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CUSTOMERS

How to Develop a Compelling, Profit-Inducing Restaurant Marketing Plan

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Operating your restaurant effectively and efficiently doesn't mean only focusing on the obvious, like the bottom line. It means developing a plan for how your restaurant will stay in, and grow, business through compelling marketing.



Why Is a Marketing Plan So Important?

A vital vein into the heart of your operation, a restaurant marketing plan dictates your earning potential, how you expand your customer base, how you reach your target audience in persuasive manners, and analytics on how effective your marketing tactics are.

Are you truly increasing covers or just increasing menu prices? Have you run the same tired marketing and promotions ideas that are good, but never great? Do you send out coupons hoping that just this one more time they'll catch on with new customers like wildfire?

Without a direct, developed marketing plan for your restaurant, you're driving in the dark. When you've got a defined plan, you know who your target market is and who you need to persuade to frequent your business, says Andrew Freeman, Founder of af&co. Within that plan, you have tasks and phases designed to help you check in on the health of growing your business. And you have analytics and tracking in place to prove expansion and profits are truly occurring.

It's essential to your operation, but how do you create a restaurant marketing plan that meets your revenue goals, hits the wants of your target demographic, and coincides with your staff's capabilities to complete the necessary tasks? Here are some top tips on how to craft a marketing plan that delivers for your restaurant.

Find a template

It may seem overwhelming at the start, but there are tons of templates available for beginners, says Kelly Stoker, account director at Prim Communications. She recommends starting small with an easy-to-follow template and using a calendar to map out your initiatives by quarter. Review what you did last year, what worked and what didn't, and what unique objectives you'd like to try for the upcoming year.

Calendar-ize

Within the calendar, fill in holidays, events, and trends that are specific to your restaurant, availability of seasonal produce, menu changes, and when your marketing plan review dates are, Stoker says. You can also track costs and insert on-the-fly promotions that may be a better fit

than what you originally planned.

Identify resources

“Start with whoever's going to be part of the process, so if it's going to be your general manager, if you have a sales manager because you have catering, if you're part of a larger company and there's a home office and there's a marketing department, if you're hiring an agency, get all the key players in the room in October, and lay out what your big initiatives are for the coming year,” says Freeman.

Set goals

Start out with a goal of increasing lunch by 10 percent, driving dinner coverage by three percent, or increasing private dining reservations, he adds, “Have your goals and then establish a very simple one-year marketing and PR plan. The more elaborate it gets, the higher the likelihood you're not going to do it or you're not going to read it.”

Have three main goals, back them up with tactics, do quarterly plans that can be broken into monthly actions, then write into the plan the goals, tactics, who's responsible for each task, and when the tasks are due, Freeman recommends.

Online presence

Additionally, work in posting fresh content to your blog and/or social media pages to help with search rankings. Plus, maintaining high-quality photos and videos, email marketing drip campaigns including newsletters, Facebook, Instagram, and Google ads, and cultivating relationships with influencers, journalists, and PR agencies is crucial to the online marketing success, says Paul O'Meara, partner at Jupiter Compass.

Follow through

Being consistent is imperative to having your marketing plan succeed. Make sure that your employees are carrying out their assignments, regularly check in on progress, and assess if your marketing milestones are being met. If something's not quite working, stay flexible and pivot to an idea your audience may prefer. Follow through on the actions, check-ins, and changes (if necessary). Hold everyone accountable, and when you've got a team operating under a plan, it's much easier to drive significant profits.

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