

WHAT'S THE RECIPE?

RESTAURANT OWNERS BRING THEIR MARKETING TIPS TO THE TABLE

By Skye Macbroom

Every restaurant owner understands the importance of marketing. But finding enough time in the day to get it all done, well that's a different story. What's the most important marketing project on which to spend your time and money?

Andy Pforzheimer is the owner of Barcelona, www.barcelonawinebar.com, an award-winning Spanish tapas restaurant group and wine bar with six Connecticut locations. Zagat® has them listed as one of "America's Top Restaurants." Pforzheimer says, "We believe in 'grass roots' marketing. I tell my managers that 4% of our marketing efforts go into getting first time visitors in the door. 96% of our marketing efforts target our repeat customers."

Keep It Fresh

If you want to leave your guests craving more, tease their palates with surprising new flavors and fresh seasonal offerings. You want them to have an insatiable appetite for next time. Barcelona has a colorful, exciting website which showcases culinary and educational staff trips. You get the sense that they are trotting the globe, searching for fresh new ingredients and recipes that they, in turn, bring home to feature on the website.

A good website is a must for any reputable restaurant, but high-tech, expensive websites with movement, sound, video, and Flash are generally unnecessary. Flash websites may take a long time to upload and cannot be viewed on PDA's or iPhones – a turn off for many web viewers. The current e-movement is going in the direction of basic, easy-to-navigate sites that are sophisticated and clean due to the simple nature of their design.

Here's what every website needs:

Homepage: Include photography of décor, atmosphere, and happy, outgoing patrons.

Menu: Keep it fresh and updated frequently with new seasonal offerings and tons of pictures.

About Us: Have a concise mission statement and core business philosophy.

Bios: for the owner, general manager, and chef

Press Page: Include media clippings, food review blogs, and positive feedback from comment cards.

Contact Us: with directions, reservations, and a customer comment section

Neighborhood Marketing

Jeff Horton is the General Manager of Scoozzi, www.scoozzi.com, a Northern Italian mecca in

the heart of downtown New Haven, Connecticut that has been a successful business for over twenty years, despite the fierce competition in a city with over a thousand restaurants. Zagat® calls Scoozzi Trattoria and Wine Bar a "cool bistro" and an "old faithful" with "wonderful garden dining."

Scoozzi also has a community sense of marketing, and Horton keeps in touch with neighbors and local merchants to share ideas and stay visible. Horton personally visits local hotels to build relationships and stock the hotels with fresh new menus. Keeping your finger on the pulse of the neighborhood is important when figuring out how to differentiate yourself in a competitive environment.

Scoozzi is known for its unique entrance – a street level elevator, boldly emblazoned with a brightly lit sign and a vibrant red lobby. The elevator transports guests into the restaurant below. Having a memorable aspect to the restaurant makes people say, "Let's go to Scoozzi, you know, the red elevator restaurant."

Be the Talk of the Town

Stay on top of what people are saying about your restaurant. Set up a Google Alert, www.google.com/alerts, with your name, the restaurant's name, and your chef's name. For bonus points, also add your competition.

Search Engine Optimization: Plaster your name on as many food sites as you can, i.e. www.chow.com and www.restaurant.com. Try sites that offer free business listings such as local newspapers, TV stations, chambers of commerce, and civic organizations.

Post your menu offerings and special events on blogs.

Reaching out to your patrons via monthly or quarterly eNewsletters is an easy, cost-effective, and time-efficient way to market your restaurant. Scoozzi's monthly eNewsletter reaches almost 5,000 patrons. To build their database of names, each month they hold a drawing for \$50. Barcelona gathers email addresses on their comment cards that are redeemable for a free drink.

"If I don't have anything super interesting to say in my newsletter this month, or even next month... then guess what? I don't send it out. I just wait until I have accumulated enough good articles. I don't want to abuse the list. We have almost 7,000 email addresses and no 'unsubscribes.' I also don't advertise in my newsletters. We're not pushy, or boring," says Pforzheimer.

eNewsletter Tips

Be short and sweet, and don't exceed 1,500 words or you'll bore readers.

Use a reputable email company like Emma or Constant Contact so you can track your open rates and so readers feel confident using a secure program.

"Grass Roots"

What is the most important, most sought after, hard to achieve, yet totally free marketing tactic out there? Building your reputation and encouraging word-of-mouth referrals.

Richard Friedberg is the owner of Allen & Delancey, www.allenanddelancey.net, a romantic Lower East Side hideaway that is one of the hottest restaurants in New York City. Friedberg's restaurant has been critically acclaimed by the New York Times and rated the Best New Restaurant in Time Out New York for 2008. His second establishment, Monteverde Restaurant, www.monteverderestaurant.com, is an award-winning 29-acre country estate, inn, spa and restaurant in the Hudson Valley. It is one of the top restaurants in Westchester, New York and receives oodles of accolades in the press.

Clearly, Friedberg knows what he's doing. "The atmosphere and food must be synergistic to push through the marketing concepts," he explains. "Bloggers are important today, just as important as the food writers that cover us. You have to deliver good customer service and meals, each and every night. Monteverde and Allen & Delancey are both very warm, personal and inviting. We don't push our diners out the door. We encourage them to linger, enjoy, savor. Whether it's sipping a pre-dinner cocktail in the Lower East side, or watching the boats on the Hudson River and dancing under the stars, we want you to feel like you are escaping to another world."

"Most importantly, I think that owning a restaurant is a very creative job. It's not like any other type of business. Getting into the top publications is very important, but so are word-of-mouth referrals. Marketing a successful restaurant is not an easy 'cut and dry' task. Think of Leonardo da Vinci, he didn't simply read 'How to Paint' tips. He was also very creative, and followed his gut. And he worked really, really hard."

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