

17 Ways to Breathe New Life Into Your Restaurant Marketing

There are over a million restaurants in the United States, with annual sales exceeding a collective \$800 billion.¹ For business owners eager to lay claim to their portion of the profits, finding smart restaurant marketing ideas could be the key to attracting more customers and out-serving the competition.

From table tents to Twitter chats, here's how you can help your restaurant jump into the spotlight and, better yet, stay there.

1. Network With Your Neighbors

It's easy to look at every other business as your competition but, unless you're vying for the same audience, for example, Italian restaurant vs. Italian restaurant, there may be room for collaboration.

Drop off a stack of disposable menus to hotel concierges, receptionists, medical offices, and anyone else nearby who might want to join you for a meal or refer their clients to do the same. Pairing those menus with some edible freebies like cupcakes or sandwiches is a great way to showcase your in-house culinary talent, so everyone knows what they're recommending.

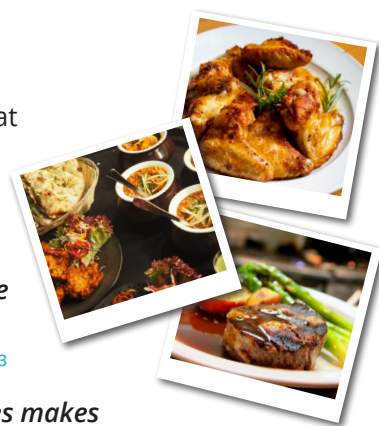
2. Photos, Photos, Photos

The adage that we eat with our eyes first is nothing new, but technology means that you can start selling the visual appeal of your food long before diners even enter your establishment. Though visual content can cause a stir on platforms like Facebook and Twitter, Instagram takes visual marketing to another level.

- *A whopping 200 million Instagram users visit a minimum of one business profile each day*²
- *Of the Instagram stories that get the most views, one-third belong to businesses*³
- *62% of consumers say seeing a company or product featured in Instagram stories makes them more interested in that brand*⁴

Stories are a powerful tool for creating narratives highlighting everything from your special event setups to how your pastry chef glazes their signature lemon cake. Take viewers on a tour of your back of house, share clips of the house band or film your head bartender make that night's featured cocktail.

Of course, there is power in putting pictures on social media, even if you never post a single story. Share images that will make consumers salivate. Choose dishes that look delicious and make your followers crave a big, juicy bite.



3. Pitch a Few Table Tents

Stellar restaurant marketing strategies don't end once a guest sits down to eat. Multiple studies show that it's as much as 25 times more expensive to acquire a new customer than it is to keep an existing one.⁵ In addition, table-top advertising introduces an opportunity for contact-free upsells. Instead of your servers or bartenders having to remember to tell each guest about the dessert menu or your upcoming wine dinner, your table tents do the talking for you.

Table tents are also an efficient way to convey key information in a bathroom or at a hostess stand. As people wait for their table up front, they're a captive audience. Use table tents to let them know about your app-based loyalty program, or talk up your weekend musical acts to ensure everyone's aware that you've added entertainment into the mix.



4. Pivot to Local Marketing & Targeted Ads

Unless your restaurant is in a very touristy area, chances are the majority of your traffic will be local. Depending on your area, your customers may come from your neighborhood, your city, or from across the whole region. You can tailor your marketing to those parameters using geo-targeted online ads. Sites like Facebook have set up their ad programs to be as flexible and customizable as possible. You don't just pay for ads to go out all 2.6 billion monthly Facebook users.⁶

Instead, you whittle down your audience based on factors such as:

- Age
- Gender
- Job title
- Recent major event (e.g., a move or marriage)
- Interests and hobbies (e.g., if they like Spanish food or the Food Network)

And that's only the beginning. You can even create "lookalike audiences" based on the characteristics of your existing customers or an audience just for consumers who have previously engaged with your business online.

Local is still one of the most compelling options because of the immediacy. Use geo-targeted ads to connect with people who are searching for "restaurants near me" or "Cleveland sushi restaurants." Those searchers are typically interested in eating ASAP, so conversion can be almost instantaneous.

5. Hand Out Some Swag

People love free stuff. Giving out promotional items like branded apparel, pencils, and other fun goodies makes consumers happy, plus it increases your reach. Every time someone uses a Bob's Restaurant key chain or takes a sip out of a branded coffee mug, they're flashing your logo and spreading the word.

To get your swag into the hands of the general public, you can:

- *Sign up to sponsor fun runs*
- *Get a booth at community events like festivals and fairs*
- *Hand out branded pens to everyone who attends your weekly pub quiz*
- *Make up holiday gift bags for your regulars*
- *Drop off gear to local businesses*
- *Give promo items to your vendors as a thank you for great service*



6. Consider Direct Mail

The rise of digital marketing has been well-documented. At the same time, traditional and proven advertising channels like mailers and media ads remain powerful marketing tools that can be used to bolster digital ads.

**Direct mail
still works,
& here's why:**

- *Some 42.2% of people who receive direct mail will either scan or read it⁷*
- *Consumers who get direct mail spend 28% more than consumers who don't get the same mailers⁷*
- *59% of consumers in the US enjoy getting new product announcements in the mail⁷*



While direct mail may not be your only promotional tactic, it should be included somewhere in your strategy. Custom business postcards can drive website traffic, advertise a summer deal, and encourage more people to attend a happy hour. They can even target consumers in a specific geographic area if you're opening a new location or trying to reach locals only.

7. Distribute Rack Cards

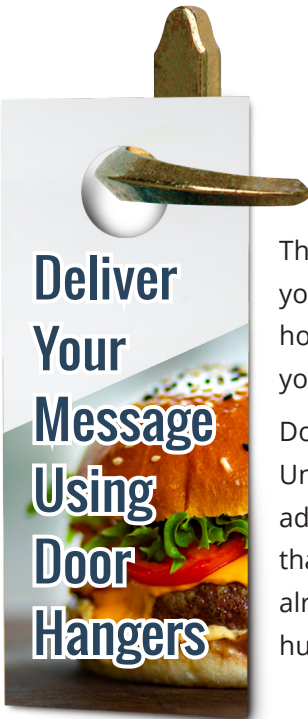
If you're in an area that attracts a lot of tourists, you can increase awareness among travelers by purchasing rack cards for display at nearby hotels and your town's visitors center. As people check-in at reception or look for information on what to do nearby, they'll spy your card and be able to take a copy along as a reminder.

8. Offer Discounts and Promotions

Four out of five diners will head to a new restaurant just because they scored a discount or promotion.⁸ People love a good deal, and that's especially true when they're taking a risk on the unknown. First-time guests aren't sure whether they'll love your food, even if their friends recommend it. Sitting down with a discount to hand makes taking a chance seem a bit easier.

Promotions are also a great way to encourage existing customers to try new things or visit more frequently. If Wednesdays are slow, turn that into Ladies' Night with corresponding happy hour and dessert specials. Look up "holidays" like National Sweet Potato Day and advertise a celebration of the sweet potato with three kinds of fries plus homemade sweet potato pie.

9. Deliver Your Message Using Door Hangers

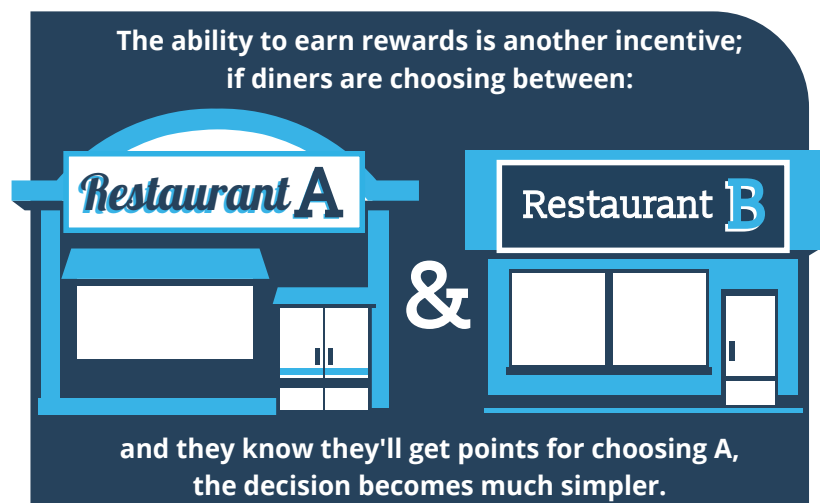


Think about the last time you came home from another endlessly long day at work. As you slowly get out of the car and trudge toward the house, all you're thinking about is how much you'd rather have someone else make dinner instead of bearing the burden yourself. That's why door hangers can be so effective.

Door hangers are almost guaranteed to give you every person's undivided attention. Unlike sending an email that might get overlooked thanks to a bustling inbox or pop-up ad that consumers often automatically click out of, door hangers are stand-alone products that put your brand front and center. Plus, you're reaching people when they're likely already hungry and further along in the decision-making process – they know they're hungry, you're just giving them an easy way to solve that problem.

10. Launch a Loyalty Program

There are more than a billion people currently enrolled in hospitality loyalty programs.⁹ It's clear why consumers would want to sign up and earn rewards, but there are perks for the brands behind the programs too. Loyal customers spend an average of 66% more, and they're 17 times more likely to recommend the company to others.¹⁰



11. Stay Top of Mind With Magnets

Custom fridge magnets won't work for every restaurant, but they could be a fantastic tool if you have a delivery or takeout service and want to increase those revenue streams. When a new customer places an order for delivery, send along a magnet with your logo and phone number on it. You can even include info about your mobile app, a discount code, or details of any ongoing promos you know you'll keep around for the foreseeable future.

When people are hungry, and they spy your...



magnet staring back at them, you become a strong candidate for an ASAP dinner order.

12. Have a Contest

Who doesn't love the thrill of competition? Hosting a contest online drums up interest for several reasons:

1. *It highlights your products*
2. *It gets participants hyper interested in your brand*
3. *Those participants are more likely to share contest info to get their friends and family interested*
4. *You can make sharing social media posts (and therefore expanding your reach)*

These contests are also easy to run as there are now apps made expressly for this purpose. Or, you can keep it simple by asking followers to post their favorite pictures of your restaurant, and tag you in it. One tag equals one contest entry, and they can snag additional entries by tagging friends, following your other social media accounts, or sharing your post.

There are dozens of variations on the contest idea above, but the genius is in asking for user-generated content (UGC). UGC keeps your budget low, since consumers are essentially creating the marketing materials for you, and you're fostering tons of engagement.

13. Upgrade Your Signage

According to a FedEx survey, 76% of Americans have gone into a store for the first time because they liked the look of the store's signs.¹¹ Some 68% purchase a product or service for the same reason.¹¹ Another telltale statistic? More than two-thirds of consumers surveyed say that the quality of a store's signage is an indicator of the quality of the store itself, which is probably why 52% of consumers are less willing to go in a store displaying poorly made or misspelled signs.¹¹

So not only are signs essential for informational purposes, but you better make sure they look good and read correctly too. Get those aspects down, and the possibilities are practically endless. Create banners for your front entrance proclaiming an amazing weekday lunch special. Get cute and advertise a "password" that gets those in the know a free appetizer. Be the only booth at the local chili cookoff that has professional, colorful signage.

Remember that great restaurant signs are about much more than just showcasing your name, hours, and happy hour deals. Even operational notices and warnings like "Authorized Personnel Only" and restroom signs should look polished and impressive.

14. Tweak Your Takeout Containers

If you have guests leaving with doggy bags, why send them on their way with a plain white sack when you could be packing up their leftover fish and chips in branded containers? Ordering custom food and beverage labels takes your messaging out of your store and into the real world.

Imagine your customer carrying their yellow curry and stuffed wings home, the savory aromas of lemongrass, and coconut milk tickling the noses of passersby. When they look to see what smells so good, BOOM, there's your branded bag, pizza box, or sandwich wrap doing its part to help convert total strangers into future diners.

15. Set Up Email Marketing

Email marketing puts your restaurant's latest news right in front of consumers. Considering that mobile devices account for nearly half of all email opens, using email to communicate makes sense. It's what the people want; 73% of millennials actually prefer business contact them via email.¹²

Although, it's not enough to whip up a weekly or monthly newsletter. Personalization is key. You can use an email program to create a template that addresses each subscriber by name. It is also possible to segment your master list into smaller groups that classify customers based on their geographic area, their interests, or other relevant factors. This is also how restaurants send out those fun birthday promotions.



While this tactic won't work for every restaurant, fine dining establishments, mom-and-pop joints with a lot of regulars, and anyone who has the time to go the extra mile can benefit from this uber-personal touch.

Invest in cards and branded envelopes, then encourage your staff to send a note of gratitude to long-time customers. You can also send out handwritten birthday cards, have everyone sign an anniversary card for guests who have noted a special occasion in their reservation, and include friendly notes in takeout and delivery orders for an extra dose of hospitality.

17. Host a Twitter Q&A

Twitter has evolved considerably over the years, and today real-time conversations are the norm rather than the exception. While some comments to popular posts may come days or even weeks later, you can also use the platform to host live chats.

Get your chef on board or ask your sommelier to sit down at the computer and engage your followers. They could take general questions about wine pairing and cooking, or you can set a theme such as "Wines of the Pacific Northwest" or "Summer Grilling Tips." Encourage Twitter users to @ your account and use your suggested hashtag. It creates a dialogue that's fun and dynamic but also stays on your feed for others to see later on.

Every time a consumer sees your restaurant's name, you make another little mark on their brain. Get enough visibility by making an impact using marketing tools that are both professional and memorable, and you could finally get the traffic and bustling dining room you've been visualizing.

