

MARKETING DIRECTOR

JASON DANCIGER

Employer: The Pelican Group

29-31 Old Compton Street, London W1

Age: 29

Salary: Over £30,000

As marketing director of one of the country's most go-ahead restaurant groups, Jason Danciger has an enviable job – and he knows it. After a varied career in the catering industry, he has found his niche.

"I know that wherever my career takes me in the future I want to be marketing restaurants," he says. "Every day is a challenge."

Marketing the group's restaurants – which count among them Café Rouge, Mamma Amalfi and Rock Island Diner – requires imagination and resourcefulness. It also needs good interpersonal skills, since a large part of Jason's job involves training the company's restaurant managers to implement the marketing promotions he has devised.

Jason had his eyes set on a catering career from his school

days, when he worked evenings as a waiter in a local hotel. But his first full-time job came with a four-year apprenticeship at the then two Michelin-starred Interlude de Travaillau in Covent Garden.

And very much full time it was too – from 9am until 2am the following morning, washing dishes, cleaning windows and generally being dogsbody. It was a baptism of fire, and Jason is pleased to have lived through it and survived. "Thank goodness those apprenticeships don't exist any more," he says.

The main benefit, however, was the opportunity to attend Westminster College, where he took a chef's diploma as well as additional management courses.

With his training behind him, he was taken on by Roux Restaurants, which, in many ways, was the high point of his days as a chef. As a young chef he moved around the Roux empire, doing stints in the restaurants, the butchery, outside catering and running the dining rooms of several banks.

But what particularly distinguished

the organisation was the fact that it was chef-led, something he never again encountered in his career. "So often, the man in the white jacket is not taken seriously," says Jason. "Chefs are considered to be temperamental individuals and not taken seriously as managers."

It was the belief that a chef often didn't receive the respect he deserved that drove Jason towards a career in management. "I wanted to prove a point – that a chef can also be an effective manager," he explains.

Several chef jobs later, he found himself in a restaurant manager's post at the National Gallery in London, working with Justine de Blanc. While he was there, with an eye on a management career, he started to take control of his own training needs. He

took courses in wine and learned about computing and business studies.

But by far his most significant qualification at that stage, and the one that helps him most in his present job, was the reputed diploma from the Institute of Marketing. That took up two evenings a week for two years, but was well worth the effort. "Although the course cannot teach you to come up with the promotional ideas, it does teach you how to focus them and implement them."

THE BIG BREAK

The turning point in Jason's career undoubtedly came when he took a job with Café Rouge. At that time the company had just four restaurants and was a far cry from the 60-outlet group it is today.

Jason knows he was in the right place at the right time and as such had the opportunity to make his mark. He began life with the company as restaurant manager of the Putney branch and with head office upstairs in those days, he was able to get noticed.

One day he told managing

director Karen Jones that he thought he could put together a better wine list. She told him to have a go, liked what he suggested and before he knew it he was buying wine for the group. Having shown initiative there, he started to suggest marketing ideas, which were also adopted across all the restaurants.

Before long Jason found himself promoted to operations director, and was in the position of opening new restaurants across London as the company began to snowball.

TRAINING FOCUS

Today the company has a strong emphasis on training, and offers courses on subjects such as management, customer care and bar skills. Ironically, Jason had always wanted to do the Hotel & Catering Training Company craft course which Café Rouge staff do today, but he progressed so rapidly through the company that he found himself training to teach it to other people instead.

As somebody who has always ensured that he has a pretty full complement of qualifications, is there anything else he thinks might have helped?

"A degree can give you a jump ahead, but when I am employing people I consider experience far more important," he says. "But really success depends on your commitment to hard work."

He has enjoyed the last five years tremendously and praises his boss Karen Jones. "She is an excellent manager, and has had the trust in me to give me a chance."

Looking back over his career, what have been the good and the bad aspects? "My last five years have been great (although I'd like to work a third of the hours!), but in the early years I had no sense of security."

"You always knew your job depended on staying on the right side of the chef's temper and that on any given service you could find yourself out of a job," Jason says. "Things are better these days, but working as a chef is still a very nomadic lifestyle."

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