

A concession stand staple quickly becomes a target of sustainability efforts

BY BRAD WEISSBERG

For More Venues, It's the Last Straw

Concessions

THE DESIRE TO keep oceans cleaner has helped produce a sudden tidal wave of sentiment against plastic straws in the last few months, as venue operators, concessionaires and localities have decided to offer alternatives and in some cases ban their use.

This August alone, concessionaire Aramark, House of Blues and BSE Global, which operates Barclays Center in Brooklyn, N.Y., and Long Island's NYCB Live: Nassau Veterans Memorial Coliseum, all announced a ban on plastic straws. House of Blues is following the lead of parent company Live Nation, which phased out plastic straws at all 52 amphitheaters it owns in April.

They join others such as Bon Appétit Management, which runs concessions for the San Francisco Giants at AT&T Park, which announced a companywide ban in May, and many others in entertainment and hospitality.

Cities such as Seattle, Miami Beach and San Francisco have gotten in on the end-of-the-plastic-straw movement, banning them at bars, cafes, clubs, restaurants and venues.

Millions of straws end up in the world's oceans and landfills each year, harming animals that ingest them. Live Nation made its decision after partnering with musician and environmentalist Jack Johnson and concert-sustainability company Reverb for a recent tour, said Lucy August-Perna, manager of venue sustainability for U.S. concerts.

"Jack has it written into his rider that plastic straws will not be handed out to any customer who buys a beverage at one of his concerts," August-Perna said. "We saw that it worked, and we decided to give it a go at all our venues this year. This was a simple way to reduce plastics and change consumer behavior."

Live Nation's amphitheaters instituted a "straw by request only" policy and will provide paper straws, she said.

The move toward greater sustainability started at Live Nation venues three years ago when

discussing the idea of eliminating environmentally unfriendly plastic straws at its venues "since the end of last year. It was spurred on by 'Entourage' actor and BSE advisory board member Adrian Grenier, who has been championing the banning of single-use plastic straws."

He expects an overall cost reduction. "We're trying to reduce straw usage as a whole," he said.



Plastic straws, considered harmful to the environment, are falling out of favor at venues.

VIPs in need of utensils began receiving wooden, bamboo or compostable cutlery, she said.

The plastic straw phase-out will save 3 million straws being shipped to the landfills each year. Although there is a slight cost increase for paper straws and new sippy-cup style lids, it's worth it to be environmentally progressive, August-Perna said.

"The guests have been appreciative of the effort," she said.

House of Blues adopted the policy last month. "It was the right thing to do," executive vice president Felix Mussenden said.

In New York, BSE Global announced its venues would phase out plastic straws by the end of the year. The decision will divert an annual 5.5 million straws from landfills. Levy, the venues' food and beverage provider, will upon request offer guests a strawless lid or a compostable straw.

AEG iEarth, AEG's company-wide sustainability program, was an adviser on the initiative for both venues.

Rohan Bhasin, senior operations manager at Barclays Center, said that the company has been

"It's hopefully a gateway to get our guests to forgo other plastic single-use items like bags, bottles and utensils in their everyday lives as well as at the facilities."

Bon Appétit Management plans to make AT&T Park straw-free by next year. "I've been concerned about how much plastic our industry uses for a while," said Bon Appétit's CEO, Fedele Baucio, by email. "I would say I've been influenced by how much plastic pollution of the oceans has been in the news."

Bon Appétit bought 16.8 million plastic straws and almost 420,000 plastic stirrers in fiscal 2017, he said.

The switch will have a cost. Paper straws cost 3 cents more than plastic, or \$135 more for 4,500 straws, *Bloomberg News* reported.

"What we are seeing is unprecedented," said David Rhodes, global business director for Aardvark Straws, the sole U.S. producer of paper straws. "We've had great growth year after year after year, but this year it has gone into orbit. It's that big, and it's growing every day." ▣

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