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Start mastering your marketing with a plan

Having a marketing plan for your restaurant is essential. You probably know a lot about what is happening around your pizzeria, what your competition is up to, general trends in demographics and the community you service. Your marketing plan allows you to put all the information you have gathered into a systematic plan of action you and your staff can follow.

Here are some key tips to keep in mind when developing or updating the marketing plan for your pizzeria.

1. KNOW YOUR MARKET, CUSTOMERS AND COMPETITION

It is important to know where your business comes from. Is it the local community, children from nearby schools or half the city? Get postal codes from customers and information that enables you to categorize them. Are they singles looking for home meal solutions or families with a weekly pizza night? You will want to market differently to these different groups.

And then there is your competition. Systematically collect information about competing businesses and chart it for easy comparison with your restaurant, so you can see where you have a competitive advantage or where your competition may be doing better. Compare hours of operation, prices, menu selections, menu specials and events they might have or hold.

2. DETERMINE THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAYS TO ADVERTISE

You need to advertise and promote if you want to get more customers into your restaurant. There are many advertising solutions – print, radio, TV, and digital – but which you choose depends on your budget.

As you know, social media should also be an integral part of your marketing plan. It's an ideal way to connect with your customers, vendors, friends and family members through interactive communication, promotion, polls and reviews. Consider using sites like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Yelp and Google+, which are among the most popular social networking sites. They are also *free*. You should also have a good website containing your hours, address, telephone number, menu, email address, gift cards or certificates, and testimonials.

3. IDENTIFY PRICE POINTS IN YOUR MENU ITEMS

Some things on your menu will have price points associated with them. At a certain price your customers will buy, but above that point they won't. Try to identify what these are for, say, your salad offerings, gourmet pizzas or even your basic slice offerings. Selling these products at just below the price points can help you maximize both the number of sales and your revenue from those sales. Price too high and you might not sell enough to cover your basic costs! Price too low and you might not make enough revenue to cover the costs of producing the item.

4. DEVELOP STRATEGIES TO 'UPSELL' YOUR PRODUCTS

Having your staff consistently offer a special gourmet pizza to customers for a little more money can help boost your sales. Ensuring all your patrons have a drink with their meal is another way to help sell more to your existing customers – the ones who have already decided they want to buy what you have to offer.

Take a look at your pizzeria's menu items, identify other opportunities to upsell and make sure you and your staff are fully versed in making these "upsells" happen.

5. EVALUATE YOUR PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIP AFFILIATIONS

People are likely to do business with those they are familiar with. Joining your local chamber of commerce can help you meet with local business owners, potential customers and the community at large. Whatever professional associations you find to help you network, make sure that as part of your marketing plan you evaluate how well they help you to promote your pizzeria.

6. DECIDE HOW YOU MIGHT ATTRACT ADDITIONAL CUSTOMERS

You've done your research well and understand your current customer base, but are there other related groups not dining with you when they could be? Say you are big with the office crowd nearby for lunches, but you are only getting the staff and not the managers. Develop menu items and market them to the more professional and executive crowd.

Never stop trying to improve your marketing. It is so essential to the growth of your business and nothing aids it more than a good plan to take what you know and can do and put your best foot forward. •

Diane Chiasson, FCSI, president of Chiasson Consultants Inc., has been helping foodservice, hospitality and retail operators increase sales for over 25 years by providing innovative and revenue-increasing food-service and retail merchandising programs, interior design, branding, menu engineering, marketing and promotional campaigns and much more. Contact her at 416-926-1338, toll-free at 1-888-926-6655 or chiasson@chiassonconsultants.com, or visit www.chiassonconsultants.com