0023 Your Competition Isnt Who You Think It Is

The Fundamental Preface · https://kb.jeffreysummers.com/docs/0023-your-competition-isnt-who-you-think-it-is/

Most independent operators think about competition the wrong way.

They watch the restaurant down the street. They track what the new place is charging, what they're putting on Instagram, how full their dining room looks on a Friday night. They benchmark against the category — who's doing better, who's doing worse, who just opened and who just closed.

That's not your competition.

And neither is indifference. "Your biggest competition is indifference" sounds right — the Guest who doesn't know you exist, who hasn't tried you, who simply isn't thinking about you. But indifference isn't a competitor. It's a condition. You don't beat indifference. You don't out-market it or out-price it or out-Instagram it. Indifference doesn't make decisions. Guests do.

Your real competition is the Guest's habit.

The habit is where they already go. The place they trust, the routine they've built, the answer they already have to "where should we go tonight?" They're not indifferent to dining out. They're indifferent to you — specifically — because you haven't disrupted the habit yet. And until you do, you're not a choice they're making. You're not even a choice they're considering.

This reframe changes everything that follows.

If your competition is the restaurant down the street, you compete on price, proximity, and promotion — the three things the chain always wins. You price against their menu, you promote against their ads, you fight for the same pool of undecided Guests on the same platforms with the same tactics.

If your competition is the Guest's existing habit, you stop trying to beat someone else and start trying to earn something for yourself: the disruption. The moment a Guest who has been going somewhere else decides to try you instead. That moment doesn't happen because you had a better promotion. It happens because someone who already knows you told them to come — and

the story they told was worth acting on.

That's the road you're competing on. Not against a brand. Against the inertia of a habit that already works well enough for the Guest who has it.

The independent operator who understands this stops asking "how do I beat the competition" and starts asking "how do I become worth the disruption?" How do I build something — an experience, a relationship, a story — compelling enough that a Guest who already has a satisfying routine decides to change it?

That question leads to completely different decisions. And once you've earned the disruption — once a Guest has stepped out of their habit and chosen you — the only competition that matters changes again.

Stop watching your competitors. In the mind of your Guest, the competitive landscape doesn't exist. They're not thinking about the restaurant down the block. They're thinking about the last time they were here. That's the only race that matters inside your four walls.

When they sit down, they are measuring you against the best experience they have ever had in your category — anywhere, ever. Not the restaurant across the street. The best version of what this kind of experience can be, carried in their memory from somewhere, sometime. That is the bar. It moves every time they have a better experience somewhere else. Your job is to be that experience.

The only competition that matters is the last experience you delivered. If it was great, your job is to make the next one better. If it wasn't great, your job is to figure out why and address it before the next Guest walks in. That's the race. Not the restaurant down the block — the version of yourself that showed up yesterday.

The operators who build something lasting aren't the ones who outperform their competitors. They're the ones who outperform themselves, consistently, over time. They're on a relentless trajectory of improvement that has nothing to do with what anyone else is doing and everything to do with their own standard.

That question — how do I become worth the disruption, and how do I keep earning it once I have it — is what the rest of this work is about.