

Many chefs and restaurateurs consider their trade as something of an art form and would rather not give a second's thought to that dirty little business word: marketing. After all, good food should speak for itself, right?

While good food is still the best advertisement, no restaurant operator can afford to ignore the business side of the industry, and this includes creating an effective marketing strategy.

However, in the slow economic environment, most restaurants cannot afford to compromise their bottom lines with a huge advertisement campaign. Luckily, with today's technology and a little smart-thinking, effective restaurant marketing doesn't have to cost much. We've compiled these 10 low-cost marketing strategies that'll help you draw in customers by the droves with minimal initial investment.



1

Utilize your restaurant's website

According to a recent survey, 42 percent of consumers report that they “usually” use the internet to find a restaurant to go to. Add in the consumers that “sometimes” use the internet to find a restaurant and the number jumps to 63 percent¹. Your business might be about food, but your online presence cannot be ignored. In order to make the most of the marketing opportunities presented by the internet, your website has to pull its weight. Consider the following tips:

- **Be sure customers can easily find all important information on your website.** When visiting a restaurant's site, customers are most often looking for: hours, contact information including address and phone number, menu and prices. If you don't include this information, they will likely decide to go somewhere else.
- **Make sure your website is easy to read and mobile friendly.** Avoid using Javascript and Adobe Flash applications, as these will frequently divert mobile users right off the bat.

2

Use limited-time offers

Limited-time offers (LTOs) are a time-tested tactic for boosting revenue, drawing in new customers and testing out new menu items. LTOs are successful because they appeal to customers' sense of urgency and encourage them to act immediately. If you're running a limited time offer, keep these tenets in mind:

- **Try out new items you might want to add to the menu.** This serves a two-fold purpose. First, it can get customers, new and regulars alike, excited to come to your restaurant. Second, it gives you a chance to try out items that might do well on the menu to see what could be profitable, and what ideas you should abandon.
- **Offer a good deal.** Discounts are still the most popular restaurant promotion, and with good reason: everyone loves a deal. Offering limited time deals can be pretty easy on your bottom line and also whet customers' appetites for your delicious offerings.
- **Listen to your customers.** Using comment cards as well as engaging in conversations on social media will give you a much better idea as to what kinds of meals and deals would entice your customers.

¹ “Buzztime Survey for Restaurant Hospitality: How Often Do You Use the Internet or a Mobile Device to Find a Restaurant?” Restaurant Hospitality <<http://restaurant-hospitality.com/company/buzztime/buzztime-survey-0112>> (accessed 9/26/2012).

3

Implement loyalty rewards

Loyalty rewards are deals you offer to customers in exchange for their repeat business. This type of reward can be implemented in a variety of formats: punch cards are popular, as are newer digital loyalty reward cards that can be scanned to keep track of customers' orders. When running a loyalty reward program, be sure to consider the following:

- **Make sure the reward is attainable.** It is better to give a small reward for a smaller amount of spending and effort on behalf of the customer, as it will be more enticing for them to try to attain the goal than if it seemed too far off in the distance.
- **Use a point system rather than a dollar system.** Though points can be matched for dollars, calling them points will allow customers to imagine working toward a goal rather than getting a certain (often very small) percentage off of their meals.
- **Offer more points during off-hours.** If Tuesday is typically a slow night, offer more point rewards for patrons that come in on that day. This will keep business moving even during the slowest shifts.

4

Make sure your menu is working for you

It is easy for restaurant owners to forget that marketing doesn't stop after customers come in the door. Your menu is one of the best marketing tools you have, and it costs almost nothing. In order to make the most of your menu, keep the following tenets in mind:

- **Put high profit margin items in strategic locations.** Customers tend to remember the first two and the last item on a list¹. In a bi-fold menu, customers will look at the top right side first. In a tri-fold menu they will look at the top center first and continue in a counterclockwise direction. Be sure to put your money-makers in these strategic spots.
- **Be sure to use descriptive, enticing language on the items you want to sell the most.** Although a customer may not come in thinking she wants your highly profitable fish entree, she may easily change her mind once she learns that it is "freshly caught" and "pan-seared."

¹ "Reading Between the Lines: The Psychology of Menu Design" National Restaurant Association <<http://www.restaurant.org/tools/magazines/rusa/magarchive/year/article/?ArticleID=162>> (accessed 9/26/2012).

5

Support local charities

Charitable giving can be as good for the benefactors as for the recipients. In exchange for your charitable support you will gain good press coverage and a high esteem in the eyes of your customers. In fact, 52 percent of adults say they are more likely to patronize a restaurant if it supports the local community¹. So, how to go about it?

- **Determine what causes you want to help.** It should be a group or organization with a solid reputation that fits in with your business concept, if possible. Be careful not to choose a politically divisive organization, unless that is a stand you are willing to take.
- **Determine how you'd like to offer your support.** You can always help by the simple act of writing a check, but this isn't always the easiest way to get good press in exchange for your good deeds. Hosting fundraising events brings new faces in the door while helping out the community at the same time.
- **Involve your customers.** Encouraging your customers to come in and volunteer alongside you and your staff builds the sense of rapport and belonging that keeps regulars coming in through the door.



¹ "2009 Restaurant Industry Pocket Factbook," National Restaurant Association <<http://www.restaurant.org/pdfs/research/2009Factbook.pdf>> (accessed 9/26/2012).

6 Host special events

There are many different types of events that your restaurant can get involved with: from pancake socials to comedy and music shows or sports-related activities. By opting to host an event, you can attract the interest of new clientele and maintain the interest and excitement of your existing customers. Here are some tips for how to turn an event into a successful marketing tactic:

- **Make sure your event fits your restaurant concept.** For more casual eateries a comedy night is a great way to draw in a crowd and have a good time. For more up-scale establishments, consider a promotion such as “wine and cheese” night which will appeal to your clientele.
- **Consider forming partnerships with other businesses.** By co-hosting an event, you increase your marketing reach and gain the potential to introduce your business to a much larger audience. This is also a great way to save on some of the initial costs that come along with hosting.
- **Get everyone involved.** Involving your staff as well as your customers in the planning and execution of the event is a great way to build up enthusiasm. Be sure to use customer comment cards to find out what types of events they’d enjoy, and let them get involved in the fun aspects of the event itself. The more personally invested all parties feel, the more energy they will bring to the big day.



7

Run customer contests

Running a contest is great for business in a number of ways. It attracts attention, provides entertainment, encourages repeat business and allows you to collect customer information for future promotions. Contests can include trivia night, physical competitions, raffles and giveaways. In order to run successful customer contests, consider these tips:

- **Make sure your prizes are enticing, but do not compromise your bottom line.** Remember, contests are supposed to make money, not cost money. At the same time, you want to make sure that customers perceive the prizes as valuable in order to entice them to participate. Good prizes include gift certificates, free drinks and free meals.
- **If possible, give an advantage to repeat customers.** Repeat business is exactly what you are trying to drum up, so making regular customers more likely to win will help you achieve your goal. For example, if you are hosting a trivia night you can hold season-long tournaments in which points can be added up, giving regulars a leg up above the newcomers.
- **Don't forget to gather customer information!** In order to get customers their prizes, you should collect their email addresses. Don't abuse the privilege and send marketing messages if they ask you not to, but keep the information in order to send strategic messages letting them know about more deals and promotions.

8

Use email marketing

Although there is a lot of talk about Facebook and Twitter (and they are essential marketing tools) studies show that when it comes to hard sales, email is still the best route¹. When implementing an email marketing campaign, there are a few things you should keep in mind:

- **More personalized emails always work better than mass messages.** When you collect information from your customers, be sure to collect as much information as possible and use this information to craft very specific marketing campaigns. For example, keep a list of your customers' birthdays and send out a personal message a few weeks ahead of time letting them know they can come in and get a deal on their special day.
- **You don't want to email customers too much or too little.** If you inundate their inboxes, they are likely to unsubscribe from your list. However, if you email them too little you will be wasting a valuable marketing tool. Customers genuinely want to know about good deals and will appreciate a notification of your promotions.

¹ "Email Is Still the Best Way to Share Content Among Consumers and Businesses," Content Marketing Institute <<http://www.contentmarketinginstitute.com/2012/04/email-still-best-way-to-share-content/>> (accessed 9/26/2012).

9

Promote your delivery services

Delivery service appeals to a large portion of the population: anyone that is too busy to cook but still wants to stay in for dinner. Offering a delivery service is typical for quick-service restaurants, but it can also offer a potential source of revenue for restaurants in any segment. Adding delivery service to your operation is an excellent source of increased revenue that doesn't bring with it extensive increased costs or the need to expand your dining area. Here are a few tips to market your delivery program successfully:

- **Don't neglect your restaurant website.** It is essential to have an easy-to-use site, as this will be where the majority of your delivery customers are going to take a look at the menu.
- **Offer online and text message ordering.** There is a growing aversion to making phone calls among consumers, especially your millennial clientele. By providing these services you ensure that you won't miss out on the potential customers that do not wish to order by the phone.
- **Offer college dorm deals.** No one loves delivery services more than college kids. By offering discounts to this population, you will gain their business and the inherent marketing that comes within the tightly packed quarters of a college dorm. If one student orders from you, others will find out about it and be likely to follow suit.



10 Appeal to the health conscious

A recent poll by the National Restaurant Association shows that 73 percent of consumers report that they try to choose healthy options when going out to eat¹. With numbers like that, food service businesses across all segments can't afford to ignore this very important demographic. Although a healthy image doesn't fit with all restaurant concepts there are still some tactics that any establishment can use to appeal to the health conscious consumer:

- **Promote “fresh” products.** Even if your meals aren't low-calorie, offering products that are fresh instead of frozen appeals to customers' sense of authentic and more healthful food products.
- **Use a tiered menu approach.** Call out a few more healthful options in a “healthy” section on your menu. Offering customers low-calorie options opens your menu's appeal to a larger and more varied demographic.
- **Get the word out about your healthy menu options.** Besides calling out healthy choices on the menu, use your menu board, table tents, flyers and social media to let customers know you offer healthy food.

Begin with a goal to increase your cover count, revenue and brand awareness; then develop a fun and inexpensive marketing plan to meet those goals. Use these simple tips and breathe new life into the marketing efforts for your business.



¹ “Diners Seek More Healthful Meals at Restaurants,” National Restaurant Association <http://www.restaurant.org/nra_news_blog/2012/02/diners-seek-more-healthful-meals-at-restaurants.cfm> (accessed 9/26/2012).

About FoodServiceWarehouse.com

FoodServiceWarehouse.com was founded in June of 2006 with a single business goal in mind: empowering food service operators to make their own businesses more successful. At FoodServiceWarehouse.com, we offer step-by-step assistance throughout the entire process of learning about and shopping for restaurant equipment and supplies. Our vast selection and educational resources create an incredibly comprehensive yet straightforward online shopping and learning experience, especially directed toward the bar and nightclub owner and operator.

When it comes to learning tools and resources, our one-of-a-kind Education Center is a great place to start. A library of free online articles, buying guides and downloadable tools gives you a comprehensive look at the food service industry from the inside out, and our Bar Specialty Store provides in-depth focus on the beverage industry specifically. When you need supplies, look no further than our Web site, where we offer over 100,000 items from nearly 300 manufacturers. To date, over 7,000 bars have come to us for supplies.

Our combination of comprehensive research materials, extensive product selection and customer-focused support process make FoodServiceWarehouse.com a one-of-a-kind experience for anyone in the food or beverage industry. For more information, please visit our website at www.foodservicewarehouse.com.



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