

RESOLUTION #4: Turn Slow Time into Show Time

WHY?

“The best place to get new business, is from existing customers.” It’s a basic business tactic, and one that smart restaurateurs are implementing by offering more than just meals. On a weekend afternoon between day parts, consider hosting a series of cooking classes with your chef. Or, ask your customers to help you select the best wines for the upcoming spring menu with a tasting and food pairing event. You could even team up with a local forager and head out this May to hunt for ramps, fiddlehead ferns, or morels and come back to the restaurant to prepare the bounty. These events will also encourage “bonding” between your restaurant and your staff, which is a new trend that’s emerging as customers seek authenticity and transparency in the businesses they buy from (or restaurants they eat at). Plus, you are offering a unique, insider experience and customers will gladly pay for it. On slow weekday nights, be creative and come up with events and activities to turn dinner into an event. Restaurant consultant Andrew Freeman cites “Promoting Slow Nights” as a top marketing strategy for 2012. Put yourself in your customers’ shoes. What would make you go out on a Monday night?

HOW:

- 1 Survey your customers and ask if you held a series of cooking classes, what would they like to learn?
- 2 Use your social media presence to entice your followers to come down to your restaurant during slow times. Describe the smell of your house-made Italian wedding soup simmering in the kitchen. Talk up a drink special. You could even announce a surprise offer once a week in real-time on Twitter or Facebook: “From seven till eight, stop by for a complimentary cup of our just-made soup...our treat to you on this freezing Tuesday night!”
- 3 Team up with a local musician and offer live music, or even host an open-mic night. Contact local non-profits and invite them to hold their evening meetings at your restaurant, offer to donate a small percentage of their bill back to their charity.

RESOLUTION #5: Maximize Your Space

WHY?

Just like resolution #4, 2012 is the year to make the most of what you already have. Think of the opportunities waiting to be created in your own backyard, literally. Could you turn part of your parking lot into a beer garden in the summer months, making a weekly summerfest beer event on a slow weekday evening? International restaurant consultants Baum + Whitman predict that beer gardens will “bloom around the country” in 2012. And so will actual gardens. In fact, over 31% of chefs surveyed said they already have a vegetable or herb garden outdoors or on the rooftop in the 2012 NRA What’s Hot Chef Survey. Also analyze how you could maximize your interior space: Could you host bridal or baby showers on weekends between day parts? Is it worth partitioning off parts of your restaurant to create exclusive, private dining areas?

HOW:

- 1 Expanding or repurposing space requires a bit of number crunching. First, estimate how much your project would cost, like an outdoor patio. Think about the zoning permits, the demolition if necessary, the contractors, new furniture, lighting, and potential additional staff. Then, estimate your check averages for about 4-5 warm weather months. Most likely, expanding outdoors is a profitable option!
- 2 Some restaurants are creating small retail zones within their restaurants: Could you do this? What would you sell? Are there any house-made sauces or oils you could bottle?
- 3 Consider setting up a coffee counter for serious morning and mid-day profits. Ask your Account Manager to set up a meeting for you with the Maines Beverage Team.

Resolve to Make 2012 a Success



These On-Trend Operational Tactics Can Help

If you're like most independent restaurant operators, one New Year's resolution always makes the list: Increase business! While your goal of success is perennial, the tactics you use to boost your bottom line should change based on the latest trends in our industry. We've put together a list of strategic resolutions that capitalize on current customer desires and market opportunities; just what you need to start 2012 off right.

RESOLUTION #1: Partner with Non-Profits

WHY?

Not only is it the right thing to do, but integrating charitable activity into your operation will pay off for your bottom line. That's not something to feel guilty about, it's the principal of "shared value" according to an article in the Harvard Business Journal by Michael Porter and Mark Kramer. They argue that your charitable efforts will be more effective when you stand to benefit as much as society. You will benefit when you devote time and effort to local charitable causes: Over half of people surveyed by the National Restaurant Organization said they will choose your restaurant over another depending on how committed you are to local, charitable causes. Here, you have an edge on the chains as an independent operator. You have the operational flexibility to respond immediately to a local crisis such as hosting a benefit for a family whose house has burnt down, or donating a week of free takeout meals to a family who lost a young child. Remember, your good deeds should never go unnoticed – this is the "shared value" concept. It's important that you let the public know what you're doing whether it's through photos of an event uploaded to your restaurant's Facebook page or a press release about the start of a new food pantry program.

HOW:

- 1 Donate surplus inventory to a local food pantry. Visit www.SecondHarvest.org to find one near you.
- 2 Stay tuned into the local news so that you can respond to any crises quickly.
- 3 Invite your customers to nominate local charities to support (this is essential: customers want you to listen to their needs and ideas, now more than ever). From that list, select a different charity to support each month. Consider offering members of the "winning" charity a \$5 gift certificate to use at your restaurant.
- 4 Ask your bartender to get creative and concoct a special drink for the charity of the month, such as a Berry Pink Pomtini for a local breast cancer organization. Donate a percentage of the profits from the drink to the local cause.



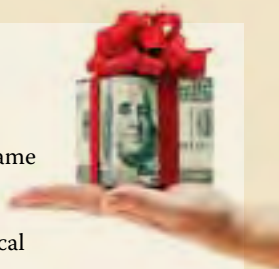
RESTAURANTS MAKING A DIFFERENCE

- \$3 billion in charitable contributions came from those in the restaurant industry
- 92% of restaurant operators support local organizations and charities
- 73% made donations for hunger relief

THE CHARITY/RETENTION CONNECTION

Doing good doesn't just benefit your restaurant with increased customer traffic, chances are you'll experience better employee retention. 88% of restaurants surveyed said that their charitable activities had a positive impact on the morale of their employees and 33% reported improved employee retention.

Source: Dallas-based research firm People Report.



RESOLUTION #2: Smarten Up Your Marketing with Smartphone Apps

WHY?

Approximately four out of every ten Americans are smartphone users according to the latest data from Neilson. A smartphone packs the power of a computer, phone, internet browser, media player, and more into a palm-size device. People are using mobile applications on their smartphones to decide where to eat, to make reservations, and even to place orders. In fact, "smartphone apps for consumers" was named the top technology trend in the 2012 NRA What's Hot Chef Survey. Here are a few simple steps to ensure you're on the radar of the smartphone users near you!

HOW:

- 1 Visit the following websites where customers are using apps to access your restaurant: Yelp.com, UrbanSpoon.com, Google.com/places. (There are many more, but these three will get you started.) Search for your restaurant, and if you don't see it, you can add it to the listings for free.
- 2 Once someone finds your restaurant through one of these apps, make sure your website loads correctly when a smartphone user accesses it on their device. Ask a website professional to optimize your website for mobile viewing, this will include everything from removing large photos to shortening text.
- 3 Offer a way for customers to book reservations online, through an ERB (Electronic Booking System). Open Table is one of the most popular ERBs, and their service allows your restaurant to take reservations through your website as well as from their website www.opentable.com. Many smartphone users have downloaded the Open Table app and will specifically choose restaurants based on whether or not they use the Open Table app.



RESOLUTION #3: Consider a Food Truck or a Pop-Up Restaurant

WHY?

Because chances are, your competitors haven't yet. The food truck and pop-up restaurant trend is booming in the big cities, but is slower to catch on in smaller towns. But the demand is there: A September 2011 report from the National Restaurant Association found that 59% of Americans say they would like to visit a food truck if their favorite restaurant offered one. The concept of a food truck or a pop-up restaurant is to bring your restaurant to customers, instead of having them come to you. This is especially enticing if your restaurant is in a suburban area: Why let the downtown restaurants get all the lunchtime crowds? You could set up a pop-up restaurant in the lobby of an office high-rise (with permission of course), or make three daily stops in your food truck between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m.

HOW:

- 1 If you have a catering van, consider turning it into a food truck. Check with your municipality to see what permits you will need. Then, contact a few local downtown businesses and let them know when your food truck will be nearby!
- 2 Food truck and pop-up restaurant fare takes a cue from street food: It should be easy to eat, quickly prepared, and relatively filling. However, you can charge a higher price point than a conventional street vendor because you're not serving simple hot dogs and nachos.
- 3 Even if a food truck or pop-up place isn't on your agenda in 2012, at least focus on building up your social media presence because if you decided to set up shop in the future, Facebook and Twitter will be the main tools you'll use to alert people of your whereabouts.

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