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9 Easy Marketing & Advertising Ideas★

During difficult times, businesses should not be decreasing their advertising and marketing budgets, but rather increasing it!

Now is your golden opportunity to get ahead of your fellow competitors. They are all probably looking to cut back and save on costs right now, which means you can push yourself to the front of the line for marketing and advertising:

Make use of your database

Send information like an e-newsletter or a printed newsletter with photos of yourself and your staff. Send a thank you card or a personalized hand-signed customer appreciation letter to your best customers, or a postcard at least every 21 days to contacts in your database. Leave a guest book or a fish bowl for dropping business cards next to your cash register, and encourage customers to leave their information. You can also collect email addresses via your own website. Make sure you ask permission to add them to your mailing list.

Be true to your plan

Create a marketing plan and include a monthly calendar of activities with upcoming events such as Father's Day, Secretaries' Week, Independence Day, etc. Include your monthly budget and deadline for these promotions, as well as who is responsible.

Invite customers to come in

Send a postcard or an invitation to announce your special events and promotions like a wine appreciation night, chef demo, or cooking classes. Involve your vendors in sharing your advertising and promotional expenses. They could provide you with co-op dollars to help defray costs.

Use your car to advertise

Have your restaurant name and logo professionally painted on the side of car as a moving billboard.

Call on everyone you know

Make a personal phone call to invite your friends, family, regular customers, and/or old business acquaintances to see how they are doing, and remind them of upcoming specials and promotions. Telephone calls are a great way to let your customers know that they are valued, and also a great reminder of your establishment.

Show your face around town

Build your business by networking and attending your local Chamber of Commerce, Rotary Club or local associations' meetings to meet potential customers. Check online to see what conventions are coming to your area.

Barter with your suppliers

Exchange services with your suppliers. For example, you can barter some of your printing costs in exchange for a few free meals.

Get other businesses involved

Do cross-promotions and co-op advertising with non-competitive businesses. For example, work with your local movie theater for a "Dinner and a Movie" promotion.

Free press

Take advantage of your local paper by sending them press releases, brochures or write an article to gain greater exposure. Or invite a local radio or TV host in for a free meal, and have him/her talk about your establishment on their show.

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The AIG Effect

The federal government's bailouts have wound up having a negative effect on hotels in Arizona and elsewhere, as the recipients of the bailout money cancel plans for retreats and conferences that could spark more public outrage. In making cancellations, companies increasingly cite the AIG backlash, and one manager said he believed the effect is a major factor behind the 27% drop in Arizona tourism revenue seen since last year.

— From AH&LA SmartBrief

Hotels Negotiate with Retailers to Stay

High-end hotels in Seattle and elsewhere that rely on steady rental income from shops and restaurants in retail spaces are turning to creative tactics to help their tenants stay put as times get tough. For some, that means offering rent discounts or allowing payments to be postponed, and one hospitality expert said he's seen lease renegotiations that offered rent reductions of 10% to 15%.

— From AH&LA SmartBrief

Key to Clinching Sales

Rhonda Abrams focused her USA TODAY column on strategies for making sales calls more successful. Among her tips: Believe you are doing your customer a service, understand how your product is unique and identify key prospects in a six-month plan of action. — Adapted from USA TODAY and AH&LA SmartBrief

Construction to Start on CityCenter Project – Vegas

MGM Mirage has made a \$200 million payment for its CityCenter project in Las Vegas. The payment will allow construction on the massive resort project to continue. Investment company Dubai World, which partnered with MGM Mirage on the project, warned that the payment was only a temporary fix for MGM's liquidity problems. — Adapted from The Wall St. Journal and AH&LA SmartBrief

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