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Year-round holiday marketing tips

The holiday season is a pretty big deal for pizzeria owners and operators. Customers can eat only so much turkey during the holidays and plenty would rather have a pizza delivered on New Year's Day.

As you know, pizza restaurants are usually very busy in the summertime and owners tend to delay their marketing campaign until the holidays. However, if you want to have a steady stream of new customers and keep your regular customers coming back, you really need to market your pizza operation all year long. A year-round effort will create a snowball effect, with new customers coming in all the time.

Here is a list of marketing tips that will put you in good shape for the holidays:

1. MARRY YOUR BRAND IDENTITY AND DESIGN

Your unique brand is vital to your pizzeria concept's success. There are hundreds of pizzerias out there and often you will find your marketing message gets lost in the crowd. Customers are overwhelmed with marketing messages today. You need to stand out if you want to get noticed.

October is an ideal time to put your promotional plan together, as it's important you send your customers information in advance, before the holidays. Every piece of marketing material should tell your brand story and promise. Be consistent with your message when it comes to your print materials, your brand, your logo and your unique selling proposition (see below), you should send and promote the same message throughout social media, newsletters, website and advertising campaigns. It's important to understand who your customers are and to build your brand around what they are interested in.

2. DEFINE YOUR USP

You need a way to differentiate your business from all others. It's essential you focus on what makes your pizzeria unique. Within your marketing message you should have what's called a unique selling proposition (USP). You don't need to spend a lot of money to have a USP that works. It should tell your clients why you are unique and better than the competition. For example, tell your customers you have the best and biggest pizzas on the block and that you're considered to be the number one place for fun holiday parties in town. Just keep in mind that positive, not negative, brand recognition contributes to customer loyalty and will draw new customers into your pizzeria.

3. HAVE AN EFFECTIVE WEBSITE

Many operations treat their websites as an afterthought. By now you should have a good-quality and mobile-friendly website. It must display the name of your pizzeria, logo, hours, contact information and other social media campaigns. Keep your website up to date and looking fresh all the time by adding high-quality photos of your newest pizzas, prices, positive reviews and testimonials and media articles. If you can afford it, consider hiring a graphic designer to put a holiday spin on the website.

4. ENGAGE CUSTOMERS ON SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS

Social media marketing strategies are a proven force in today's world. It's the most effective way to be in front your customers and to engage them all the time. Consumers use social media constantly to search for new food and retail business opportunities. These platforms also provide a great opportunity to advertise your pizzeria brand, location, menus and special events in creative

and unique ways. Use Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Pinterest to describe your pizza ingredients and menu. Post short, concise and accurate descriptions and use excellent and colourful photos. Don't forget to use your email newsletter or blog as a way to feature your new pizzas for the holidays or to share special discounts.

5. ASK CUSTOMERS FOR REVIEWS

Ask happy customers for reviews. There is no better way to ask for, and get, reviews than to do it in person. Word of mouth is the number 1 motivation for a visit to a pizzeria operation, and we all know the power of great reviews.

A National Restaurant Association study says more than 60 per cent of consumers say online reviews factor into their buying and dining decisions. Make sure you provide an easy way for them to give you a good review. For example, print a note on every receipt asking for a review, have your staff suggest it or use testimonials on your website or social media pages.

6. BE UNIQUE

Avoid copying your competition's message. Try to differentiate your business from everyone else. Think of what makes your pizzeria unique and what makes you stand out from the competition. Pay attention to what your competitors are doing around you and build a strong marketing plan and strategy to win new market share. One last tip: "local" is the new unique. •

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