

[— Back](#)

CUSTOMERS

Competing for Tourist Traffic With Seasonal Restaurant Marketing

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Looking to capture a slice of that hungry seasonal tourist traffic?

You should start right away, because the process of seasonal marketing begins well before crowds start piling into your city. If you haven't built a network of referrals, curated positive reviews, and crafted a regional menu, you're already behind the ball.

If you want seasonal restaurant customers, think about who they are and what they want in order to dial in your messaging. Then, consider how your location, menu type, and relationships can be leveraged so your restaurant is buzzing with out-of-towners when peak season arrives.

So how do you attract tourist traffic to your restaurant?

Analyze Your Location

"First ask yourself, are you in a location that's tourist friendly?" says [Stephen Zagor](#), former dean of the [Institute of Culinary Education](#), and adjunct professor at [Columbia Business School](#) and [New York University School of Nutrition and Food Studies](#).

If you are, determine what types of tourists frequent your area (families, tours, weddings, singles, couples, business travelers, etc.), he says, and put yourself in their shoes. Why are they visiting? Are they quick-service or high-end diners? Do they want local culture, or to hit hot, touristy spots?

If you're located near your city's best attractions, visit them, advises Zagor, and hand out seasonal marketing promotions and business cards. This helps build your referral network and have your restaurant recommended to travelers by the attraction owners.

If your location isn't ideal, and getting seasonal restaurant customers seems like a struggle, what can you do to start your marketing now so it pays off with visits during tourist season? Can you build relationships with hotels, businesses, other restaurants, visitors bureaus, and attractions that have ideal locations in order to gain referrals? Can you create a traffic-inducing promotion with other restaurants and shops?

Brainstorm options that may attract tourist traffic to your location.

Form Partnerships

Whether you're located in the city center or on the outskirts, nurturing partnerships is a great seasonal restaurant marketing strategy, say experts.

Start with hotels where you can meet with the concierge or manager. Work to become familiar with their tourist audience and see how you can help their business grow, and they may provide



referrals to your restaurant. One example of helping each other might be a co-branded promotion where you offer a hotel's guests a discount or special item.

Another partnership step is connecting with retail partners that match your brand, explains John Kolaski, CEO of [K2 Restaurants](#), and partner with them in a reciprocating way. For example, you agree to recommend their shop to diners, and the retailer agrees to hand out discount cards to your restaurant to their shoppers. It's a win-win, says Kolaski, and both partners are kept top of mind to tourists.

Zagor recommends partnering with tour companies as well because they can bring by large numbers of tourists, and they're often looking for restaurants that are willing to take big groups. One tourist is a single transaction, he adds, but connecting with a tourism group that continues to bring in tourists could be multiple transactions that lead to a big boost in revenue.

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Stay Visible Online and on All the Tourist Sites

Are you being seen and highly-reviewed online?

Making it easy for tourists to find you online means positively positioning your brand on the sites they visit most. From Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter to Yelp, TripAdvisor, OpenTable, and Resy, your restaurant needs to be visible, have positive reviews, and continually build credibility.

If you've won awards, celebrate them on every site to cut through the noise, says Kolaski.

Building your online presence also includes public relations (PR), which there's no substitute for, says Zagor. PR firms can help your seasonal marketing by positioning your business toward tourists, connecting you to the right writers, and managing your local perception and reputation.

Have Quality Food and a Tourist-Attracting Menu

Featuring exceptional ingredients strikes a chord with tourists, but so does cuisine that's authentic to your area. However, it's a fine line of making those dishes local yet approachable, so encourage tourists to order them.

“Tourists are often scared of local cuisine,” explains Zagor, “People don't want to take chances so they go with what they know and what they love. Menus have to have that combination of comfortable with a little bit of what gives your city its local color.”

Promote specials that showcase local flavors with higher price tags to entice tourists, but always have your locals' menu favorites at traditional prices, he advises. This way, locals can still get what they crave for the same cost, but you increase revenue because of the specials.

At Kolaski's food hall concept, [Social Eats](#), every venue has menu boards that highlight specials, seasonal dishes, happy hours, and unique plates. They also feature photos of menu items at registers to entice orders.

“It's having some visual marketing as well that draws people in and cuts through the noise and allows them to see what's on the menu,” Kolaski says, “We have those types of visual cues so they can point and say, ‘Okay, that's what it is. I want that.’”

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Tourists Love Delivery

Don't forget, more and more hotels don't have restaurants or room service, and tourists, like locals, love delivery, says Zagor, "The tourist delivery market to a hotel is way bigger than we all think."

This is why you need to make sure your menu is in the room or at least part of the restaurants list at the hotel. You can also provide discounts or free items to hotel guests to encourage orders.

Your ultimate goal is to have your menu inside hotel rooms so when guests are mulling over delivery options, your menu is easy to find and order from. Especially when the weather is poor and the menus are simply sitting in the room, Zagor says guests are much more likely to order from what's right in front of them.

Are you located in a larger city? See if third-party delivery services are a good fit for you, say experts. It may be much more profitable with tourists than you think, and can be a wonderful way of garnering a positive reputation with visitors.

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[Back to Top](#)



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