

# Ocean Basket's Grace Harding serves up insights from US Summit

The 9th Annual Fast Casual Executive Summit, held in the US, is an intense event centred on keynote sessions, breakout sessions and brain exchanges with top-level restaurant executives, speakers and panellists. Everything is unpacked and discussed at this summit - from customer experience and trends to digital menu boards, mobile CRM and integrated marketing.



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Ocean Basket company leader, Grace Harding has been sharing her experience and insights from the summit around boardroom tables, at executive presentations, as well as on her recently launched blog [ForFishSake](#).

Harding and Ocean Basket's marketing leader, Nana Lloyd were the only two people from South Africa to attend the summit in Denver, which took place in October and, although Harding has already shared her highlights from her trip to the US, there is still a push from local business leaders for more information.

"There's a lot of excitement from South Africans about the technology in particular," says Harding. "They want to know all about the digital menu boards, about mobile payments and how to use mobile for enhanced consumer engagement. While there is what has been described as 'a mega shift' in mobile engagement in America, it's not always all about what's big in America."

"It has to be about your customer. It is about how they want to shop and be engaged with. The criterion for something like mobile engagement will always come from understanding how the customer wants to interact with your brand or product."

She gives an example of one of the customer centric stories that struck her most at the summit.

"When the management of a particular restaurant decided to improve its lunch and dinner trade, they didn't start by looking for ways to make more money, they started by looking at their customers' needs. They noticed that at lunchtime, their customers needed Wi-Fi and a place to be able to put their food as well as their laptops. Their customers at dinnertime

however, wanted an environment where they could unwind."

"Through unwavering customer focus, they spotted a relevant opportunity that would not only enhance customer experience, but would in turn increase trade and boost sales."

"All too often, we get the numbers in, we look at the profits or losses and then we put that information aside. In order to improve the business, we have to look at the story the numbers are telling us. We've got to take the data with us to every conversation - just as we do with the customer."

The customer and the data are the two biggest things Harding brought back with her. Not the fads, the trends or the latest technology. South Africa is years behind the US and Harding gently reminds us that it is okay, that we don't have to do everything all at once. "We'll get there, as long as we remember take our customer and our data on the road with us."

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