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Give and You Shall Receive



5 Ways that a Spirit of Giving can Lift Restaurant Revenues

The holidays are characterized by a spirit of generosity and there are numerous ways that restaurants can tap into that mood to boost profits and elevate customers' spirits. Below is your guide to some of the easiest gift-and-giving-related tactics to improve your profits and visibility this holiday season.



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1 Gift cards increase profits.

Consider gift cards to be your restaurant's most obvious holiday no-brainer. They're a cost-effective way to get new people through your door and your customers will appreciate being offered an easy gift solution. Plus, gift cards are a fantastic restaurant revenue-generator. According to GRI Financial Services, approximately 61% of card holders spend an average of \$29 more than the value of the gift card. Even better, Consumer Affairs reports that more than 10% of gift cards are never used. That's basically free money. Here are few tips to get you started:

- Don't know how to begin offering gift cards? Just ask your Maines representative. They have the knowledge to steer you toward an easy-to-use, cost-effective gift card system for your restaurant. There is most likely a pre-packaged system available that suits your needs, so you'll be able to get your gift card program up and running in ten minutes or less, so you can start processing gift cards immediately. Many of these systems even provide remote access, 24/7 live phone support and don't require swipe fees, percentage charges or signing a contract.
- Advertise gift cards on your table tops, so guests are reminded throughout their stay to consider making a card purchase, rather than just passing by a poster and forgetting about it. Also, give customers an additional reminder by including a message about gift cards at their bottom of their guest check.
- Offer specials such as five free gift certificate dollars when customers purchase \$25. Or, give guests who buy gift cards a little something extra on the spot, such as a free appetizer, drink or desert.



2 Gift-worthy merchandise is free advertising.

According to Dr. Patti Shock, professor of hospitality administration at the University of Nevada, restaurants sell more than 700 million t-shirts each year. Producing and selling items that can be given as gifts is a great way to increase your profits in the giving season. Print up t-shirts, hats and coffee mugs, or glassware with your logo and sell them in your restaurant to boost revenues over the holidays. Or consider jarring and labeling one of your signature sauces, dressings, salsas or spice rubs. You could even put together a cookbook with mouth-watering photographs of your food. (Just be careful not to give away any secrets!)



Selling these items not only makes your restaurant extra money. It also provides free advertising to potential customers who might have not previously visited your restaurant. Plus, if a person is a loyal enough fan of your restaurant to purchase these items as gifts, you can bet they'll be giving a good referral along with that gift.

You can display merchandise in your restaurant display case or set up a table in house during the holidays, but if you have a website, you should also be selling your items and gift cards online since so many people are doing their shopping via the world wide web. E-commerce is easy to set up, especially if you already have a website. Or, another idea you can try is to reach out to local retailers and grocers to see if they would be interested in selling your items or food products in their stores.

3 Give guests a good time and increase traffic.

Holiday events and promotions can make your restaurant an extra fun place to be during the holidays. A visit from Santa or a caroling staff can give your guests a good time, or you can try some of these more unique events:

- Hold an Ugly Holiday Sweater (UHS) event where everyone who dines at your restaurant wearing a UHS receives a free item or discount. Give a grand prize for the most hideous sweater.
- "A Dickens of a Christmas" is a fun, classic treat for families that doesn't detract from your staff's time. Have servers and hosts dress up as characters from Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. You'll get bonus points if some of them actually perform - and they'll most likely receive extra tips!
- Hold an "Every Time a Bell Rings" promotion. Once per dinner service, preferably when you are most busy, ring a loud bell and draw a table number. That table will receive a prize. Or place colored gift tags under one chair per table, and the person sitting at the chosen table who has the tag under their chair wins a gift card.
- Feature holiday cooking demonstrations during slow times in your restaurants to let your chef showcase his or her twists on traditional holiday dishes. Take videos of these demonstrations and post online.



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4 Give thanks to your best customers to keep their business.

Zero Millions Entrepreneurship Resource reports that 68% of customers will not continue to return to your restaurant if they feel unappreciated. It costs between five and eight times more to gain a new customer than to keep an existing customer, so it's in your best interest to show your best customers that you value their business. Wrap up a collection of thank you gifts and give them out to frequent customers who visit during the holidays. Or start collecting addresses on comment cards and mail customers a Christmas card with a thank you message. Better yet? Mail them a thank you card at Thanksgiving to improve your chances of winning their holiday party, catering and gift card business.

5 Give back to your community and receive more guests.

The holidays are a great time to raise money for charity because people are in a money-spending mode and embracing a spirit of giving. Charitable efforts within your restaurant can help to increase restaurant traffic, improve your image, and provide valuable public relations opportunities. The National Restaurant Association reports that 57% of adults are basing their decision of where to dine out on how much a restaurant supports charitable and sustainable efforts. So pick a cause you believe in and raise some funds - and awareness of your restaurant.

There are lots of ways to channel the power of charity. You can hold a fund-raising event, match customer donations, devote the proceeds from special menu items to your charity, or have a donation wall where guests can donate and write their name on a holiday card to be displayed in your restaurant. Be creative! But no matter how you decide to raise money, be sure to advertise your efforts with press releases in local papers, on your Facebook and Twitter pages, within your restaurant and on your website.



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