

nightlife industry

BEHIND THE BOTTLE

Bottle service dominates the new generation of nightclubs



If you want VIP treatment at your favorite nightclub, get ready to whip out your credit card for 750ml of status. Once the purview of expense-account profiteers and high-rolling celebrities, bottle service is now the easiest way for clubbers to taste the good life.

After several tough years in New York, new venues like Crobar, Spirit, Black and Avalon are bringing back the era of the high-profile superclub. To pay for this opulence amid rising costs, venue owners and promoters rely heavily on selling bottles of liquor to patrons.

"Bottle service is a way of giving customers an increased level of service. It works especially well on nights when the venue is near capacity," Avalon Director Fedor Benuchi says.

New York isn't the only town in which clubs push for the sit-down crowd. Chicago promoter Brian Pfeiffer sees it as a growing trend in his market. "It's a way for the big spenders to rent the best real estate in the club for an evening," he says.

For clubgoers who may have scoffed at paying \$200 for a \$50 bottle of vodka in the past, bottle service has become an increas-

ingly appealing choice. The number of mixed drinks you'd pour from a 750ml bottle can equal what you'd pay for the same number of cocktails from the bar.

Add to that the semi-VIP status — plus the chance to woo friends, colleagues and attractive strangers — and buying a bottle seems like a reasonably priced way to enjoy yourself for a few hours.

Selling bottles, and the perks that go with them, though, is far from a sure thing in the harsh economic reality of the nightlife business.

"In a large venue, bottle service is not the windfall that one would think, due to the increased staffing required to implement it,"

Benuchi says. "On regular nights, it seems a venue could generate more revenue if the service staff pushed cocktails as well."

New York promoter Daryl Daren sees another downside to the growing trend.

"Bottle service kills the door revenue for promoters and raises the revenue for club and bar owners," Daren says. "It's great for owners, not great for promoters." —DA

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