead of opting for a biometric solution, will ultimately lead to it's failure.

By using a system such a Nightkey a customer would be identified biometrically before purchase and would be automatically given a "green light" to purchase or a "red light" if declined. As there is only a need to register persons banned, there would be no need for customers to produce ID and therefore the amount of customer backlash against the register would be greatly reduced.

Further more the possibility of banned drinkers using alternate or fraudulent ID would be eliminated.

In Summary, it is our belief that the adoption of Biometric I.D. scanning, is without doubt the single best innovation that is has been seen in the field of patron management within licensed venues since the roll out of mandatory CCTV.

After all, as I mentioned at the beginning of the submission, how can we possibly mange the "why" of social violence until we have a clear understanding of "who" it is that is perpetrating it.

## **The gaining of social experience and the consumption of alcohol**

One of the key factors that makes Discovery as successful as it is, is that we have created a haven where people from different ethnicities, cultures, social economic backgrounds as well as varying age brackets, can come together in a controlled environment and safely enjoy the consumption of alcohol. With such a mix of people in the venue, the opportunity for younger, less experienced drinkers to gain a proper understanding of a safe level of alcohol consumption, exists through the observation of their older, more social experienced peers.

This gaining of social experience and alcohol consumption is something that we need to remain focussed on. After all, tolerance levels to drinking are something that more often than not are gained through the short term negative effects of over consumption. This very factor is why I believe it is so important that late night venues such as ourselves remain an integral part of the social fabric.

Venue mangers, security and bar staff all play an important role in helping our youth gain a better understanding of what's acceptable and what's not when it comes to drinking. More importantly we are here to help during the period of time when perhaps tolerance levels to alcohol have been over estimated by patrons.

This type of support network for younger drinkers only exists in the realm of licensed venues, and the more pressure we place upon late night venues through increased restrictions will only further jeopardise this support network.

## **The Lockout.**

The lockout is without doubt the singularly most ineffective, "one size fits all" attempt at being seen to be doing something, that we have come across in our 20 plus years of owning and hosting late night venues. I personally worked in Victoria during it's initial conception and implementation, and have now subsequently seen its repeal throughout the state.

The hard truth of the matter is, that it serves very little real purpose as again, it seeks not to identify problematic persons and exclude them from either venues or precinct's permanently, but rather attempts to try and simply carrel patrons into certain areas at certain times in order to contain any or all potential social violence.

As having noted in the previous section of this submission, we have now been correlating data of patron behaviour for some 15 years, and that data categorically shows that it is still the minority of people perpetrating the majority of violence and alcohol abuse.

Our normal course of action is to punish those who do wrong, by excluding them from society for a period of time through imprisonment, however through the "lockout" we have chosen to punish the majority of those who visit late night premises on the guise that that may possibly do something wrong.

I feel that the option needs to be put forward to venues, that if they are willing to invest into systems that identify problematic persons, and are able to show their willingness to exclude such patrons, then the lockout should be removed from those venues that meet these requirements.

## **Over Saturation of licensed numbers within the CBD**

One of the most prolific problems we are facing as a business at the moment is what seems to be an ever-increasing onslaught of licensed venues within the CBD.

Darwin itself is suffering a population decline, yet it seems every other week a new trendy wine bar or small bar pops up within the CBD. This increase in competition leads to poor practice by established venues in the form of discounting, and an ever-increasing disregard of Responsible Server Practices. I truly feel that a great deal of the issues we are seeing arise at the moment could be countermanded by either a moratorium on the number of licenses issued to the CBD, or perhaps to go so far as to offer a buyback of some current licenses.

Ultimately we need to limit the amount of square metres available to be utilised for the sale of alcohol whether it be for on or off premises consumption.

## **Summary**

In writing this brief submission it was never our intention to seem well versed in the field of government legislation, but rather simply to show that we, the team here at Discovery, have a great deal of passion in wanting to see the sustainable growth of our industry.

We have only chosen to pass comment on some of the issues that we consider affect our particular positioning within the alcohol industry, and again, only on such areas where we feel we could help to bring about a better outcome.

We do feel that if our industry experience was utilised by the panel, to further gain an understanding of those issues that surround alcohol in late night licensed venues, then perhaps better resolutions to some of these issues could be obtained.

Thank you for time and patience in the reading of this submission, please feel free to contact me on the details provided if I can be of any further assistance.

**Andy Price**



**Licensee / General Manger**