

STRUGGLING TO INCREASE YOUR COVERS?

A guide for food entrepreneurs
during the pandemic



Increasing your covers

MARKETING STRATEGY

Whether you own a restaurant or are looking to open one it is crucial to ensure you keep your tables full, especially in an uncertain market. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted trade with not just lockdown but also home-working causing a loss of passing trade and cautious customers also cancelling bookings.

With the right marketing strategy you can improve your chances of having a busy restaurant and also reduce 'no shows'. Every restaurant has three core ways to increase revenue:

1. Acquiring more customers or covers;
2. Increasing spend per customer with upselling and;
3. Retaining customers and ensuring they visit more frequently.

USING SOCIAL MEDIA

Create content

Start creating content as soon as possible. In the food industry the main accounts are Instagram and Facebook. Examples of content include photos, videos or competitions. Try and be inventive and appeal to your desired customer demographic.

Post frequently

All too many people wait for the perfect social media post rather than getting stuck into and learning from the process. Posting frequently on social media is cheap and free but it can be slow to build up a following.

Make an offer

Think of an offer that if successful will bring in so many customers that it would almost scare you. Make it actually worth the time for someone to stop, see and take action. Some offers that work are: birthday special, group table offer with value added items, large giveaways.

Advertise

Use paid advertising on Facebook and Instagram. Use Youtube if have video content. Consider community groups on Facebook, many local groups allow free advertising on certain days. Test and adapt.

INFLUENCING & TARGETING



Get influencing

Consider influencers in the local community, microinfluencers with over 2K following tend to work independently and are cheaper. Influencers within the range of 5-10K or above tend to work with agencies and can be more expensive. Consider your demographic and reach out with a tempting pitch. Don't forget the influence of your staff – rope them in to posting and sharing if you can.



Build a database

The follow up process is key. Your goal is to build your database of names, emails and phone numbers of preferably local people. This will allow you to run weekly/monthly offers and specials targeted at those 'fans' who have shown interest in the past. Once you have an abundance of leads, bookings and people visiting it is crucial to get them to spend more and more often, if possible.



Retarget regularly

Retarget them regularly. Be clear about your brand identity. Make sure they know who you are, what you serve, why you love what you do and most importantly why they should come and visit again.



Train staff well

Train staff w to always offer starters, desserts and drinks and point out specials and interesting items on the menu. They need to engage with the customer and pick up on any uncertainty or wavering over whether to order that extra dish or not.

REDUCING NO SHOWS

Reduce no-shows and give yourself time to book in those last-minute customers:

1 Confirmation of booking

Where possible send a confirmation email or text with their booking with a polite ask to call to cancel if they need to.

2 Reminders of booking

Remind them close to the date of their booking via email or text and options if they need to cancel or change their booking.

3 Clear cancel options

Clear guidelines and options on the website to change or cancel a booking if required. Make it as easy as possible to call you.

RETAINING CUSTOMERS



Create a personalised offer

Create offers for people based on how many times they have visited. Not a loyalty card but personalised emails, texts, or even hand-written notes alongside paid advertising. Use your list of customers and carefully analyse visit frequency to ensure targeting the right ads and offers to the right people at the right times.



Be part of the community

Link up with local events such as the local rugby club, winter dog walk, gin tasting or season events such as wreath making to attract customers in. Consider a frequent newsletter containing local community information and events or special occasions coming up that they may want to book for.

GUARDING YOUR REPUTATION



Responding to a crisis

Many mistakes that harm reputation are own goals, things that could have been foreseen and avoided. Also, very importantly, it is sometimes how a business responds to a crisis that decides if it comes out well or badly. Too many business leaders run for cover or pretend there is no problem too long, while quick remedial action reduces reputation risk.



Social media risk

Social media news can spread to many in minutes, so it is crucial to be quick to deal with things that go wrong. Also attention should be paid to regular risk management, watching for typical problems, which can involve staff issues, safety or regulatory concerns, or advertising mistakes, among other things.



Employment law

Clearly it is now a high legal risk, as well as obvious reputation risk, to be found to employ people on illegally low wages, people who have no legal right to work in the UK, victims of modern slavery, or even just buying from suppliers found to have done these things.



Standard for suppliers

Every business needs diligence about the standards by suppliers. Good media advisers can help in public communications, and legal concerns may have to be promptly addressed to assure the public and relevant authorities that the business is well run and can be trusted.



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