



THE RESTAURANT'S GUIDE TO DIGITAL MARKETING

BY RESTAURANT.COM



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IMAGINE ADDING A TABLE OF CUSTOMERS FOR EVERY FIVE YOU ALREADY FILL

RESTAURANT.COM HELPS INDEPENDENT RESTAURANTS SUCCEED IN THE EVER-EVOLVING WORLD OF DIGITAL MARKETING

We see them walking down the street, on trains, in coffee houses and even in our homes. Some call them Generation Screens: The young people who are deeply entranced by their smartphones, tablets and laptops.

Except, these days, that screen-driven group is no longer limited to people under 30. Computer and smartphone use has become a daily, even an hourly, habit across all age groups. Nearly everyone today has an email address, a smartphone, a Facebook page, a Twitter handle, and maybe even an Instagram account. The world has gone resolutely, incontrovertibly digital – and it is significantly affecting the restaurant business. According to research, the digital age influences one in six restaurant visits through some form of online marketing.

It's almost impossible not to jump on the digital marketing bandwagon and it can mean significant growth for your business if you embrace it – and a potential loss if you do not. Why miss out on new and returning customers? Think about that statistic again: one in six.

What's remarkable is how little many online marketing tools and tactics actually cost to implement. You just have to know what you're doing. This e-book provides you with an overview of the top strategies and first steps to succeed in digital marketing.

Restaurant.com, a premier digital marketing site for restaurants, supports independent restaurant owners in their quest to make use of the best and most cost-efficient marketing tools available – which is why we collected knowledge and ideas from our own in-house experts to assemble this e-book.

Generation Screens now includes people ages 18 to 80. With a digital marketing program, your restaurant will appear on their screens and stay top of mind with your customers as they decide where to dine. Let us show you how!



FIVE DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGIES FOR RESTAURANTS

RESTAURANT.COM LOOKS AT WAYS RESTAURANTS CAN THRIVE IN THE DIGITAL SPACE

Is your restaurant plugged in?

Today, an online presence is an absolute must-have for restaurant owners, no matter what size their establishment is. Diners are living digital lives when they're not filling your seats. If you aren't engaging them online, you're missing a golden opportunity to get their business more often.

You don't have to be a marketer by trade to promote your restaurant—but a website only gets you so far. Don't fret: here at Restaurant.com, we're focused on staying ahead of the curve when it comes to restaurant marketing.

To help your restaurant get a slice of the pie, we put together the top five emerging digital marketing trends for restaurants. Based on insights from Restaurant.com President and Chief Marketing Officer Christopher Krohn, this article covers five areas of online marketing where your restaurant can find its flavor, including:

- Online deals
- Search, display & directory marketing
- Mobile marketing
- Social media
- Email marketing



WHERE'S THE BEST PLACE TO START ESTABLISHING YOUR DIGITAL PRESENCE?

1. Online Deals Are the Main Course

Still unsure about the impact online deals could have on your restaurant? Maybe this will change your mind: by 2016, consumers are expected to spend \$5.5 billion annually on online deals, flash sales and other online discounts. That's double what they spend now!

Online deals are more than just a side dish—now, they're the main marketing course for many restaurants. They're relevant for restaurants of all shapes and sizes, driving new diners through your doors and giving you the opportunity to create an army of loyal customers. And these days, there are many different kinds of online deals, so you can pick the right kind of promotion to suit your restaurant's image and clientele.

A recent NPD study revealed that deals and special offers represent 37 percent of restaurant visits influenced by online marketing activities. Promotions like these won the biggest piece of the digital marketing pie.

Without an online deal strategy, your restaurant stands to lose diners. Luckily, it's simple for any restaurant owner to get started in this space. All you need is the right partner with the right reach.

Once you start dishing out deals, you can turn your focus to drawing in more diners through search engines.

2. Whet Appetites with Search, Display & Directory Marketing

Optimizing your restaurant to be found through Google and other search engines can help send new diners to your site to learn more about you. Here, you have three options:

- **Display advertising:** Ads that run on other websites.
- **Directory optimization:** Restaurant listings in a slew of online directories to return more location-based visits to your website.
- **Search engine optimization (SEO):** High-quality content with keywords that help your restaurant rank higher on search engines.

Between display advertising and directory optimization, restaurants have to spend quite a bit of money before they begin to see a return on investment. There are no roadblocks here for marketers at large chains. For smaller restaurants with tight budgets, this can present a problem without a marketing partner to help.



Search engine optimization (SEO) doesn't always require paid search. But it will require you to create a continuous stream of content like blog posts, articles, recipes, specials and more. You may not have the time to create content yourself, and the cost to have someone else do it for you can be a burden.

A visible search presence is an absolute must-have to attract diners online. How do small restaurants like yours fight back against aggressive, heavily funded search campaigns?

The Solution: Affiliate your restaurant with a larger marketing program. Partnering with a large brand can help get your message out to your diners.

Diners come to websites like Restaurant.com specifically to find restaurants, and Restaurant.com spends millions annually optimizing our search and display programs to maximize exposure for your restaurant. Partnering with us gives you the opportunity to optimize your restaurant's page for targeted traffic. It also adds extra link juice on search engines.

A strong search presence is one part of the equation. Now, let's turn our attention to one of the largest emerging markets available to restaurant owners.

3. Mobile Marketing Is Your Future Bread and Butter

Today, 53 percent of your customers and potential customers have smartphones in their pockets, purses and hands. What are you doing to reach them?

Developing a separate mobile optimized website can be tricky and costly. Creating a mobile app is even more out of reach for many restaurant owners. Even if you do decide on a custom app, will you develop for iPhones, Android devices or both?

When you know you have to optimize for mobile customers, where can you turn to do it inexpensively?

Partner with Established Marketing Brands

For many restaurants, custom mobile web development is outside of budget restrictions. The alternative is finding a partner that is well versed in restaurant marketing—with specific proficiency in the mobile space.

The simple way to secure a strong mobile presence is to list your business in different online directories. Online directories offer viable mobile-optimized shortcuts, including popular mobile apps that showcase your restaurant.



These include:

- **Deal sites and restaurant directories (like Restaurant.com):** Diners may visit deal sites to seek out specific restaurants. As a result, websites like Restaurant.com offer you a place to create your own controlled restaurant page.
- **Facebook:** Getting your site listed on Facebook is as simple as creating your own brand page.
- **Google:** Claim your restaurant through Google Places so you can control and optimize your page content. That way, mobile browsers can find the information they need to make a dining decision on the fly.

Mobile is one of a few crucial restaurant marketing channels that have emerged over the past few years. You may already have a foothold in the next area of focus.

4. Diners Snack on Social Media

Wonder where people get the time to manage their social media channels? Monitoring your page, responding to customers and publishing fresh content—all with a smile on your face—takes a special touch and a lot of time.

It may seem like a handful, but maintaining a strong social media presence is absolutely essential to business today. Restaurants have a great opportunity, whether they plan social around location-based services like Foursquare or take more established routes like Facebook.

Your customers are already using social media to have a dialogue—and it may focus around your restaurant. Don't ignore these conversations. They're an important way to create great customer service experiences!

Possible social media channels to investigate include:

- **Facebook:** You've probably heard of this one. Facebook now caters to a whopping 1 billion users and it's a great network for sharing promos, pictures, and other high-quality content.
- **Twitter:** A real-time network for sharing short-form content, marketers have found fascinating ways to put Twitter to use. Many companies, large and small can make a resounding impact within this network of potential customers.



- **Pinterest:** Targeting predominantly 25-44 year old women, Pinterest is a very focused network. Make sure to spend time on Pinterest if it matches the type of diners you regularly receive. An added bonus? It boosts your SEO ranking.
- **Instagram:** Pictures can be a strong emotional trigger, especially when it comes to your food. Instagram is one of the most popular picture-sharing networks on the web. Like Facebook, this community is great for sharing your food and décor.
- **Foursquare:** Location-based networks like Foursquare give you the ability to incentivize visits and check-ins for your customers.

Before you choose which social media channels to pursue, carefully research your audience and decide which sites targets them the best.

Social media is a very public marketing channel. What about more private marketing channels, like email?

5. Email Marketing Encourages Diners to Return for Seconds

We've all opened our inboxes to find a mountain of promotional emails. It's true: this kind of marketing has contributed to consumer email fatigue. But that doesn't mean email marketing isn't worth doing. It just requires a personalized touch to maneuver your emails through the clutter and in front of the diner.

Personalized emails present relevant, targeted content to each individual diner. That way, you can cut through the dozens of irrelevant emails consumers get on a daily basis and offer them something valuable—something desired.

A young mom with kids, for instance, wants a much different dining experience than an empty nester. How might a profile of each customer look?

- **The Young Mom:** A young mom looks for kid-friendly dining options, so she may appreciate a reminder that "kids eat free." When date night rolls around, she may want a special offer for "dinner for two."
- **The Empty Nester:** On the flip side, an empty nester doesn't have to worry about feeding the kids. She might enjoy an email with the "evening specials," for example.



Delivering personalized email content is tough to do without expensive software platforms. You'll need to partner up. (Here at Restaurant.com, we provide email addresses, comments and other customer information to Partner Restaurants so they can create targeted email campaigns.)

LET US DO THE HEAVY LIFTING

Drawing in diners is more than just having the hottest menu on the block. It's about staying plugged into digital marketing channels that can help you expose your restaurant to an even larger audience.

As a restaurant owner, you may not have the time to manage digital marketing in addition to the day-to-day operations of your establishment. Working with an affordable partner like Restaurant.com can be the best way to beef up business and establish your brand as a mainstay in the neighborhood.



SIX WAYS RESTAURANTS CAN USE FACEBOOK TO ATTRACT MORE CUSTOMERS

RESTAURANT.COM DIVULGES THE RECIPE FOR SOCIAL MEDIA SUCCESS USING THE WORLD'S LARGEST SOCIAL NETWORK

One billion people—about one-seventh of the world's population—are on Facebook. Are you?

Let's get more specific. Does your restaurant use social media or have a social media plan? Social media websites like Facebook offer your restaurant a golden opportunity to attract more customers and encourage them to return to your establishment. All you need is a plan and a basic understanding of Facebook's best practices.

Featuring insights from Jen Shatswell, who manages social media for Restaurant.com, this article will walk you through the basics (as well as a few advanced strategies) on how your restaurant can establish a strong Facebook presence.

Throughout the course of this article, you'll learn about:

- How to design your page
- How to generate a following
- Sharing content
- Dealing with customers
- Using Facebook ads and offers
- Budgeting money and time



**BEFORE YOU'RE READY TO USE YOUR PAGE, FIRST STEPS
ARE TO MAKE THE NECESSARY PREPARATIONS FOR SUCCESS.****1. Add Flair to Your Page**

Establishing your restaurant's Facebook presence begins with creating your brand page. This page will represent your restaurant on the popular social network, becoming the hub for your followers, the content you share and the interactions you have with customers.

Designing your Facebook brand page shouldn't be taken lightly. You may be tempted to follow the footsteps of other restaurant pages—but make sure you take into account certain best practices first. For example, there are right and wrong ways to create a lot of page elements, including your:

- **Cover photo:** Ignore the temptation to make your cover photo a parking lot shot of your restaurant. Instead, choose a cover photo that's warm and inviting—a professional picture of a delicious meal or people having a great time. Remember, your cover photo is the first impression your Facebook page makes.
- **Profile photo:** Another popular go-to for a business profile photo is the company logo. Again, ignore that impulse. Find something simplistic like an action shot that doesn't repeat the concept in your cover photo. Visitors tend to see a thumbnail of your profile picture, so it's important to avoid images with a lot of text or details.

***Tip:** To save time and make sure you design your page professionally, check out North Social, an easy-to-use application that helps simplify certain elements of your Facebook page design.*



YOUR PAGE NEEDS ONGOING MAINTENANCE

Designing the basic elements of your page is just the beginning. It's important to understand how page design works when you start sharing content.

As your page adds fans, some of the content you share will be more important than the rest. Good news: you have the ability to feature that content using two different features built into the top right corner of each post.

- **Highlight:** The star-shaped option on the post gives you the ability to expand the piece of content to fill the entire width of your page, creating a larger presence on the page.
- **Pin:** Click on the pencil to find the option that allows you to pin a certain piece of content to the top of the page. This is great if you have a special promotion running throughout the month, for instance, and you don't want new pieces of shared content to replace it on the page.

You now have a place for customers to visit you online. Now, how do you get them to stop by?

2. Attract Followers

Seeing that empty page will seem intimidating at first. It's your job to find people who will see and interact with the content you eventually share.

Keep in mind that you already have followers in real life. You have customers who know your restaurant. People in the neighborhood pass by your front door every day. Start to build a following by transitioning those people into Facebook fans. To accomplish this, you must combine your online and offline strategies.

How exactly do you do that? Here are a few ideas.

- Add the message "Have you liked us on Facebook?" to every bill.
- Create a custom window cling highlighting your Facebook page.
- Inform customers that they can get a coupon if they like you on Facebook.
- Feature the link to your Facebook page on the menu cover.

These are great ways to start gaining a following if you don't already have much of a digital presence. If you collect customer emails or receive them from Restaurant.com, you already have an open digital channel. Use email, coupled with a Facebook-specific promotion, to get your page started on the right foot.

Most of these tactics involve minimal cost and effort. Now comes the hard part. Create the content you'll share with your new fans.



3. Share Tasty Content

Getting followers is one part of the process. But what about keeping them engaged with what's happening at your restaurant?

Sharing on Facebook is an art that only a handful of companies have done successfully. But corporate pages have been around long enough now that we've found some pretty universal tips for keeping the interest of your customers. Here are three tips to help guide the content you share on Facebook.

Take a visual approach. If there's one thing Facebook users love, it's images.

Pictures, paired with relevant text that represents a call to action for your customers, are the simplest ways to get people talking about your Facebook content. For restaurants, sharing pictures may range from a high-quality plate of food to people enjoying themselves at your establishment to behind-the-scenes photos of your staff.

Whichever approach you take, make sure you couple your pictures with relevant text. You want to get your customers talking—but more importantly, you want to get them to dine with you more often.

Promotions, recommendations and tips make for good sharing:

Finding text to pair with visual content can be difficult. As a rule of thumb, limit yourself as much as possible to sharing promotions, recommendations and tips.

Each of these is a powerful engagement generator. A promotion, for instance, could be your food and drink specials for the night, a reminder about a chili cook-off or a 'kids eat free' reminder.

Recommendations and tips could range from food and drink pairings (for items available at your restaurant, of course) to the recipe of a diner-favorite dish. Make sure content provides some form of value to your fans and you can't go wrong.

Frequency is key: You're busy. How often do you have to share pieces of content?

Start by sharing 2-3 times a week. Stick with simple posts, like a notice about a special menu item you're featuring for the week or the happy hour deal you want customers to take advantage of. Once you get the hang of it (and start getting followers involved in the discussion), you can ramp up your sharing to 5-7 posts per week. You could share more than once a day if you have the time, but be careful of taxing your followers by oversharing.

Your best (and least expensive) bet is sharing content to get the attention of your fans. What else can you do to put your restaurant in front of potential diners on Facebook?



4. Reach More People with Ads & Offers

Facebook's business landscape is a continually evolving animal, which is why Facebook Ads and Facebook Offers have become more popular options for restaurants.

These routes can be extremely effective—but they shouldn't be taken lightly. If you don't understand how these services work, you could end up throwing away money on the wrong audience. Education is key.

Sidebar "like" advertisements don't have much impact for restaurant owners. Instead, you should focus your resources on two different ad types.

- **Page Post Ads:** These are really simple to run. Promote a happy hour or another event to existing fans of your page and friends of your fans.
- **Offers:** These are a little more complicated but can return great results. Offers are promotions and discounts that reach your audience on Facebook. Coupled with a strong deal website (like Restaurant.com), this strategy will drive traffic through your door.

Neither tactic requires a large budget to get up and running. Advertising doesn't replace a strong Facebook page with engaging content—but it does act as a great complement.

We've spent a lot of time covering ways you can start the conversation. Customers may decide to take their own conversations to your page as well. This is where things can get tricky.

5. Care for Customers

Many restaurant owners shun Facebook because they've heard horror stories of customers sharing bad experiences. They don't want bad press living in such a public space—and understandably so.

If you find yourself in this camp, consider a different perspective. Why can't you use negative feedback to your advantage?

In real life, how often will a customer tell you about a bad experience? Sure, when the experience is really bad, they may make a point of it. Otherwise, you may lose a customer for life without even knowing it.

The fact is that complaining customers give you a prime opportunity to show how much you care for your customers. Plenty of businesses across the spectrum of social media have proven this perspective time and time again.



Instead, consider dealing with a complaining customer differently.

First, don't hide the post. The worst thing you can do in a situation like this is to delete the post. The web is a vast place; if the customer isn't complaining on your page, they'll find somewhere else to do it. When it's on your turf, at least you have an element of control.

Then, make things right. Regain your customer's trust by apologizing, reaffirming your commitment to high quality dining and offering your customer a discount or free meal to make up for the mistake.

All right, so let's get to the bottom line. How much is a Facebook presence going to cost you, anyway?

6. Plan Your Budget

It's natural that the idea of maintaining your restaurant's Facebook page will be overwhelming. But don't fret. Once you get things started down the right path, you can get creative about how you split up responsibilities.

Not every restaurant's Facebook page is the same. Budgetary ranges differ depending on the reach of your restaurant and the scope of your strategy. Some general expectations include:

- Budgeting \$1,500/year for social media should be plenty. You can budget more or less depending on your restaurant's needs.
- Depending on the amount of content you plan to create, expect at least a 3-5 hour per week time investment. Keep in mind that generating more content or engaging with your fans will increase this number.

A responsible person with full vision of your restaurant's brand (like yourself or a marketing person) should kick things off on the right foot. Then, you can involve a social media-savvy staffer—or even a marketing student at a local community college looking to intern.

You don't have to run your page. But, you should stay plugged in and monitoring its pulse to make sure it reflects the image you want your restaurant to have.

WE'RE HERE TO HELP

Facebook is a great start for building your restaurant's presence online, but there's much more you can do to guarantee your seats are filled. Follow our six areas of focus for creating your restaurant's Facebook page and you can't go wrong. It'll take a bit of work to get up and running, but it's absolutely essential for keeping your restaurant relevant in an increasingly digital age.



A RESTAURANT'S GUIDE TO GROWING A LARGE CUSTOMER BASE THROUGH EMAIL MARKETING

ENTICE DINERS TO VISIT MORE OFTEN BY DELIVERING DEALS TO THEIR INBOXES

Around 247 billion emails are sent daily—approximately 2.8 million per second.

Your customers constantly check their email. Some do it obsessively. Others check once every couple of days. Next time they look, will they have a message from your restaurant?

Email is the workhorse of digital marketing because of its low cost and high level of effectiveness when executed correctly. Thousands of restaurants generate results through email marketing. Even if you're already among them, it's never too late to learn how to improve email marketing tactics to generate more business.

Here at Restaurant.com, we're well versed in email marketing best practices for establishments just like yours. We asked Director of Email Marketing Louie Bryja and Vice President of Customer Retention Brent Carter to weigh in on how restaurants can set up and manage their own email marketing programs.

Throughout this article, you'll learn:

- The fundamentals of a successful email marketing campaign
- Tools that can help you get an email marketing program up and running
- What kind of content works best for capturing customer attention
- Why testing is crucial to strong email marketing
- How to find out if your campaigns are working

Getting started in email marketing requires a crash-course in the fundamentals.



THE FIVE FUNDAMENTAL STEPS TO SUCCESSFUL EMAIL CAMPAIGNS

Perhaps you've considered dabbling in email marketing. Maybe you've even collected a bunch of email addresses, but aren't sure what to do with them. A few restaurant operators reading this may already be running campaigns but finding little success.

If you are starting completely from scratch, don't feel intimidated. Let's begin with the fundamentals of email marketing. This article includes a high level overview of what you need to do to find success.

We've broken email marketing down into a five-step chronological process.

1. Find tools to help...Email Service Providers (ESP)

You don't need to make a huge financial investment to obtain the right email marketing technology. Here are a couple of great options.

- **Free Simple Tools:** Constant Contact and MailChimp are both excellent Email Service Providers that are easy to use and offer simple control over your email campaigns. While not as advanced as other options, they'll provide a great foundation for your email marketing.
- **Inexpensive Advanced Tools:** Responsys and ExactTarget are industry leaders in creating more advanced email marketing programs. If you want to invest more in your email marketing, these are solid, established Email Service Providers to examine.

Once you have a system in place, it's time to take a good, hard look at who your restaurant serves.

2. Understand your customers.

For any kind of marketing, it's important to understand what kinds of people frequent your restaurant (and what kinds of people you want to frequent your restaurant.)

Perhaps even more important is how you classify different types of customers that come in the door. If you have an advanced email system, this can be a crucial part of how you turn one-time customers into repeat visitors and keep repeat visitors consistently coming back for more.



If you plan to categorize your customer types, here's a simple structure:

- **New customer:** A customer who visits your restaurant for the first time.
- **Repeat customer:** A customer who has visited your establishment two or more times within a predefined period.
- **Lapsed or inactive customer:** A customer who has visited two or more times, but not within the "repeat customer" period.

An advanced email marketing system will let you classify each of these customers. You gain the ability to send them different messages based on their category. For instance, you may want to send information about happy hour specials to a new customer and a coupon for a free appetizer to a repeat customer.

Categorizing your customers begs another question: How do you obtain the information you need to split your customers into these segments?

3. Get your customers to opt in.

Ready to start collecting email addresses? First, be sure your customers know what they're getting in exchange for sharing their information.

Transparency is absolutely crucial on the part of restaurant owners. No matter how you go about collecting email addresses, you should be upfront about how you plan to use them, what will be in the emails and roughly how often you'll send them.

So, how can you convince customers to provide their email addresses? Here are a few proven methods:

- Run contests offering discounts, coupons and other extras. Require an email address for customers to sign up to win. **Hint:** A popular tactic here is the "business card fishbowl" where customers are encouraged to drop their cards for a chance to win a free meal.
- Include forms and surveys with the check. This is another longstanding tactic that has proven successful.
- Ask for an email address when customers buy gift certificates. If they feel like they know your restaurant well enough to buy a gift, chances are they'll be okay with receiving promotions via email.

When you've collected enough email addresses, it's time to start marketing.



4. Write great subject lines and emails.

The most important part of writing a strong email is delivering the right message or promotion. An email that delivers the message well has two elements: the subject line and the body of the email itself.

The first hurdle in email marketing is enticing the customer to open the email. That's why the subject line is crucial. The second hurdle is encouraging the customer to follow through on visiting the restaurant with the content of the email.

How do you craft compelling emails? Take a look at some tips below.

- **Subject lines:** As your first impression, email subjects should be taken into serious consideration. The right subject line should be determined through testing—a subject we'll cover in more detail shortly.
- **Email body:** You know what you want your customer to do, whether it's buy a gift certificate, cash in on a coupon or "Like" your Facebook page. In as few words as possible, tell your customer exactly what they should do.

Now, you're almost ready to send your email. There's just one more piece of the puzzle.

5. Test and retest campaigns.

Email marketing is only as successful as you let it become. It requires some trial and error. The risk is generally low; there's no harm done if no one opens your email. By testing your email marketing, you will improve with time and gain a better understanding of your customer base.

Testing helps you:

- Determine how often to send emails.
- Find effective subject lines.
- See which promotions work best for drawing customers in.

Testing your email marketing requires a look at four measurement numbers. Understanding, collecting and weighing those numbers is relatively simple.

Measuring Success Isn't As Difficult As You Think

Crunching numbers can be tedious and sometimes intimidating. But finding out which campaigns work and which don't is absolutely critical to your email marketing—and a lot easier than you might think.



So, how do you make sure your emails are hitting the mark? Here are four areas of measurement that your email platform should make it simple for you to find and some tips on how to use them.

Deliverability Rate

This is the first (and simplest) measurement for your email campaigns. It answers the question, “Are my emails even getting through to the recipients’ inboxes?” Reasons for delivery failure could be:

- The email address was entered incorrectly.
Otherwise known as a syntax error.
- The customer has retired his or her email address.
This could also be due to a person no longer working at a particular company or business.
- Spam filters
- Being “Black Listed,” or having a bad reputation with Internet Service Providers (ISPs).

Not every single email you send has a realistic chance to get through, but your deliverability bounces (emails that weren’t delivered) should hover between 1-2 percent. Having a good Email Service Provider (as mentioned above) is the key to avoiding deliverability issues.

Open Rate

How often are your customers opening your emails? That’s how you get to the bottom of your open rate, a metric that can help you determine which subject lines your customers respond to.

This is where testing comes in handy. By pitting different email campaigns against each other, you can take into account a couple of different factors based on your open rate:

- Does one subject line work better than another?
- Is this the best time of day to send an email?
- Are we sending too many emails?

Tackle each of these questions by launching different campaigns and comparing their open rates. The most successful campaigns can teach you what gets the best response from your audience.



Click-Through Rate

Does your email include a link to a promotion or coupon on a website like Restaurant.com? Perhaps it's simply a call to action to visit the menu on your website.

Whatever you're asking the customer to do outside of the email itself, the click-through rate is a perfect measurement of whether or not the customer is taking the desired action. Basically, this is the percentage of people who open the email and click on the link inside.

Purchase

This is the most important metric of all. How many people are purchasing based on the emails they receive?

To measure this, you'll want to create email-specific promotions that include links to exclusive coupons, gift certificates or promotion codes. When customers come into the store and use them, you'll know what kind of impact your emails have on your business.

NEED HELP? CONTACT RESTAURANT.COM

Email is a critical part of encouraging return customers in the restaurant business. If it seems like a daunting addition to your daily routine, there are other ways to make sure your restaurant establishes a strong digital presence.

Restaurant.com is dedicated to helping small businesses just like yours stay on top of marketing trends that can help you grow a large customer base. We work with independent restaurants daily and we understand your challenges and budget constraints when it comes to getting set up online. Get started in the world of email marketing with Restaurant.com.



THE RESTAURANT'S GUIDE TO AFFORDABLE MOBILE MARKETING

EASY WAYS RESTAURANTS CAN ACQUIRE CUSTOMERS THROUGH MOBILE OPTIMIZATION

A mobile presence can be a dizzying prospect for any restaurant owner. You've already spent money on a website. Why should you spend time worrying about how it looks on a mobile device?

Because 75 percent of mobile users conduct searches on the go, and 64 percent of those who search for restaurants convert immediately or within the hour.

That's a significant opportunity to attract more customers - one you don't want to ignore. If you don't want to miss out, you'll need to develop a strategy to ensure you optimize your website for mobile browsing.

That's only the beginning. What about tablets? Do you have to plan differently for iPhone and Android devices? Optimizing your mobile experience seems like a huge challenge, but fortunately for restaurant owners, it's much, much easier than it seems.

You don't need a big budget to put your restaurant's best foot forward. All you need is a little insight into the tools available to start building a mobile presence. At Restaurant.com, we keep a close eye on the mobile strategies and results that drive new and repeat customers to restaurants just like yours.

To help you get started in the mobile space, we've compiled some tips and tricks. Restaurant.com Vice President of Customer Acquisition Sarah Nelson and Senior Manager of Mobile Commerce Greg Kingsley contributed the insights collected in this paper based on their daily interaction with mobile marketing. You'll learn:

- Why you should optimize your website for mobile browsing
- The steps to finding mobile success
- Free and inexpensive tools that will help you along the way

First, let's tackle the obvious question: why is it so important to optimize for mobile?



WHY DO YOU NEED A MOBILE-OPTIMIZED WEBSITE?

According to Nielsen, almost half of US mobile subscribers own smartphones. But surfing the web on a smartphone can be tricky. Traditional websites have proven less effective when accessed through mobile phones.

There are plenty of reasons why it's hard for consumers to get from point A to point B using a mobile phone to access desktop websites. These include:

- **Navigation:** Have you ever tried to click a link on your mobile phone? The links are often too small and our fingers are typically too large to do this well. Mobile-optimized sites, on the other hand, account for this challenge by spacing out buttons and making them bigger so they are easier to access.
- **Text & Graphics:** A smaller screen also means a tougher reading experience. Sure, you can zoom in on a traditional website—but then you have to scroll side-to-side in addition to up-and-down. Without mobile optimization, potential customers may have issues reading content on your site.
- **Content Prioritization:** Mobile consumers tend to hit the web with a very specific purpose. They don't want to be overwhelmed with too many different options. Your mobile site should prioritize certain types of content, simplifying your potential customer's path and increasing the chance they'll show up at your establishment a few minutes later.

These are the most compelling reasons to make the move to mobile. Believe us, restaurants that focus on mobile optimization see great results.

Mobile browsing inherently includes a localization factor, simplifying how diners make on-demand choices. They're in the neighborhood. They're hungry. They search for somewhere to eat on their smartphone. In fact, according to Google's "Our Mobile Planet" research, 94% of people use smartphones to search local businesses.

Thinking about pushing your mobile strategy beyond your website? There are a few other areas to consider.



WHAT OTHER WAYS ARE RESTAURANTS GAINING THE UPPER HAND IN MOBILE?

Major restaurant chains splurge on a wide range of mobile tactics. Unfortunately, smaller restaurants often don't have the budget to keep stride. But, developing an awareness of mobile tactics enables you to seek out third parties with whom you can partner to piggyback off their existing efforts.

Hot areas of mobile marketing of which you should be aware include:

- **Applications:** Applications live on smartphones, which offers a great opportunity for restaurant branding. With the app development comes major challenges, including a high price tag, differing platforms and low adoption rates. For smaller restaurants, app development is intangible and shouldn't be a priority. Instead, you should find a way to get listed on an existing third-party app like Restaurant.com's, which has already been downloaded by more than 600,000 customers. Your inclusion in that app will allow all of those customers to find your restaurant.
- **Geolocation:** It's amazing when a mobile website knows exactly where you are, isn't it? It can be extremely convenient, and some websites use location data to deliver highly relevant search results. Enabling geolocation for your site can be tricky and requires a strong strategy. Again, we suggest looking to third parties who specialize in showing the most relevant search results for customers based on their location to take advantage of this mobile tactic.
- **Texting (SMS/Short Message Service):** Text messages are a great way to send out promotions and other content to keep customers engaged—as long as you have a very light touch, as too many messages will be unwelcome. This is another opportunity to capitalize on a third party's existing capabilities to manage this tactic on your behalf. Not only will they have an established customer base, they can also help create the proper Terms & Conditions, manage your customer list and execute a long-term text plan.

Remember: While challenging, these strategies aren't out of reach. Next, we'll show how your restaurant can develop a comprehensive mobile marketing plan without breaking the bank.



WHAT'S THE EASIEST, LEAST EXPENSIVE WAY TO STABLISH A MOBILE PRESENCE?

All right, so you're convinced it's time to bring your restaurant into the mobile space. What will it take to get your strategy off the ground?

A marketing budget isn't always the number one financial concern for small restaurant owners, yet it's important. The step-by-step guide to establishing a mobile presence below was put together specifically for restaurants like yours.

Step 1: Work with third parties like Restaurant.com to befeatured in directories.

Directories are extremely important for a restaurant's mobile presence, whether or not you plan to develop a separate mobile-optimized website. A third-party directory is the place to go to create that comprehensive mobile presence. It's the easy way to get your restaurant on apps, geolocation and SMS.

Partnering with Restaurant.com (as well as with Google and other directories) is the simplest way to make sure you're well represented through smartphones. Directories like ours tend to have their own applications. Geolocation and SMS are already built into our mobile platform. Our website is search- and mobile-optimized, ensuring customers can find quick-hit information related to an establishment.

Chances are good that your restaurant is already listed on directories like Google. As a result, it's important to take ownership of those listings and make sure all of the information is up to date. To find out where you're listed, search for your restaurant on a smartphone and see what pops up.

Step 2: Evaluate what you have already and see if you can work with it.

If you decide to build a mobile-optimized site, take stock of what you're already working with. Too often, small business owners overlook the obvious: does your website software or developer already offer a simple way to set up a mobile site?

Popular blogging platforms like WordPress may come equipped with simple mobile configuration tools. If you worked with a web developer or designer to create your site, they should be able to create an inexpensive mobile-optimized website relatively easily.



Step 3: Find a cost effective vendor to build your mobile site.

If step two fails, it's time to reach out to a third party to create your mobile-optimized website. The current marketplace is well populated with mobile vendors. Competition has driven prices down, so some affordable options are available.

Creating a mobile-optimized website takes special consideration. Earlier in this article we mentioned content prioritization—showing customers only the most important information on your mobile website.

Mobile customers usually only have a handful of reasons for browsing your site on their smartphone. Typically, the information that is most crucial to converting your customer is your phone number, location, menu and directions. Reviews are a plus. Equipped with this information, customers can make a quick, educated dining decision on the go.

Step 4: Educate your customers and, if necessary, get opt-in.

When you've established your mobile presence, let your current customers know about it. Announce your mobile-optimized website on the bill and table-toppers. Run mobile-specific promotions. Use your email list to send out an announcement. Encourage people to contribute reviews to online directories.

If you do put together a Texting/SMS strategy with a partner, obtaining opt-in from your customers is absolutely necessary. Get them to provide their mobile phone numbers and subscribe to receive your messages. Again, limit the number of texts you send to make sure you aren't flooding text message inboxes. Marketing over Text/SMS requires a special touch, so you'll want an experienced partner to manage your campaigns.

Step 5: Use your new mobile channels to promote your restaurant.

Congratulations, you've built a mobile presence! Now, it's time to use those channels for the good of your business. Put them to work to spread the word on targeted, localized promotions that will attract new and repeat customers.

Bonus tip: Did you know that smartphone owners are more likely to notice mobile ads than desktop ads? Consider a mobile ad strategy to get your message in front of more eyes.

MOBILE IS OUR SWEET SPOT

For restaurant owners, marketing can sometimes feel like a full-time job, but solidifying your spot in the mobile universe is absolutely crucial to the success of your business. How do you find a balance between running a business and getting the word out?

At Restaurant.com, we constantly keep our eyes on the latest mobile trends and find ways for smaller restaurants to participate inexpensively. Working with us on a comprehensive mobile strategy will open new doors to digital marketing. By using technology to get the word out, you will gain new customers and keep your current customers coming back for more.



RESTAURANT DIGITAL PUBLIC RELATIONS (INCLUDING BLOGS)

THE INTERNET'S NEW VERSION OF "WHAT'S NEWS" CREATES OPPORTUNITIES FOR RESTAURANTS

Public relations, or communications, always has been, and will continue to be about the conversation you have with people who are important to your business. They include your customers, but also the people who influence them. This second category, the influencers, is comprised of traditional media and new (digital) media such as bloggers, fans on Facebook or followers on Twitter.

Media today is a complex, interconnected web of voices and platforms. Each provides opportunities for you to communicate and influence behavior. This is good for independent restaurants in several ways:

- Digital media is relatively inexpensive or free.
- As a non-corporate, local business, you are inherently more interesting to bloggers and local news outlets.
- Traditional and online media coverage of your restaurant creates a third party endorsement that diners may believe more than advertising.

Another important note about new media is how the lines have blurred. In the old days of traditional press – which was made up of television, radio, newspapers and magazines – those outlets were the filter through which you fed messages to mass audiences. They still exist and remain important – who doesn't want a great review by the restaurant critic at your local daily newspaper? - but it's only half the story in media today.

Diners obtain their information from a broader variety of sources: blogs, social media, YouTube, search engines, online review sites, or your website. Many of these feed to and from traditional media.

The good news overall is there are many more opportunities to reach your future customers. These opportunities come through the plethora of blog publishers and writers, and the thousands of people you can reach directly through social media, through friends of friends, and friends of friends of friends of customers who themselves report on a good (or bad) experience in your restaurant.

Put another way, there is nowhere to hide. But, if you are proud of your restaurant, and are willing to evolve with the times, there is little need to be concerned.



Restaurant.com Vice President of Marketing Communications Laura Roberts has been a participant in and witness to this revolution in public relations. She notes that sometimes the lines are also blurred between “earned media,” the press that does not involve payment, and “paid media” such as advertising. Where it comes to blogs, sometimes a payment is required and sometimes it is not. The point is that sometimes it is worth spending a few dollars on public relations (some call it marketing communications) because the results can be phenomenally effective and the coverage is still viewed credibly.

This article explores just how restaurants make the most of this new media world in five sections:

- Create news – it’s what keeps your restaurant exciting
- Make the most of your website
- Social media, your news agency
- Write your own blog! (and love all the others)
- Embrace the overlap

If digital media has been a mystery, or if you haven’t quite figured how to make the most of it for your business, this article will help you.

HOW TO LEVERAGE DIGITAL PR TO KEEP YOUR RESTAURANT FRESH AND INTERESTING

We will assume you run a tight ship and keep an eye on what your diners want. These tips are just ways you can make sure the rest of the world knows it, too.

1. Create news – it's what keeps your restaurant exciting and top-of-mind

Diners rarely look for routine, even if they have expectations of their favorite restaurants. That’s a great thing if you are the new restaurant in town. The trick is to keep them coming back months and years after you open.

The same thing can be said about public relations. It’s about giving people something to talk about. If you’re a creative restaurateur, this comes naturally to you. You introduce new dishes, new desserts, new appetizers, and perhaps new décor or locations to create something for people to talk about.

In digital public relations, you have many more opportunities to share information in casual, of-the-moment ways or even engage in a conversation with your customers via Facebook or Twitter. If you have an event scheduled at your restaurant, a wine tasting, a new chef, or you host game-watching parties for your hometown’s sports teams, that can be news.



2. Make the most of your website

Take a look at your website. If it hasn't been updated in the past year, it is getting old. While customers first seek out a restaurant website for basic information – your menu, prices, location, parking, hours of operation, phone number for reservations, etc. – it might solidify their decision to dine with you if they see something new is happening.

Websites that are most effective are evolving and changing all the time. This happens for two reasons: First, as we are discussing here, it says to the site visitor that your business is alive, fresh, evolving and coming up with new ways to give diners a new experience. The other benefit to updating your website is that it helps your website get higher Internet search rankings.

3. Write your own blog! (and love all the others)

Blogs, blogs, blogs – can there ever be too many of them?

Not yet, apparently. They are a popular forum for information and discussion. Not only does it make sense for you to cultivate a relationship with the dining, food and nightlife bloggers but you should also consider writing your own blog. Both activities get to the heart of what good digital PR can do, and both directly lead to generating new customers for your restaurant. Here is how that works:

- **Connect with other bloggers** – Some blogs are an extension of the traditional media, such as those authored by food and restaurant writers at your local newspapers or hosts of radio or television programs. To see how this is done, visit the website of your local media to see what they are doing. They too are having a conversation with their readers and listeners. Study it to see what they are interested in, and how they are reporting on the restaurant scene in your town.

They need "content," as it's called – things to write about to keep a flow of information for their audiences. Send an email to the blogger about something your chef created, trends in what diners are choosing, or anything new you are doing that might be of interest. This might provide them a reason to write about you in their next post. Even if they don't, try something else. Every blogger likes attention and may eventually find your news and ideas worth including in their blog.

Note: You have a big advantage in blogging over national chain restaurants. They are corporations, probably based in another state – while yours is a local business with an authentic connection to local vendors and the local dining scene. Make the most of that in what you promote and share.



- **Create and maintain your own blog** – This is your opportunity to have a very detailed, extensive, informative and almost unlimited conversation with your customers. A blog can be anything you want it to be, but we suggest it be all about the dining experience at your restaurant. That can include the following:

- › Your food and beverages – What's new, what's interesting, what are people asking for, what new ingredients are now available and what's locally sourced? Each of these brings something new to your diners.

- › Your place – The dining experience includes atmosphere, after all. Maybe it's about changing up your décor for the season. Maybe it's something about your staff, setting up your summer outdoor café, or a celebrity visit. Perhaps there is construction near your restaurant and you want to help diners navigate around it. Just one or two paragraphs can cover this.

- › Your thoughts on dining trends – The food business is constantly evolving. For example, selecting a restaurant or entrée today is now a decision that can have global implications. If you opt for locally grown produce, there are diners who want to know that! If you want to counter press on something negative in the industry (e.g., fish species misrepresented on menus), provide your position on how you do a better job than as reported.

A very important benefit comes from having a regularly-updated blog that is on your website. Google, Bing, Yahoo! and other search engines respect new content on websites and award them with higher rankings in search. The more frequently you write about the dining experiences in your restaurant, the more likely you will be found in a web search by a prospective diner.

4. Social media is your news agency

Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and other social media sites enable businesses to share information and photos with their fans. All are very well suited for restaurants.

For example, Facebook is an ideal social platform for sharing all kinds of information, the same kinds of things you might put in a blog. Certainly, you would use it to launch a new location opening. But you can also post the small moments that make your restaurant a busy, evolving and fresh business: A photo of wait staff having fun, for example, or a beautiful plating of a new dessert or a simple recipe for a holiday- or seasonal-themed dish.



These same items can be posted on other sites. The point is that when you post information on one, two or more sites, you are releasing information to your fans and followers. From there it is amplified – more if it's very interesting, less if not.

Your website should have buttons that enable visitors to plug into your social media pages – allowing them to make an easy connection. And think about what that says: They like you and they want to follow you. They even want to share their experiences at your establishment with their friends. That's the beauty of the social media conversation in this new world of digital PR.

5. Embrace the overlap

In case this feels as if all these things run together – media blogs, your own blogs, social media pages, your website – don't let it overwhelm you. First, you can approach it increments, doing one tactic at a time. But once you get up to speed on one or more of these tactics, embrace the overlap! Multiple tactics work together synergistically, where putting out photos and ideas and information about your restaurant through various means add up to keeping your restaurant in the public eye.

Digital PR may create a little more work and a little more complexity in your business. Just keep in mind that most of these efforts require very little spending, that most of your competitors haven't figured this out yet, and that the opportunities are more numerous than ever before.

Digital PR for restaurants lets you have more conversations with hundreds or thousands of people at a time. Learn how to do it and you'll be serving many more diners very soon.

LET US DO THE HEAVY LIFTING

Drawing in diners is more than just having the hottest menu on the block. It's about staying plugged into digital marketing channels that can help you expose your restaurant to an even larger audience.

As a restaurant owner, you may not have the time to manage digital marketing in addition to the day-to-day operations of your establishment. Working with a partner like Restaurant.com can be the best way to beef up business and establish your brand as a mainstay of the neighborhood.



BUILD AND MANAGE A SUCCESSFUL RESTAURANT WEBSITE

MORE THAN EVER BEFORE, DINERS EXPECT TO FIND IMPORTANT INFORMATION ON YOUR WEBSITE

There are three mistakes a restaurant may make today with regard to their website. First, many restaurant owners assume that their presence is already well established and that no one would think to look on a computer to find them (and those online review sites more or less serve that function, right?). Another mistake is that they built a website several years ago and it's fine as is. Third is the belief that other digital innovations such as social media, email campaigns and mobile apps, now make your website less important.

Restaurant.com Director of Customer Acquisition Phil Volini tells us why all of those assumptions are incorrect. First, the world is brimming with new customers who will naturally gravitate toward the restaurants with websites that provide them with information and compelling, inviting photos.

Second, "You do NOT want a third-party site to define your restaurant to potential customers," says Volini. He adds that an old website is a stale website – not something you want associated with a great place to dine.

The third point is that everything else you do to market your establishment – social media, email campaigns, promotions, even mobile apps - are designed to enhance, not replace, your website. If you receive positive social media interactions, visiting your website is the natural next step for customers to take. The same can be said about email campaigns, promotions, and even traditional advertising. Your website is where people will seek practical details and valuable information about you and your restaurant.

You can convert your audience into first-time customers by providing appetizing, compelling content that paints a picture of the great dining experience they can enjoy at your restaurant.

In this article you will learn:

- Your website answers your customers' top questions
- How little – and how much – you could/should spend to build your website
- Why photos matter (and may not need to cost very much)
- How to secure a professional web address
- How to build traffic – and integrate your other digital marketing efforts

In other words, your website is a fundamental and necessary part of the conversation you have with your diners. We suggest you jump into this immediately – it's about as basic to running a restaurant today as having a sign over your front door.



THE EIGHT THINGS PEOPLE WANT TO KNOW BEFORE THEY VISIT YOUR RESTAURANT

If you don't think of a website as a marketing tool just yet, the least you can do is think of it as a service that makes things easier for your customers. Diners want to know eight things before they go out to eat:

1. Menu
2. Prices
3. What things look like
(photography of your food and ambiance)
4. Location and directions
5. Hours of operation
6. Parking or valet service options
7. How to make reservations (online or by phone)
and how to order take-out when available
8. Offers/promotions/events/ restrictions – including
what you offer through Restaurant.com

These are the basics that should be available on every restaurant website. Want to make it even better? Add a blog! The true value of the website is to present this information in a helpful way that motivates customers to visit your restaurant and hopefully refer others to dine there in the future.

To create value, approach your website with the K.I.S.S. (keep it simple, stupid) principle. You can even build a site that is just a single page, but make sure the execution is flawless and still meaningful to the customer. Provide the eight points above, and make sure it's easy to navigate and easy on the eyes to entice new customers.

BUILD IT FOR FREE – OR SPEND A FEW DOLLARS MORE TO UP YOUR GAME

We understand that your main priority is running your restaurant. If you don't have the time to handle your marketing efforts or create a website, assign someone else to manage or build it for you.

There are now very easy-to-build templates – available for free – that you or someone on your staff can use to build a website. Visit any of these recommended sites to discover pre-made website templates:

- Google Sites (<https://sites.google.com/>)
- Weebly (<http://www.weebly.com/>)
- Let's Eat! (<http://www.letseat.at/>)
- IM-Creator (http://imcreator.com/?exp=5&utm_exp=42537450-2)
- FindingYummy.com (<http://restaurant.findingyummy.com/index.php>)

To get started, no coding or programming knowledge is needed. Many of the templates are so simple they can be built in an hour, using a simple drag and drop feature to quickly add photos, PDFs of menus, and any copy needed to help finish your site.

Note that restaurants that partner with Restaurant.com get a free website as part of the relationship. The site is promoted to millions of customers via the Restaurant.com search engine, mobile apps, social media, email marketing and more, and includes your photos, hours of operation, location and other key details.

Providing the information customers want is step one, but one crucial piece of advice could mean the difference between success and failure. Don't skimp on functionality. Find a few restaurant websites you enjoy visiting, and check out the websites of those restaurants you consider competition or would like to emulate. If a basic template won't put you in the same league, you should consider paying a professional to construct one for you. This is particularly important if you wish to attract younger customers, who are more tech savvy and used to a smoother user experience.

How much that would cost varies widely between markets. Expect to spend at least a few thousand dollars, and be sure to ask the following questions:

- Can you make changes to it over time, for example when you change menu items or want to advertise promotional offers?
- Is photography included in the price?
- How long will it take to create the final product?
- What will be the full cost?

If you are waiting for a professional to build your site, it might help to still use a free template site in the meantime. Who wants to miss out on customers for even a week or two?

PHOTOGRAPHY MATTERS

Because dining is a very visual experience, it's important to capture the ambiance and your delicious food through updated, high quality photography. It must meet a minimum level of quality, because the wrong subjects, dull colors or poor lighting could make food look unappetizing. It's also important to crop images down to an appropriate size to prevent a poor user experience due to long page load times.

At the same time, your budget may not allow for professional photography. Fear not – there is a middle ground. Today's camera technologies (even some later versions of smartphone cameras) can deliver remarkably high-quality photos. The trick? Choose what to shoot ahead of time to cut cost or time needed to complete all of the photography more quickly. Unsure who to ask? Students, photography lovers, members of your staff, a friend or a relative – including your nephew or niece who took a photography class – might be able to give you terrific photos.



Photo subjects should include:

- **Well-plated signature dishes** – and that includes dessert, main courses, and appetizers.
- **Smiling and friendly wait staff**, perhaps while engaged with customers or in a group shot (tip: groups larger than six or eight people are just a crowd shot – include only if you want to communicate the size of your establishment).
- **Room shots** – Ideally, with people who are representative of your clientele and who appear to be having a good time. Note that you should request permission from diners if you plan to use their photo on your website.

It's also very important to note that the presence of photos on your website helps drive traffic to your site by utilizing SEO best practices recognized by Google, Bing and Yahoo! search engines (see "Bring On The Traffic" below for more information on search engines).

WHY AND HOW TO ESTABLISH YOUR OWN DOMAIN

While template website builders provide ease of use, they can leave a long URL that becomes a pain to promote and remember. For example, a template site might look something like this: <http://wordpress.com/BobsRestaurant>, when what you really need is a custom URL that looks like this: www.BobsRestaurant.com.

Templates provide free hosting of your site, but to customize your URL, you'll need to pay a few dollars (around \$10 a month) to have a server host it for you. Simply put, it looks more professional and makes it easier for diners to find your site. These companies offer great hosting and custom domain (your URL) options:

- Network Solutions (<http://www.networksolutions.com/>)
- Go Daddy (<http://www.godaddy.com/>)
- Charlottezweb (<http://www.charlottezweb.com/>)
- HostGator (<http://www.hostgator.com/>)
- Bluehost (<http://www.bluehost.com/>)
- Fatcow (<http://www.fatcow.com/>)
- Inmotion (<http://www.inmotionhosting.com/>)
- HostMonster (<http://www.inmotionhosting.com/>)

If you hire a professional web designer, this is something they should manage for you. If you are building your own site, the web hosting service provides instructions on how to set it up.



BRING ON THE TRAFFIC!

If you've read about how search engines decide to rank websites, you know that links from social media (Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, etc.), email campaigns and PR/blogging to your website, raises your profile in the online world. Now think of your website as having a circular relationship with those marketing tactics, where each supports the other.

Web traffic to your site can come directly from these efforts, or what the search engine gurus call "organic search." That is, certain things cause your site to be found naturally by web surfers who may not have known about your restaurant previously. If you have an Italian restaurant in Burlington, Vermont, you'll want to show up at the top of search results for "Italian restaurant Burlington" or other similar keywords and searches so customers can find you first. The use of "Italian" "restaurant" and "Burlington" on your site is essential and natural. But there are several additional things that help new customers naturally find you. By incorporating keywords and common searchable phrases, you will ensure your place higher up in the search results and you don't have to pay a penny in advertising!

KEY TIPS:

- **Just be you** – If you are an Italian restaurant in Burlington, the content on your site should mention Italian dishes, occasionally use Italian food words ("lasagna," "penne," "ristorante," etc.) and perhaps refer to some specifics of your location ("just one block from the Burlington waterfront.") Search engines respect genuine information so that searchers find what they are looking for – so keep your information authentic.
- **Maintain a fresh site** – Update your content (copy and photos) with some regularity. This can include anything from new photos and new menu items, to changing the hours of operation or blogging about a new promotion. Google and the other search engines will rank regularly updated sites higher than those sites that have sat untouched for months or years.
- **Have links to your site** – When a blogger for the local newspaper writes up a review, they should include a link to your site. That's golden! Make sure to include your website URL in your email campaigns, social media (Facebook page, Twitter, Pinterest and others), or in the media. If you are really creative, you might post a YouTube video of something fun at the restaurant, such as a cooking demonstration or a special event, and link back to your site from YouTube.



- **Photos and video** – Visual imagery on a website effectively wins a higher search ranking versus sites with copy only. As mentioned previously, make sure the photos effectively represent your restaurant at its best.

If that seems like a lot of work, remember that Restaurant.com provides its Partner Restaurants an easier way to build a unique website, which is a helpful supplement to your restaurant marketing efforts. As a premier digital marketing site for the restaurant industry, Restaurant.com can be a powerful driver of traffic back to your website (and into your restaurant.)

Remember, if you don't have a website, you are allowing review sites to represent your restaurant- and that is not always a good thing. Take back control of your online reputation by maintaining control of the message, the imagery, and increase the opportunity for new customers to find you!

JOIN RESTAURANT.COM TODAY AND YOUR UNIQUE
WEBSITE WILL BE LIVE WITHIN THREE BUSINESS DAYS!



DIGITAL PROMOTION PRIMER FOR RESTAURANTS

INTERGRATE ALL YOUR DIGITAL MARKETING TO DRAW NEW CUSTOMERS

You know that your customers come to you for different reasons. For repeat diners, it's about the food, atmosphere, service and location. New customers are motivated by word-of-mouth and what they've read in the press or online (including social media), in blogs and in traditional advertising.

But, it is promotions – a particular deal, event, theme or program designed to get customers in the doors - that stand out as a key driver of both new and repeat traffic. This has been true even before the advent of digital communications, and is even more important now. That's because promotions are very targeted efforts, reaching the right people with the right offers at the right time. They inspire a call to action and give people a specific reason to pay you a visit within a specific time period.

What exactly is a promotion? A promotion can be anything you want – a deal or discount on a particular dish, or a special price. Promotions can be as simple as "Fish Fry Fridays" or "Kids Eat Free on Wednesday," down to digital deals, trivia nights or loyalty programs. Most importantly, "promotion" does not have to mean "deal." Restaurants can creatively run promotions without offering a discount and succeed at the ultimate goal: Get customers in the doors.

Promotions can last a day, a week, or a month. They can be used to spike traffic during slow times, like Tuesday nights or holiday weekends, or to attract specific clientele – think Ladies' Night, or showing a particular sporting event on television. No matter the promotional approach you select, promotions are an integral part of the 360-degree approach to selling your restaurant.

Consider ways to generate new and repeat business through promotions that take into account these five points:

- Know (and play up) your strengths
- Determine the right promotion for your restaurant
- Employ the 360-degree approach
- Measure your results
- Always think about the future

Are you ready to boost traffic and sales in just a few weeks time? Here's how.



KNOW YOUR STRENGTHS: WHY DO PEOPLE DINE WITH YOU ALREADY?

A promotion is about creating a great new experience. It's all about the first impression that lasts. So, make sure what you promote is about putting your best foot forward. That starts with assessing your strengths as a restaurant.

You may already know your strengths from experience, from intuition, from wait staff feedback or what your friends tell you. But don't be afraid to ask your regular customers. If they dine there frequently, they obviously like many aspects of your restaurant. A casual conversation with them, eliciting their opinions and feedback – pro and con –will tell you not only what it is that draws people in, but what you might need to communicate more frequently and clearly. And, it's a launching point for developing promotional ideas.

It doesn't hurt to look at your competitors as well. What are they promoting? You absolutely do not want to copy them, but seeing what works never hurts. If anything, think of ways you can do it better.

You should also ask yourself if there is a particular type of customer you want to bring in. Is it:

- **The type of customer you see frequently already?**

Then make sure your promotion matches what they already like. Maybe your popular Friday special could draw new customers on Tuesdays or Wednesdays, too. Or, consider instituting a loyalty program for your regulars, which can be as simple as a punch card for each time they visit that includes a reward when they reach your desired frequency.

- **A new type of customer?** For example, if you typically serve people over age 50 most nights of the week, can you generate a Sunday afternoon crowd of younger sports fans to watch games on your big-screen TVs?

- **Customers at a different time of day?** Say your lunches and dinners are busy, but you think you can work up traffic with weekend brunches or daily breakfasts. Maybe a bottomless coffee or breakfast buffet special menu can bring them in.



Here are some ideas:

- **As a restaurant, your product is the food and the experience.** A great main course, unique appetizers, mouth-watering dessert or even a signature soup or salad, are all promotional tools readily available for your use. Consider discounting one dish – like a burger – on a particular night of the week. Or, offer half-price appetizers with purchase of a certain entrée.
- **Holidays provide great inspiration for promotions** – and we don't just mean major holidays. There are tons of "food" holidays on which you can capitalize, ranging from National Guacamole Day (Sept. 16) to National Soup Month (January.) Consider hosting theme parties for events like Cinco de Mayo, the Fourth of July or St. Patrick's Day.
- **Is your restaurant in a neighborhood with lots of young families?** Consider catering to busy parents who may not feel welcome elsewhere with young children with "Kids Eat Free Wednesdays." If you're looking to attract 20-somethings, try a happy hour special. And if you want a mature crowd, consider a three-course deal for Saturday nights.

As we mentioned above, the sky is the limit as far as promotional ideas. Just be sure they match your goals and capabilities – for instance, a fish fry might be a bad fit for a pizza restaurant, and a Cinco de Mayo celebration might not work well at a steak house.



Once you've settled on your promotion, it's time to get the word out. Digital communications tools are a great way to do that. Here are the most basic means for doing this:

1. Email marketing

Retain an Email Service Provider. Identify a service such as Constant Contact (constantcontact.com) or MailChimp (mailchimp.com), both of which are free; Responsys (responsys.com) or ExactTarget (exacttarget.com), which are relatively inexpensive. These providers will help you systematize your promotions without consuming staff time or requiring you to have specific computer skills. Email is key. Do whatever you can to obtain as many emails as possible so you can keep in contact and top of mind with your customers.

Develop your targets. Depending on the type of promotion you have determined, use the tried and true methods of email address development: business card fishbowl promotions, forms and surveys with dinner checks, or simply request email addresses when customers purchase gift cards. Be transparent about why you want their email addresses – most people are aware of why you are asking and how it works, but no one wants to be tricked into something. If asked, explain that you want to provide them news, events, and occasionally a few deals,

Write, send, test and retest. Develop great subject lines in your email program ("Kids Eat Free" works a lot better than "November Promotion"), trying different approaches and keep track of how many people actually open your e-mails. This feedback can only help your program improve over time.

2. SMS (Short Message Service, or text message marketing)

SMS marketing can be very effective, but needs to be approached with caution. The two things to remember are to get permission from the customer and limit the frequency of contact.

First, capture cell phone numbers of willing customers. As with gathering email addresses, it's absolutely essential to be transparent about why you are asking for that information. Next, do not abuse it – sending messages more than once a week may make a customer angry. If you are giving them a reasonable offer, it can be something they appreciate.



3. Social Media (Facebook, Twitter)

Let us assume you have developed a Facebook page and perhaps a Twitter following. This means you already have built-in fans, people who like your restaurant and are willing to share things about it with others.

Keep The Conversation Going!

a) Put those Facebook fans to work. Give them a promotion that they not only will like but which they can share with friends and family – in other words, give a digital boost to good old fashioned “word-of-mouth advertising.”

b) Be visual. Use a photo, illustration or graphic that fits with your promotion concept (food pictures always catch the eye). Write text to accompany it that is relevant and is explicit about the promotion. If it provides value to your Facebook friends, they will like it – and so will their friends who see it.

c) Be frequent and consistent (but with variety). If your promotion is recurring, say every week, rotate in new visuals to accompany the same promotion. Keep it new and fresh looking as the promotion concept gains momentum. For example, to promote a Friday Fish Fry, gather fun photos and illustrations with a fish theme, using a new version each week while your copy continues to provide a consistent promotional message.

Additionally, you can use Facebook ads and Facebook offers, if your budget allows. On Facebook, go to settings to find “Create an Ad” for more information on how to do that.

The 360-degree approach: Integrate Everything

All aspects of a promotion need to work together and without question, that applies to your operations as much as the marketing and advertising. Coordinate closely with your in-restaurant service personnel and the kitchen. Keep them informed of your marketing activities and how they play an important role. Nobody likes an uncomfortable moment when the diner has to dispute a bill because the server misunderstood the promotion. Think through the process from planning to execution to your results evaluation.

You also need to be tenacious about your promotions. The first week or two of a promotion planned to run indefinitely might yield minimum results. If that happens, don’t give up. Keep hammering out the message via your various digital communications (email, SMS/text, Facebook, etc.) and it will build. At the same time, be attentive to problems with the promotion and make necessary adjustments.



Measure results

Keep track of how well each promotion works – manually, when your promotion requires involvement by your wait staff, or electronically if the promotion is promoted digitally.

For example, if you participate in a digital loyalty program, you can retrieve customer data from the program sponsor. Or, have your wait staff keep track of how many customers come in for the promotion. Compare pre- and post-promotion time periods where applicable.

The Future

This is an early age for restaurant promotions via digital marketing channels. New tools are continually evolving. That doesn't mean you should wait for it to happen – quite the contrary, you need to get started now with promoting your restaurant in new ways. It's the most likely means by which you'll keep up with your customers.

Some of the Newest Tools:

- **QR codes** – Otherwise known as those “squares that are the new bar codes,” QR codes are ways for businesses to marry up cell phone technologies with promotions and products. As with a bar code, each QR code is unique to an establishment and enables mobile couponing. Mobile is in the forefront of digital marketing today. Don't lose those customers who might not know at that moment where they want to dine out but find you in a search on their smartphone.
- **Be one of Siri's answers** – Just three days after Apple launched the iPhone 4S, four million phone buyers were introduced to Siri, that gal with the answers who speaks to you from your iPhone. That was in October 2011. Millions more are now using Siri, and while Apple remains mum on what characteristics qualify a restaurant to be her answer, we are told that Siri looks at several ways in which restaurants have a digital presence. The more you are mentioned in restaurant reviews, and the better scores you earn, the more likely that Siri will cite you.



Digital Promotions -- Here to Stay

With so many new ways to promote a restaurant, it can easily be overwhelming. But approaching it step-by-step, one tactic at a time might be the way your restaurant stays fresh and part of the digital dining scene in your market.

But it also helps to have a partner. At Restaurant.com, we're constantly keeping our eyes on the latest trends in digital promotions and finding ways for smaller restaurants to participate inexpensively. Working with us on a comprehensive promotional strategy will open new doors to digital marketing, ensuring that you can use technology to get the word out, gain new customers and keep your current customers coming back for more.

The Power of Price

Participation in the Restaurant.com program is another type of promotion. The diner will purchase a \$25 certificate for \$10, for example, which they redeem at your restaurant (only one per table). The value you deliver to them may be \$25, but the food costs are much less than that. The promotion is a significant value to the customer, providing the surprise and delight that should come with any promotion, while you have a chance to fill a table with that party and develop a new customer. That's a solid price promotion that has worked for thousands of restaurants throughout the country since 1999.



ABOUT RESTAURANT.COM

Restaurant.com is a premier digital marketing site for restaurants and the nation's largest provider of dining deals. The company helps thousands of restaurants nationwide fill tables every day, providing a steady, sustainable stream of customers over an extended period of time through the dining certificate program. Restaurant.com is the restaurant's partner in profit, and the diner's source for the best deal, every meal. The company has operated in Arlington Heights, Ill., since 1999.

Visit partners.restaurant.com to join or learn more today.

