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M O N E Y

# Is Specialty Coffee the Next Step to Differentiate Your Restaurant?

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Drip coffee may be your restaurant's standby, but wouldn't you like your customers' dollars to flow into your brews instead of into those of other restaurants and coffee shops? Grabbing the attention of caffeine-buzzed customers is about positioning your specialty coffee's branding and advertising in a way that makes the experience of a cup of your Joe one-of-a-kind.

When you're highlighting your restaurant's unique selling proposition (USP) through marketing, you're proving to customers that your coffee is more than basic beans. It's about bringing the coffee to life, and using that opportunity to grow your coffee business while encouraging customers to try, and get hooked, on your cuisine.

Breaking into the coffee crowd may seem like a struggle, but if you provide something your guests want to come back to and tell their friends about, you can differentiate your specialty or branded coffee easily.

## What is Specialty Coffee and Should You Add it to Your Restaurant?

Sean Brennan, CEO and founder of The Pie Hole, says when you're considering specialty coffee, review a few factors for success:

1. It's an artisanal product, which means it has a certain culture. It matters how the coffee is grown, processed, shipped, and prepared, and it needs a Q grade at 80 or above.
2. You need to upcharge for the coffee because the product is more expensive. You also need to create (the perception of) value to justify why it costs more than a typical cup.
3. The flavor profile and blends need to be single origin and appeal to the widest group of people.

"What people want right now is they see that high quality coffee is more readily available. They're starting to drink it more; they really like it," says Brennan, "And there's the whole other component which is branding and culture. People aspire to be part of a culture that appeals to them, and they want to align themselves with [the] specialty coffee culture. They want to sit in a specialty coffee shop, they want to smell the fresh beans of a specialty coffee...people really want specialty coffee."

Whether you're a mom-and-pop or have a few locations, adding specialty or branded coffee is about knowing exactly what your audience wants, says Asser Christensen, Coffee Industry Expert and Q Grader. Are your customers open to new flavors or do they want bland coffee that just gives them a jolt every morning? Getting the answers to these questions can help you learn if specialty coffee is right for your brand.



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### Specialty Coffee Options

If your customers are open to new blends and tastes, there are a few coffee routes to travel. You can work with big brands like Counter Culture, Stumptown, Peet's Coffee, or Intelligentsia, some of whom were the first companies to start sourcing directly from farmers, or you can use a local roaster for a more hands-on approach, says Reuben Villagomez, Director of Coffee at GOffee.

Larger specialty coffee brands can offer staff training, equipment, service, specialty and machinery, and Villagomez says you can negotiate with these bigger brands to minimize costs on service calls and other maintenance fees. However, smaller, local roasters have wonderful benefits, too.

“I highly suggest a local specialty coffee vendor. Usually they're owner operated, you can roast lower minimums for order and delivery, you can have much more control over the flavor profile, and blends are single origin,” explains Brennan. With larger brands, the pricing may be better, but he says you lose much of the artisanal aspects of the coffee and getting to know the product well.

Working with a local roaster can also be a boost, “especially if the roaster already has brand recognition in the local area,” explains Christensen, and that “shows you care about quality, the local environment, and you get that [roaster's] help.”

Experts agree that local, as well as sustainable taglines, excite consumers, and may help when it comes to branding and marketing your coffee business. Consumers today are looking for brands that align with their values, Villagomez says.

The type of specialty coffee you purchase changes the way you develop your USP, branding, and advertising. Are tried-and-true large brands your thing? Do you want to go with a local roaster the city knows? Are green and sustainable most important? Look through the lens of the coffee brand you choose to help narrow the USP and marketing strategy for your restaurant.

### Differentiating, Branding, and Advertising Your Specialty Coffee

Explain the varieties, coffee growing elevation, or producer traceability to show customers you're introducing them to something that's unique, says Villagomez.

“Maybe you're a seasonal restaurant and you source seasonally based on what's being harvested at that time of year,” he explains, “You draw attention to the things that make your coffee different than just any brewed cup of coffee.”

Rather than saying its Colombian coffee, Villagomez recommends painting a story of the producer, where they live, the coffee growing experience, and the flavors and notes that come to life when the beans are brewed. Think of specialty coffee as you would wine and list its characteristics on your menu, in your signage, online, and throughout your marketing so customers know what to expect from a sip.

Presentation, flavor, flatware, tone of your social media posts, and sensory experience the coffee provides can also show uniqueness, says Villagomez, and the attention to detail of your program needs to come across clearly.

Some restaurateurs aren't as nimble as others, says Brennan, and they're not always as innovative or connected to the community. Take advantage of this and do as Brennan does: complete surveys, polls on social media, grab data from your email list, and try focus groups to see what coffee samples are working. Then, expand on those in your coffee business marketing.

When customers come in with a brand name cup, it's your chance to engage them in a conversation about your coffee. “Because when people come to The Pie Hole, they'll come in with [a brand name] already in hand and we'll engage them in that conversation... ‘Have you ever tried our coffee? Would you like a free sample?’” explains Brennan, “We think going to [brand names] is like the customer drive to need coffee, but we have to meet people where they are, not where we

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Your USP mixed with branding could also come to life through food pairings. If you have a breakfast, brunch, or lunch concept, Christensen recommends including coffee as part of a combo so you know customers are trying it. Experiment with flavor profiles and highlight the dishes that make both your cuisine and specialty coffee shine.

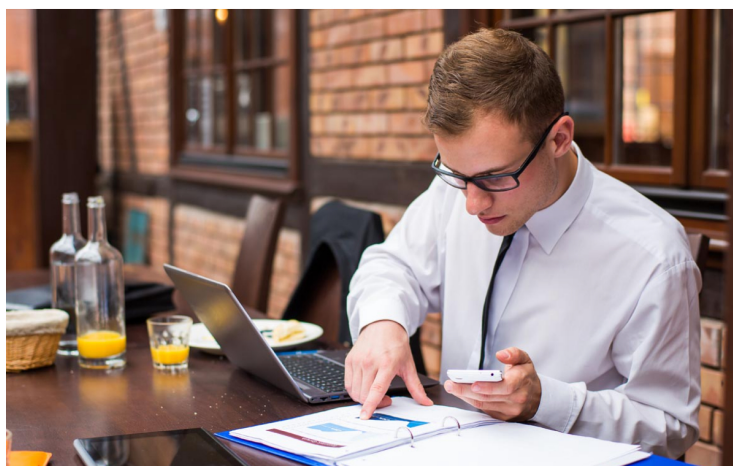
And don't forget about the best free tool: social media platforms. Showcase your baristas, coffee, food pairings, and lifestyle shots on Instagram as well as in email communications.

“Especially surrounding a new introduction of a specialty program, if you have an existing restaurant, you want to be as loud about the introduction as possible, and [show] that it makes sense within your business,” explains Villagomez, “Because you want people to know when you're doing something you feel you can execute well.”

Social media marketing can also include partnering with a well-known, well-respected, local roaster and co-branding with them, says Brennan. Adding their coffee to the menu, signage, social media posts, and advertising materials is one of the best options because the specialty coffee company already has name recognition yet you're still creating an original, unique experience.

If you believe specialty coffee is the right step for your restaurant, invest in partnerships, do your due diligence with coffee purveyors, and create a USP that easily differentiates you from both large brands and other coffee shops. Truly think through what kind of edge you can create between your dishes and the coffee that coincide with your restaurant's vibe and the demand from consumers. Then, execute consistently with your branding and advertising to launch and grow your restaurant's specialty coffee service beyond your four walls.

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