



**Success
stories**



Shanoor Miah

Café Zeera
Harpenden AL5 4ST

Throughout his life Shanoor has been passionate about food and creating innovative dishes. He's been doing this since childhood when he used to watch his mother cooking food and was fascinated by what she created. He gets excited about cooking every day and feels so lucky to have been able to parlay his passion into a successful business. Inspired by his mother's cooking, he started working in restaurants when he was a teenager, but always had a dream of opening his own business and offering something new and exciting to his customers. And as the years have gone by he has just got better and better. The key is to keep moving with the times, to keep innovating – which Shanoor has done.

“Customer experience plays a major role in your success,” he believes firmly! Talking to the customers and listening to their feedback is his favourite part of this business: “Their compliments are wonderful to hear and it makes it all worthwhile. The numbers of times I've heard people say they've had their best meal or they've never had something so full of flavour before is amazing. I love what I do and this makes me very happy.”

Their unique selling proposition, Shanoor says, is their ability to evolve, to find out what the customer likes, what works well and to change if necessary. He adds, “We have many regular customers and we're able to remember their favourite dishes. Everything is cooked from fresh so we can make our dishes to the customer's preference.”

From years of growing up in a family of cooks and from travelling around the world he has gained experience of how to choose his menu and ingredients: “We talk to chefs from all over the country and from places in other countries, we share tips and advices and in our spare time we apply them to find out what works and what doesn't.”

“The ingredients must always be fresh and high quality, which makes a huge difference,” he says. They have recently changed their menu and introduced new dishes which people in the region won't have seen before. The chef specials are many favourite dishes that take traditional Indian cuisine to a new level of intensity. These dishes are very popular with their customers.

To Shanoor, the kitchen staff are extremely important, from the KP to the tandoori chef. “They

are the cogs to the engine and without them we don't work. I have no doubt that they love what they do and enjoy it but they also have families. Families and happiness come first always and we are very accommodating to ensure there is a work-life balance.”

Personal relations strategy and marketing are of paramount importance to Shanoor and his partners. They know each restaurant has a story to tell but without a strong PR strategy, that story may never reach your customers. PR helps the brand authentically connect with your customers, increase your visibility and elevate your credibility, keeping your brand out of the advertising abyss. One of the investors in the business runs an award-winning PR and marketing company. They manage their press, adverts, events and social media. Shanoor and his team consider this as the key to bringing customers in.

They are innovative working with local partners, like the council, to try new initiatives, which is great for community engagement. They often get asked for vouchers by schools and people setting themselves challenges which they are always happy to offer as it supports the community and gets their name out there.

The hardest part in his business, Shanoor thinks, is when a customer doesn't have a good experience for whatever reason: “It doesn't happen very often but when it does you take it personally and you feel that you have let them down. It may be no fault of yourself or the staff, it might be that the person is not terribly friendly but you still take it personally.”

Shanoor is very clear on simplicity. ‘Work hard and listen’ is his philosophy: “There are many people out there that have years of experience. Listen to them, take advice, share your own, and never be afraid to learn.”

During the pandemic he sold his shares after a four-year partnership business at Maya Indian Kitchen & Bar. Currently, he has started a new restaurant called Cafe Zira on the basis of partnership. “We're a two-year-old business and there are new ways we can improve, grow and develop.” Shanoor wants his new venture to be one of the best celebrated restaurants in the country and he won't stop until it is.