

Black Angus Steakhouse Hits A BullsEye with New Concept

By: [Alissa Ponchione](#)
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Black Angus Steakhouse, headquartered in Los Alto, Calif., knows how to sell steaks. So with an already-established loyal fan base, President and CEO Merry Taylor developed the BullsEye Bar concept — a more laid back sports bar concept housed within the Black Angus restaurant. Taylor tells us about the inception of BullsEye Bar and what the future holds for the new initiative.



VIBE: How and when did you start the BullsEye Bar concept?

Merry Taylor: We did fairly extensive research — both qualitative and quantitative — about the brand and what guests like about brand. Many remember the energy of our Square Cow Fun Bar, where originally — very originally — we had a stage with live bands, and then we moved to a recorded format with DJs and videos, keeping up with the most popular MTV videos as it evolved in the '80s and '90s. But then that business became outdated.

But surprisingly when we did research, we found that people missed that energy and that fun and that was a driving force to come up with a new bar concept. We wanted to develop a bar concept that recaptured that energy and is more contemporary and synergistic with the steak house concept. We developed the concept in 2009 and opened the first BullsEye Bar in September of that year in Burbank, Calif.

VIBE: What's the BullsEye Bar concept aesthetic and menu like?

Merry Taylor: The bar has generally 11 or 12 flat screens, remodeled to have viewing zones from every seat so you can see multiple sporting events. Sports are shown all the time, and there

are promotions and drink specials, as well as a separate menu that has more sports bar related items including traditional sports bar food like Buffalo wings and hand tossed pizzas, a spicy steak pizza or baby portabella pizza. It also has some steak takes on traditional sports bar food such as steak nachos and filet mignon sliders.

VIBE: Are you looking to attract a new/different target customer or perhaps expand into different day parts with the bar concept?

Merry Taylor: Both, and we've found that it has accomplished both. Originally, we were looking to provide a different location to increase frequency. With Black Angus and BullsEye Bar, people can come in and have a complete steak dinner on a date or a social gathering, or they can stop by on the way home from work and have a drink and watch the game. We were looking to provide a different occasion, and an entry point for new guests seeking something more causal and with a lower price point than a complete steak dinner.

We do have some different drink specials, as well as beverages that are not on the Black Angus menu. We have a line of Cheladas like Pineapple Jalapeno Chelada. The typical Chelada in Mexico is a tomato beer and clamato juice so we do a take off on that. We also have the Blue Drink, which is offered as a special when the hometown wins. It's a Martini drink or the BullsEye bomber made with Red Stag, Amaretto and Red Bull.

VIBE: What's the vision for BullsEye Bar? How do you see it evolving as a concept, and what's its role in the Black Angus restaurant concept?

Merry Taylor: We've opened 15 in a little over a year, and we'll open 13 or 14 more between now and August, especially with the start of football pre-season. These bars will encompass larger buildings that have the space to allocate to a BullsEye Bar. In the case of our very small bars, we'll incorporate some elements of the BullsEye Bar; we'll incorporate food like steak nachos and some of those elements. They'll be mini BullsEye Bars in themselves, if you will. It will be our evolving bar concept for the future. With every bar concept, you keep it fresh by innovating with product, promotions, food and drinks specials and new beverages.

VIBE: What kind of promotions do you run at BullsEye Bar? Or hope to run in the future?

Merry Taylor: We do a lot [of promotions] on an on-going basis. We do sports focused contests and trivia contests, and people win BullsEye Bar merchandise, or they win sports tickets or movie tickets. For the major sporting season, we do a special promotion. We do an NCAA promotion, NBA playoff promotions, an NFL promotion, a World Cup promotion that stemmed around how often you visited during the World Cup, and someone won a flat screen TV at the end. Then we do constant trivia contests.

VIBE: Tell me more about your Moo'la Bucks promotion.

Merry Taylor: That's really our NFL promotion. We started that a couple years ago. It's really fun because it's an auction environment. Throughout the NFL season, you have the opportunity to get Moo'la Bucks for every dollar you spend on food. You get 100 Moo'la Bucks for a dollar of food. So when the auction comes around, we auction off NFL player jerseys and other items like the opportunity to win a gift card for BullsEye Bar or a free appetizer — items from large to small. The auction is kind of exciting. We do an auction once a month during the football season. And at the end, if people don't spend their Bucks, they can use them to win a trip the Pro Bowl. We did something similar three years ago with some prizing, but we added the Moo'la Bucks last year.

VIBE: What POS materials and local market outreach do you use to market the promotions at the BullsEye Bar?

Merry Taylor: As each bar opens, there's radio support for each bar. Once the bar is opened, the sustaining support is done with flyers. We have lots of flyers and our managers get out in the local community and distribute the flyers to nearby hotels, to apartments and to local sports clubs. We do have a Facebook page that's quite active for BullsEye Bar that's constantly updated.

VIBE: Some locations have had the Bullseye Bar concept for some time; what's the response from guests? From employees?

Merry Taylor: The response from guests has been terrific. It's always good when you create a concept that can attract new people. We just completed research on a BullsEye Bar that has been opened for six months. The BullsEye Bar excelled in ambiance, service and food. It excelled in quality, value and variety, and our employees love it. The bar has a halo effect of increasing the energies throughout the concept. They're very excited, and teams can't wait for their own BullsEye Bar.

VIBE: What's the impact been on traffic and as well as sales? Has it attracted new guests? Has it increased the total beverage sales for the restaurant?

Merry Taylor: We've seen a fairly dramatic increase in beverage sales and food sales in the bar and all around in the restaurant. I guess one of the things that's interesting about BullsEye Bar is although many people enjoy items from BullsEye Bar menu, we also have guests that order from the regular [Black Angus] dinner menu in the BullsEye Bar. They enjoy a steak dinner in a causal environment while enjoying the game. It's a mix of people, not just certain people gravitating toward nachos and wings, which is the successful point of the concept. Guests have their choice of viewing areas and have a choice of whether they feel like a complete dinner or a typical sports bar snack.



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