



Restaurant Marketing Ideas for the 12 Days of Christmas

11/01/2018

Christmas marketing isn't limited to just the immediate holiday but includes your winter menu changes, catering services, increased promotions of cookies, cakes, pies, pastries and side dishes for holiday meals, holiday party bookings and gift card sales. You have a great opportunity to attract new customers, show your chef's skills in preparing holiday favorites and exotic foods from other countries and cultures, and host special tasting events that attract convivial crowds.

12 Christmas Marketing Ideas for Restaurants

As the song goes, special gifts for the 12 days of Christmas include wildly exotic gifts, homespun treasures and a partridge in a pear tree. Christmas marketing ideas for restaurants can follow a similar template for 12 restaurant marketing ideas.

1. Offer a Set Menu for a Special Price

Hosting a prix fixe meal during the holiday season is a great way to encourage customers to try your complete meals from appetizers and soups to luscious desserts. The special can run for the month of December or for as many days as you choose.

2. Two-for-One Meal Promotions

Often underutilized by restaurants but very effective ways to promote in-house dining with friends, bounceback two-for-one incentives encourage people to bring guests and larger groups to your restaurant during the holiday season. This marketing idea is particularly effective when offered to lunch diners who often eat alone or have never visited the restaurant in the evenings.

3. Three-Course Special

Offering a three-course special in December is a powerful inducement when diners can choose from several appetizers, soups, salads, entrées and desserts. The power of holiday marketing is that you don't have to offer a big price discount to get customers to order a three-course special because you can promote the special as a perk that's just available for the holidays. Few customers will actually average the prices of each course to see how much they're saving.

4. Four Ways to Market Gift Cards

Gift cards can extend your holiday sales bonanza into the new year and encourage recipients to bring friends, family members and workplace associates with them because people seldom want to dine alone. You can market your gift cards in the following ways:

- Start Early** - Set up a display in the front of the restaurant or at the cash register to promote gift card sales. You can include attractive packaging for the card that makes it a suitable gift for putting under the tree. Another alternative is to include a greeting card.
- Provide Giveaway Gift Cards** - Give small denomination gift cards as marketing incentives during the holidays. Customers will get the idea that gift cards hold value and make good gifts for casual or restaurant acquaintances and fellow diners. You should also promote the gift cards through your website, social pages, in-house marketing and traditional advertising.
- Promotional Video** - Filming a promotional video is a clever way to market your holiday events, seasonal menu and gift card sales. Film your chef preparing traditional holiday foods or special menu items that you're going to serve. Post the video online at YouTube, on your website and on other social platforms to encourage holiday bookings and direct gift card sales. Include a link to the video in any emails and customer correspondence.
- Gift-Giver Incentives** - Provide your gift card buyers with incentives for purchasing higher denominations. For example, you might offer a free \$20 gift card for the buyer for each boxed or mailed gift card or gift cards totaling \$100 or more. (Using this language will prevent customers from stocking up on gift cards to save money on their regular meals at the restaurant.)

5. Five Golden Events

December is an ideal month to promote special events at your restaurant and attract new customers. Try to come up with at least five special holiday events in December. These gold-generating events might include:

- Hosting a party at the restaurant for your customers
- Holding a contest for the best holiday or winter photo, original work of art, festive recipe or children's essay competition
- Providing special meals, treats, boxed dinners, children's favors, holiday merchandise and other incentives
- Extending business hours for holiday shoppers or providing special holiday services, such as children's story times or holiday cooking classes for adults or children or cake-decorating tips
- Organizing entertainment, live music, dances or a singles or couples event

Contest prizes might be catered holiday meals with all the trimmings, gift certificates or holiday platters of hors d'oeuvres or tempting desserts. If your city sponsors a holiday parade or Dickens-type Christmas festival, you can provide special dining incentives, decorations or other in-house dining incentives for family shoppers, such as warming soups, signature coffee and tea beverages and hot chocolate for kids.

6. Six Holiday Meals Earn a Bonus

You can easily get regular customers to increase their patronage during the busy holiday season when people eat out often. Offer a loyalty incentive exclusively for the month of December, such as getting a free meal with each half-dozen paid meals. These incentives can accrue consecutively or apply immediately for large groups.

7. Lucky-Seven Charity Event

Holidays get people thinking about charities and the less fortunate, so you can get big promotional benefits by hosting a fundraiser, providing food for needy families, giving a percentage of sales to charity or encouraging customers to donate to worthy causes. You could host a gambling event to raise money for charity, auction off goods or dates with local eligible celebrities or just donate a specified percentage of gross sales or for certain menu items or holiday specials.

8. Provide Meals to 8 Percent of America's Diners on Christmas Day

According to the National Restaurant Association, 8 percent of people are willing to eat at restaurants on Christmas Day. Your restaurant could easily earn record-breaking profits by offering a traditional or elegant holiday menu, Christmas brunch, dinner buffet or full-service dining from the regular menu. The 8 percent of people looking for dining venues include your competitors' customers and people who have never tried your restaurant, and serving Christmas meals is an excellent strategy for attracting new diners. By the way, don't forget Christmas Eve, when one in 10 people go out to dinner.

9. Nine Decorating Ideas

Holiday decorating ideas include everything from winter landscapes to religious symbols, but most restaurants prefer to use décor that's not religious to avoid offending people of other faiths than Christianity. Nine holiday decorating ideas for the Christmas season include:

- Dressing the staff in red and white colors
- Trimming a live or artificial tree with lights, presents and decorative accents
- Adding silver, gold, green, red or white accents to tables
- Transforming the dining room into a winter wonderland or Santa's Workshop at the North Pole
- Hanging holly, mistletoe and decorative wreaths
- Printing special holiday scenes, promotional-event notices or seasonal messages on carryout containers
- Painting your windows with holiday scenes
- Dressing the restaurant's team leaders or shift managers in Santa costumes or Santa hats
- Hanging Christmas cards from customers, well-wishers and vendors where people can view them

10. Book 10 Meals, and the 11th Diner Eats Free

December affords tremendous opportunities to book Christmas parties, large family gatherings, office parties and group events. You can target business groups, local factories, office buildings and medical offices with holiday incentives, such as providing a free meal for every 10 paid bookings. For larger groups and holiday parties, it's effective to set time limits for receiving these booking incentives, and asking for a nonrefundable deposit is acceptable for holiday bookings (which helps to prevent no-shows and cancellations)

11. Begin Multichannel Promotions by the 11th Day of the 11th Month

Regardless of which marketing ideas you choose, it's best to start promoting early. You should begin actively promoting your holiday initiatives by Veterans Day at the latest. The Armistice and Armed Services holiday allows you to attract a patriotic audience to kick-off your holiday marketing ideas. People begin planning holidays early, so it's important to remind them when they first begin thinking about their holiday plans. Promote your ideas through in-house signage, website copy, content on your social media pages, press releases, traditional advertising and even guerrilla marketing, such as decorating a local eyesore with festive holiday decorations or putting reindeer-hoofprint graffiti in unusual places.

12. Selling Pastries by the Dozen

The holidays are great times to gear up for bakery sales of pies, cookies, candies, pralines, chocolate éclairs, brownies, blondies, cupcakes, muffins, cheese straws and pastries. You can sell these products by the dozen in attractive gift baskets and boxes to ignite holiday sales. You can even offer mailing service for out-of-town customers or charge for deliveries of holiday food gifts within certain mileage limits.

Using any opportunity to promote the holiday season, engage customers and generate loyalty is important in today's competitive mobile and digital marketing landscape. During this time of year, people willingly spend more money to celebrate with families, friends and business associates. You can provide a memorable experience for each guest by embracing the holiday spirit and season, encouraging your customers to entertain, offering high-profile holiday events and giving diners a wide selection of traditional and special holiday fare.

Source: Gourmet Marketing





How Restaurant Gift Cards Can Bring You Profit

11/01/2018

Without a doubt, product expansion has the potential to bring big profits to small businesses. Restaurants should always be brainstorming what other products they can effectively sell besides — or separate from — regular items on their menus. Such expansions could include a packaged version of an original ingredient, like jam or barbecue sauce, or even branded merchandise like t-shirts, shot glasses, or mugs. But what many operators don't realize is how well restaurant gift cards can work for their business.

What are the perks to investing in restaurant gift cards? And what things should you keep in mind as you start selling them?

Bigger Checks

When you're training your servers or cashiers on how to best upsell, you should be including your restaurant gift cards in that process. For cashiers, it can be seamlessly done at point of sale as everything else a customer has ordered gets rung up. For table servers, the best opportunity would be before presenting the check to the table (that way, your server has a chance to add it to the check before printing it out).

Non-perishable Product

Unlike most retail products sold in your establishment, restaurant gift cards won't ever go bad. They don't spoil. If your early batch of restaurant gift cards don't sell out immediately, there's no worry of having to throw out the product in a few weeks.

With that in mind, consider choosing a non-seasonal card design that can appeal to customers no matter what time a year it is. Speaking of...

A Year-round Purchase

Restaurant gift cards are not necessarily a seasonal item, so make good use of various gift giving opportunities throughout the whole year. Yes, most people think of Christmas when it comes to restaurant gift cards, but don't discount birthdays, graduations, Father's and Mother's Day, and any other gift-giving occasion! Restaurant gift cards allow for the giftee to make their own choices, but it still feels more personal than their friends or family simply giving them cash.

Definitely mention on your restaurant's website that you offer gift cards, but consider mentioning it on your menus or at your cash register as well. Mind you, the type of restaurant you are and the atmosphere you project should influence where you post about your restaurant gift cards. If your establishment is fine dining, you are not going to have your customers come up to a cash register to pay, but you can still (tastefully) include a call to action at the bottom of your menu to suggest diners purchase restaurant gift cards for their friends.

Immediate Revenue

One of the biggest advantages of selling restaurant gift cards is that you generate revenue immediately. The gift card purchaser buys the card upfront, so if the gift card gets lost somewhere (or the giftee just decides never to redeem it), your restaurant still got paid upfront. The flipside to this, of course, is that if or when the gift card is used, the revenue has already been accounted for.

Securing Future Dining Experiences

When a guest purchases a gift card, it sets up a few opportunities beyond just extra revenue. For one, they trust your restaurant's food and service enough to gift that experience to a loved one. That fact should be a boon to your whole staff! For another, the guest is setting up a future diner's experience, which means another customer you get to impress. This could very well be someone who has never tried your food before. And implicit in the act of the gift is that your restaurant is a place they thoroughly recommend. That's great word-of-mouth marketing in action!

Branding

There's brand awareness that comes with restaurant gift cards. Include your name and logo on the card — as well as your phone number and address(es) — so that even if the giftee takes months and months to actually use it, they'll be reminded of your business every time they open their wallet. This can be very useful, especially if you're a small, locally owned restaurant.

Restaurant Gift Cards > Coupons

Some restaurant owners feel hesitation to incorporate gift cards because they worry it will be like offering discounts. But think of it like this: there's the perception of more value and more legitimacy in a restaurant gift card compared to a coupon or other discount initiative. Selling gift cards for your restaurant won't dilute your brand like pumping coupons into the market would. There is nearly zero loss on a redeemed gift card (as it's already been paid for in full) and it doesn't change the price of anything on your menu.

What else should I know?

There are some other things to keep in mind as you get started with restaurant gift cards:

Don't include an expiration date. Unlike coupons, gift cards are treated like cash. Someone essentially paid you in advance, and if the giftee comes in with the card, even if it's several years after the gift card was purchased, you should still honor the card. Beyond ethics, there are various escheat state laws that include unredeemed gift card value. To be safe, work with a vendor that won't include penalties for inactivity and won't place an expiration on your cards.

Consider offering different dollar levels, including amounts above your check total. If your average check is \$25, consider also including \$50 and \$100 increments. Not only does this mean more upfront revenue for your business, but the more expensive gift cards come with a greater chance that the giftee will have leftover cash on the card, leading to a second visit. That means a second opportunity to win them over with your food and service.

And if the amount they have left over isn't enough for a full meal, you'll have some new revenue coming into your restaurant. If you're using a gift card system where any amount can be put in at the gifter's discretion, train your point of sales person (whether a cashier or a server) to look for opportunities to upsell to a higher increment.

Don't forget about the potential for upselling the giftee when they come when they come in to use their card, not just upselling customers on buying a gift card along with their meal.

After-all, if their check is smaller thanks to the gift from their friends or family, the giftee might not be as worried about ordering a little more, whether that's choosing an appetizer or ordering a bottle of wine.

Source: Katie Schenkel for Rewards Network





Restaurant Guide to Holiday Promotions

11/01/2018

One of the busiest times of the year (if not the busiest) for any restaurant are holidays. Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Eve have the potential to greatly increase sales for the average restaurant. Holiday parties, catering and gift cards are all ways to increase sales during the months of November and December. By starting your advertising campaign early, being proactive with booking dates, and making sure you are prepared for the busy holiday rush, you can make the most out of the holidays at your restaurant.

Start Advertising Early

No matter what services your restaurant offers during the holiday season, whether it is off-site catering or packaged turkey dinners, you need to get the word out early –like 6-8 weeks before each holiday. You should start reminding customers that you are open for Thanksgiving, in September, and continue to remind them periodically over the next 6-8 weeks. The same is true if you are hosting a New Year's Eve bash – start promoting it in November. If you do on-site catering, for office Christmas parties, contact last year's list in early October and offer to book their event now, because space is limited.

I was able to fill my function room every weekend though November and December with repeat customers, simply by calling and offering to book the date for them. Posting reminders on your social media pages is another way to build word-of-mouth advertising for your holiday promotions as well.

Offer Catering Services

If you don't offer catering services, the holidays are a good time to start. There are all sorts of celebrations taking place from Mid-November to January 1st. Office parties, family parties, weddings – people love to celebrate during the holiday season! If you can't accommodate extra parties at your restaurant, why not bring the food to the party? Offsite catering is a great way to boost sales and get the word out about your restaurant, at the same time. Check out my Guide to Holiday Catering, for more ideas and tips.

Gift Cards

Make sure you have plenty of gift cards on hand for the holiday season. Since a large number of cards are bought on Christmas Eve, so it may be worth paying a staff person to be at the restaurant, just to sell gift cards. We did this at our restaurant (giving the staff person who volunteered a bonus for working Christmas Eve) and always make several hundred dollars, without serving any food or drink.

Staffing for the Holidays

Extra business means you will need extra staff. Rather than trying to run a skeleton crew in your restaurant kitchen and dining room, hire extra staff just for the holidays. Lots of people are looking to make some extra money for Christmas. If you hire just for catered events, training is pretty simple and strait forward. You don't have to worry about training them on your menu or a lot of the other regular training that your dining room staff go through.

Restaurant Tips for Thanksgiving

Many people are opting out of cooking a big Thanksgiving meal, choosing to dine out instead. If you opt to keep your restaurant open on Thanksgiving, it could prove to be a big business day, rivaling Valentines, Easter or Mother's Day. Another option for restaurants is to offer pre-cooked thanksgiving meals. Supermarkets do this every holiday season, so why not utilize your catering skills and do the same?

The turnaround between Thanksgiving and Christmas is quick – overnight in many cases. Be ready to transform your restaurant from a harvest theme to a holiday theme quickly. Set aside a slow period of the week to decorate your restaurant dining room, hang lights inside and outside and put up a tree or two.

Source: Lorri Mealey for The Balance Small Business



Drive Incremental Sales with Happy Hour Menus

11/01/2018

Today, there's more to a menu than breakfast, lunch and dinner. Food and beverage specials served between 5 p.m. and 7 p.m. on weekdays help attract the after-work crowd, but it doesn't end there. Happy hour is becoming more and more of an opportunity for diners to relax while operators increase incremental sales and traffic.

Adult beverages are an important part of happy hour menus. Though it's important to offer specials on drinks that patrons are already familiar with, happy hour can also be a great time to try new beverage offerings that differentiate your operation. Technomic research shows that beer and wine cocktails, slushies, and drinks made with fresh herbs and fruits are trending in 2018.

A well-rounded happy hour menu also includes food specials. Must-haves include sliders—nearly 40% of diners would order them if offered—and pretzels—the number-one snack item. Sharable appetizers and small plates are also extremely popular. They allow diners to try a variety of dishes, as well as socialize and connect with friends and coworkers.

Try these tips to build loyalty and drive traffic during happy hour:

- Millennials in particular rely on foodservice operations to create moments and special experiences with their peers. Appeal to these diners by promoting delicious protein-packed appetizers, such as Brooklyn-Style Turkey Meatballs and Turkey Pick-Up Sticks—both easy to share and even easier to love.
- Generation X is also an important demographic to target during happy hour. They're extremely interested in deals, so entice these guests with discounted or buy-one-get-one appetizer specials.
- Diners are also craving spicy appetizers, as 33% want restaurants to offer more of them. Heat things up with Turkey Taco Tostones, featuring turkey carnitas and a delicious harmony of spicy, sweet and zesty flavors.

Find more great-tasting happy hour menu inspiration in the Culinary Center, and explore more foodservice insights in the Resource Center.



Spread Some Holiday "Cheers" with Special Food and Beer Pairings

11/01/2018

The craft beer selection can be a major draw for customers at casual dining operations. In fact, in just 4 years craft beer has grown 16% on menus compared to domestic and imported beers that are declining. **1.** But beer isn't all guests are looking for. Seventy-one percent want complementary foods that go with those beers. **2.** To offer the right food pairings, it's important to understand the characteristics of your major beer varieties. Here are some of the most popular craft beers and food ideas for complementing them.

Stouts

These beers have prevalent chocolate, coffee and roasted flavors. Savory, salty foods like an indulgent poutine topped with cheese curds and onion rings make an excellent pairing to contrast the flavors.

American Brown

Browns have a toasty rich malt flavor with notes of caramel and chocolate and a moderate hop presence. Pair with spice flavors, slow-roasted foods and savory dishes like American cheese burgers or this skillet ranch poutine.

Amber Ale

The caramel notes and toasty malt make this one of the most versatile beers to pair. Try with rich, aromatic, smoked or spicy foods such as spicy pickle fries.

IPA

The bitter, bready, grainy malt and hoppy aroma of IPAs is very popular right now. Complement it with intense flavors like blue cheeses, game and dishes with aromatic spices. The real IPA flavor in the breading of an IPA Ring Toss is also a great pairing.

American Wheat

Bready, doughy and grainy, American wheat beers shine with classic brunch items like omelets and hash browns as well as Asian flavors. Try hash brown quiche sliders.

Pale Ale

The balance of malty sweetness and hoppy bitterness pairs well with dishes that contain lemongrass, garlic, cilantro and similar flavors. Think flavor-packed nachos.

Lager

This popular, palate-cleansing beer pairs well with almost any bar food from seasoned tots to Jalapeño Poppers and cuts through heat with its cooling malt properties.

For more food ideas perfectly designed to stand up to your craft beer selection this holiday season, visit www.McCainUSAFoodservice.com/TrueBeerFood.

