

El Piano: a wholly vegan, environmentally friendly restaurant serving locally sourced food since 1997

At EL PIANO they began working with organic, local and sustainable food long before it was popular. The result is a deep and wide knowledge of planting and harvesting, as well as production and preserving. The food served in the York, Malaga, and Granada restaurants, together with their own sauces, conserves, baking kits, fast food kits and cookbooks tells a 40 year story of excellence and devotion to service.



Description of the case study:

Aim

Magdalena, the owner of El Piano, wanted to create a seamless union between professional life and private ethos on sustainability focusing on food. Together with her four children, she founded in 1997 EL PIANO offering a plant-based, gluten-free food using organic and local ingredients long before it was popular. The result is a deep and wide knowledge of growing as well as production and preserving. Currently, EL PIANO restaurants operate in York (UK),

Granada (ES) and Malaga (ES). The confederate model of franchising has been slower to grow than conventional models but it allows for each EL PIANO to be rooted in its community. With EL PIANOs in three cities, the business is gaining in strength and its mission to share the related knowledge is widening.

At the core of EL PIANO is a transferable sustainable business model. Its structure is sustainable and as economies change, EL PIANO has proven in-built safeguards. This type of green business model is important for the restaurants sector because we need a profitable, fun and transferable business model which is funded on sustainability, in its two-fold meaning i.e. sustainable for the planet in terms of impact of the human activities on the environment, and sustainable for the personal lives of people working on a specific business activity.

Description of the process

The idea came personally from Magdalena, who transformed it into practice thanks to the help of her four kids. There have not only been the choice of location to take care of, but also the choice of suppliers, who had to be local suppliers, and then the training of staff. After eight years of challenges to address, a new one came in the house with the opening of two EL PIANO restaurants in Spain. In Granada, a former member of York staff engaged with the local community and local suppliers opened a new EL PIANO restaurant under the same ethos characterising the York-based restaurant. In particular, the three key successful factors of the process are three: ingredients costs, staff costs and energy costs.

Open plan kitchen means that EL PIANOs have no, or minimal, heating costs. Furthermore, EL PIANO recycles its waste and minimises its impact on the environment by using 100% biodegradable 'plastic' containers currently derived from corn and using 100% biodegradable 'plastic' bags made from potatoes serving food in boats made of pine-shavings from renewable forests recycling packaging in Spain by re-cutting and using as take-away trays. EL PIANO supports green energy and uses energy (UK only) from green providers almost no heating except that generated by refrigeration, cooking and people no air conditioning. EL PIANO minimises its use of chemicals by reduced washing-up through biodegradable serving dishes. Purchasing from ECO sources EL PIANO considers the impact of transport and buys fruit and vegetables that are, wherever possible, locally grown while most other products from local traders. EL PIANO supports organic growing by sourcing staples such as being beans, flours, grains, from organic providers; and by sourcing fruit and vegetables that are, wherever possible, organically grown. EL PIANO informs customers where their food comes from and informs customers what their food contains. EL PIANO participates in campaigns, local, national and international that promote awareness of, and action to, combat climate change.

For the implementation of the EL PIANO project, there has therefore been not only the collaboration of the family, and members of staff, but also of local suppliers and local community, of which customers have been a key factor towards the success of the restaurant. The restaurant has always welcomed all kind of customers, and this heterogeneity of customers is still possible to experience on almost a daily basis.

Effects/Results

The results of all these efforts have certainly not being easy to achieve. As Magdalena likes to say "there is no quick route to the loot", but despite the long route, nowadays EL PIANO York registers a gross profit (GP%) higher than the industry average. To be financially successful, a restaurant in UK needs to make a GP% of about 65-70% and EL PIANO was able to achieve a GP% of about 80%. There are many reasons behind this impressive result, one of which is certainly the virtually non-existing turnover of personnel. Despite the seasonal members of staff coming and going, the full-time members of staff bond with the business in such a depth that rarely someone leaves the business. This translates into cost savings in terms of recruitment, training, and development of staff. From an environmental perspective, the adoption of local and plant-based ingredients for the EL PIANO menu results in lower emissions and footprint of the business, making the difference not only for the environment, but also from a social perspective, through its positive impact in surrounding local communities.

Barriers/challenges/Lessons learnt

Among the different challenges and barriers that the business encountered throughout these almost two decades, the financial and administrative aspects of the restaurant business have been the most relevant one. In particular, it was reported as barrier the role of banks in allocating fundings or delaying repayments in critical moments of the business as well as all the administrative burden experienced especially during the initial stage of the development of the business. Finally, EL PIANO shared with us their lesson learnt about the key role that people have played in the development and success of the business. Accepting the diversity of people, and putting people at the centre of the business, rather than considering them as a simple high cost that the business has to bear, can make the difference towards a long-term economically, environmentally and socially sustainable business. EL PIANO has

resisted alliances with any particular group or party, and, as a consequence, enjoys a wide clientele. From bankers to nursing mothers, students to drug squad police officers, right wing to left wing, vegan to carnivore, down the years EL PIANO has enjoyed serving people from all different walks of life. It is a platform of EL PIANO's commercial success that the focus is on the individual customer. Even when people are looking for burger and chips, or steak and beer, it is the EL PIANO custom to assist, passing them on to other restaurants in an effort to ensure that they had a good time. It is always appreciated, and people often return for another occasion. Ultimately EL PIANO is in the service industry and the commitment of staff to serve and serve well is funda

What was the type of green solution? Please select the type of solution.:

Technology/Product [1], Organisational methods and (green) business plans [2]

What does the featured solution contribute to?:

Environmental protection,

Resource efficiency

Which technology area(s) does the case study belong to?:

Bio-based materials [3], Raw material efficiency [4], Pesticides [5], End of life product recovery [6]

How was the green solution financed?:

Private funds [7]

Capital costs description:

The required initial investment has been of 150.000 €

Operating and maintenance costs description:

Running costs in general are: Staffing should run: At 19 - 25% in take-away; Below 30% in restaurant service; Food ingredients costs should be 33% of sales max for take away 25% of sales max for restaurant

Emission reductions description:

Yes, but not possible to quantify, yet.

Energy consumption description:

Yes, but not possible to quantify, yet.

Material consumption savings description:

Yes, but not possible to quantify, yet.

Operating and maintenance costs:

Yes, high O&M costs

Would you characterize the green solution as:

High capital intensive investment (i.e. above €30,000)

Partners:

Company name

- El Piano [8]

Relationship type:

Company that supplied or installed the green solution

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Links

[1] <http://greeneconet.eu/type-green-solution/technologyproduct>

[2] <http://greeneconet.eu/type-green-solution/organisational-methods-and-green-business-plans>

[3] <http://greeneconet.eu/technology-area/materials/bio-based-materials>

[4] <http://greeneconet.eu/technology-area/resource-efficiency/raw-material-efficiency>

[5] <http://greeneconet.eu/technology-area/protection-natural-resources/soil-pollution-prevention-and-mitigation/pesticides>

[6] <http://greeneconet.eu/technology-area/waste-treatment-and-recycling/end-life-product-recovery>

[7] <http://greeneconet.eu/financing/private-funds>

[8] <http://greeneconet.eu/el-piano>