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Top 5 Ways to Connect with your Guests through Marketing

This article dives into why restaurants shouldn't '86' marketing efforts during COVID-19 and strategies for how to succeed in connecting with your guests.

It is no surprise to anyone that the coronavirus pandemic is having a massive impact on almost every business. The restaurant and foodservice industry is among one of the hardest hit overall.

With in-person promotional opportunities being extremely limited right now it's hard to figure out how to promote your operation in a time when consumers are in constant conflict between their desire to treat themselves to their favorite restaurant dishes and their fear of staying safe during this COVID crisis. However, marketing is essential for restaurant operators to stay top of mind and survive this crisis. Here are some ideas to help you engage with customers online, boost awareness around your takeout and delivery offerings, and keep business going strong during this unprecedented time.

Communication is Key:

Tell your customers that you're open (for takeout, delivery, or your dining room) on social media, over email, on your phone recording, on your website, with door or street signage – anywhere and everywhere someone may look. Make sure to share your hours of operations, updated menu, updated take out options ([alcohol is a big one](#)) and be SURE to share what type of safety precautions you are taking.

Americans remain anxious – with slightly more than half of people feeling very concerned about their own personal health according to [Dataessential](#). Show your customers that you're taking extra steps to keep them safe.

Social Media and Technology Initiatives:

For the most part the traditional social media “rules” should be thrown out the window right now. We are in an unprecedented situation – which requires an approach that is outside the norm. Meaning, post more than X number a times of day if you want to, don't overly edit your videos or put beautiful filters on everything. Make it real, make it authentic, and try to make it fun. Here are some ideas:

Show and Tell –

Connect with you customers by taking them behind the scenes where all the magic happens. Highlight your chef cooking up a new recipe and then share that recipe for those who may want to try it at home. Feature that goofy BOH worker who can always seem to bring energy and smiles to

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the faces of your hardworking employees. Share stories from your restaurant owner on how he or she is truthfully coping and dealing with the stresses and fear of the unknown. Now more than ever before people want to connect and what better way than to bring them inside your operation. Make sure as you are highlighting in BOH visuals, your staff is shown in protective gear so you can reiterate your restaurant operations is abiding by all safety precautions.

Host a Social Media Contest –

Encourage customers who order from you to tag you in a post to be entered to win prizes or a free meal. The more creative the post the better to really liven up your Instagram feed!

Create your own Personal Zoom Background –

Do you have a famous wall in your restaurant where customers tend to take pictures, a drink that you're known for, or maybe a triple cheeseburger patty made of French fries and pickles (I'm stretching here!) that is a customer favorite? Give your customers a Zoom image they can use as a background on their virtual happy hours and let the other Zoom attendees ask where the heck they are!

Special Touches on Delivery or Take-Out:

Delivery and take out is difficult when you're building or maintaining your restaurant brand because let's face it, personal touch is almost impossible when you aren't face to face. Here are some special ways to make your customers feel the love when they open up that bag on their kitchen table and ensure they'll come back over and over again:

- ❖ Throw in a gift card they can use for themselves the next time around or donate to local hospitals or frontline workers.
- ❖ If they order a kid's meal throw in a coloring book or a small toy.
- ❖ Include a handwritten "thank you" note from one of your employees or better yet the restaurant owner.

Add some Flare to your FOH Employees

Is your dining room or patio open for business but government guidelines require your customer facing employees to wear a mask at all times? Get customized masks for your employees that have your logo on the front. Put a sign out front that advertises your daily specials, includes a joke, or even some positive words of encouragement that we will all get through these times. It's the first and last thing consumers will see and potentially remember when it's time to choose where they want dine for their next adventure out.

Revisit and Optimize your Online Presence

With the world of takeout and delivery now being a primary way to drive revenue, now is the time to make sure that consumers can easily find you online. Do not leave it to chance that search engines will automatically list your website when a search is conducted. 92% of consumers will pick a business on the [first page of local search results](#) and 60% of users click on one of the top three search results; which means it is extremely important that your restaurant's website comes up on top when consumers conduct a search.

How? By increasing your Search Engine Optimization or SEO. And great news – it's free to do! All major search engines rank listings based on its relevance to users. Does your restaurant appear when you Google "food near me"? This just happens to be one of the most search terms on the web today. These search engine companies want to keep their users by providing the best search results possible. In order to do that, they scan websites for certain key words and topics, rewarding the sites with the clearest messaging with the highest rankings.

The whole idea of SEO and how to compete in this website competition can feel pretty intimidating especially in unimaginable times like these. [Click here for our Top 8 Tips](#) to get an immediate boost in your SEO ranking.

We hope these tips provide helpful inspiration to you and your team. You can find all the latest industry data and tips for best practices on our [Compeat COVID-19 resource page](#).

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