



Where the Money Is


When we think marketing, we think getting people in the door... and those people we're targeting are often customers who are visiting for the first time. The theory is "if they try us, they'll like us," but the truth is getting new customers is almost *10 times* more expensive than building sales through repeat visits, check averages and party size. Instead, make sales count by maximizing the customers you do have while reaching those who haven't yet discovered your operation:

- **"Check" in with service.** These "capitive" customers are the best way to increase your profits, so why do we save all the discounts for those who've never made it to the door? When suggestive selling, empower servers to deliver their own on-the-spot "mystery" discounts for those add-on sales, such as premium drinks, appetizers, desserts, etc. When servers can reward guests with half-price specials or a free dessert just because "we're glad you came in," you'll build customer loyalty and encourage additional sales ("Sure, I'll have an Irish Coffee with that free dessert").

- **Blog, baby.** Yes, mass media works if you have the budget to compete with the big guys... a few hundred million dol-

lars should do it. If not, try a more accessible form of technology. E-mail, blogging, podcasts, MySpace and YouTube video posts are all inexpensive, effective ways to reach new and existing customers. No clue how to start? You can bet someone on your team does. Brainstorm contests, menu voting, wine reviews and other ideas that get customers excited and assign someone on your team to start the process. Check out http://www.allfoodbusiness.com/restaurant_blogs.html for tips on how to start a restaurant blog.

- **Stretch yourself thick.** If existing customers are so valuable, why are they so ignored? Use signage, coupons and discounts to keep customers coming back and trying new things. Highlight curbside pickup, catering, delivery and your future events throughout the operation, including on your menu and guest ticket.

- **Party hard.** Too often hosts make customers feel as if they're inconveniencing restaurant staff with requests for large tables. Instead, offer incentives for team members to "book" large groups (party of 6 or more) and provide programs like birthday clubs and refer-a-friend campaigns to turn customers into recruiters. 

Tips for Effective Table Tents

Table tents are relatively cheap and often extremely effective marketing tools, but they're typically ignored, abused and outdated. Make the most of them with these tips:


- **Keep them clean.** It sounds like a no-brainer, but many are stained and sticky creating the exact opposite result you're intending.

- **Be creative.** If you're creating your own table tents, be sure to position the item you most want to promote in the center of the table tent. Use bold headlines and limit descriptions to 10 words.

- **Perfect photos.** Ask anyone who's tried it: photographing food so that it looks appetizing is extremely difficult. If you're including photos—and you should—make sure you're using a professional photographer and food stylist. Without that combination, you'll make even your


best items appear unappetizing.

- **Track results.** Table tents tend to include appetizers, specialty drinks and entrées, but some of the most effective items are those that guests aren't looking for. Table tents with desserts, for example, tend to create interest and remind guests to "save room." Do your own in-house experiment and track sales results of items on table tents and rotate these marketing devices periodically to determine what's most successful.

- **Switch out.** Hosts could deliver table tents of specialty drinks and appetizers when they seat customers and servers could pick them up and replace them with table tents that promote entrées, desserts or coffee drinks. It's a natural way to remind servers to suggestively sell these items and use the table tents as selling tools. 

Put It To Work

To deliver *Service That Sells!*, it's important to discover what guests need and want. Asking questions provides this information. Think about salespeople. They ask questions to find out what clients are looking for; then make suggestions to enhance the purchase. A good salesperson would never call on a client without doing research first. It's a little more difficult in restaurants. In most cases, you don't know who or how many are coming, or what the specific needs are. The staff must be able to determine those needs on the spot to provide the best experience possible.

Don't get caught up in making generalizations about guests. If someone has dined with you before, there's no need to give him or her the full tour and history of the restaurant just because it's a "step." If you get counted off for not providing drink refills quickly enough during a mystery shop, don't automatically bring refills to everyone. Not only will it cost you money, guests may not want them. 

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