

# MAINESENSE

MAKING SENSE OF YOUR FOODSERVICE BUSINESS

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# Restaurant Resolutions for a Successful 2013

*If ever there was a good time to make some positive changes to your restaurant's operation, now is that time. Now is the time to kick things up a notch and really go after more business. If you're going to beat out the competition then you need to trim down, work harder, and be smarter. Inside this issue of Mainesense are 25 resolutions to help you get there.*



## Marketing

- 1 Build a good website** – Every visitor to your website should have easy access to basic information about your restaurant such as directions, phone number and menu. In addition, you want to build a brand. Post pictures of your food and your dining room, update often with promotions and events.
- 2 Stop being afraid of Yelp** – Yes, a bad review by an influential Yelper can be disastrous for a restaurant. But instead of trying to limit Yelp you need to engage. Respond to bad reviews, reward good ones, and take control.
- 3 Get new menus** – Drop the dollar signs, highlight the good margin stuff, and put your best sellers in the middle of the list – all proven ways to get your customers buying your bread-and-butter entrees.
- 4 Stop pretending social media doesn't matter** – Despite the ongoing rise of social media many restaurants have mostly ignored the trend, preferring to engage customers in more traditional ways. Well, the time has come to engage using social media. The investment is small, the potential gains are big, and as adoption continues to increase so will the cost of not participating.
- 5 Get your food out of the house** – Whether you cater events, start delivering your entrees, hold exclusive off-site events, or participate in food festivals, your food needs to leave the house to be seen and recognized.
- 6 Source locally** – Local food was one of the hottest trends of 2012, and there's no reason to believe it won't be hot again in 2013. Local food is great for marketing because when you talk about partnering with other local businesses to bring local food to your tables you become a part of the community, and the word-of-mouth this generates is invaluable.
- 7 Claim your Google places page** – It's easy to do, free of charge, and gives you an automatic presence every time someone searches for restaurants in your area. All you have to do is enter your business address and then watch out for the mailer Google sends you. Enter the confirmation code and your business is now activated.
- 8 Raffle for charity** – Everybody loves a raffle, but you probably haven't done one in your restaurant because you're not sure why you would donate to people who are paying to eat there anyway. This is why: you collect every single email address in the room when they enter the raffle. Now you have a way to entice all those customers back over and over.
- 9 Hold an exclusive event** – Regular customers love nothing more than feeling special, and nothing will make them feel more special than an exclusive event at your restaurant. Set up a prix fixe menu, throw together some new dishes, and set aside a slow Tuesday night to really impress your biggest fans.
- 10 Host live music** – from a single piano or singer/songwriter to a full-on rock band, every restaurant can use some type of live entertainment. If you're just trying to improve the ambience then run some drink or food specials to coincide with the live act and turn it into a regular event.



## Management

- 11 Get a handle on inventory shrink** – Food product is one of your biggest expenses, and it can be easy for some to go missing. Sometimes this is unintentional and other times it is very intentional. Either way you're losing money. Start with a good inventory system and then put some checks on employee misuse like clear trash bags (so you can see what's getting thrown away), ban backpacks and other personal baggage from your kitchen, and train staff to minimize waste.
- 12 Stop serving dishes that don't sell** – It can be easy to fall into the trap of adding more and more variety to your menu just for the sake of variety. The problem is, if a dish isn't moving then it's costing you money to buy those ingredients and store them. Go through your sales numbers regularly and ax anything that isn't turning over quickly enough. Printing new menus is a much less expensive effort.
- 13 Add an over-the-top entrée** – Menu pricing is all relative. Things are only as expensive as the next item on the list, so why not give your customers something to compare against – something so over-the-top expensive that everything else on your menu will seem affordable by comparison. Bonus points for putting your highest margin items right next to the expensive one!
- 14 Train employees to make you more money** – Anybody can write down an order and bring out drinks and food at the appropriate times. It takes a true server to be able to connect with customers and recommend a bottle of wine or sell a few specials. Ongoing training will not only help your servers raise check averages but will also turn them into money machines for your business as well.
- 15 Clean up your restroom** – There's no denying it: customers are judging you by your bathroom. If it's shabby or dirty then they wonder if other places they can't see (like the kitchen) looks the same. Send a strong message when your customers visit the restroom: show them the tight ship you run by taking care of the details behind the bathroom door.
- 16 Start managing portion control** – A simple side like mashed potatoes doesn't seem like a big deal at first glance – just whip up a large batch and serve them till they're gone (or they go bad) – but for every extra ounce you put on a plate you're losing money. Using portion control tools like scales and sized ladles will help your busy staff avoid overserving, and help you reduce leftovers.
- 17 Actually sell desserts** – It's far too easy for full customers to turn down a server who walks up to the table, check in hand, and asks "Did you save any room for dessert?" There's good money to be made in dessert sales, especially if you know how to sell them. Start by making desserts small and very affordable, thereby removing the "I'm too full" excuse. Next, make real models of your desserts for display. Being able to see desserts rather than imagine them has an enormous effect on the decision making process.
- 18 Stop losing business to allergies** – According to a study by AllergyEats.com, accommodating people with food allergies could boost business by as much as 9%. This is because if one person has an allergy in a group of people deciding where to eat, everyone will change their mind according to which restaurant can accommodate the allergy. This "veto vote" means you're losing a lot of business.
- 19 Shrink portion sizes** – Smaller portions are all the rage since the Great Recession hit the American economy. That's because a smaller portion means less cost to both you and your customer. And in an increasingly health-conscious world, smaller portions mean you can still use decadent ingredients without blowing up calorie totals.

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## Energy Efficiency

**20** **Set equipment schedules** – Powering up restaurant equipment puts a huge load on your gas and electric meters all at the same time – and that costs you more money than it should. Create power up and power down schedules that space out your usage and try to set them for off-peak hours when rates are cheaper.

**21** **Stop thawing meat with running water** – It's a common practice in many restaurants, and if your kitchen is using hot running water to thaw meat then you're throwing dollars down the drain. Create a thawing schedule for every day of operation and see that your staff sticks to it. Sticking frozen product in the refrigerator 8 hours before the dinner rush is so much cheaper (and safer) than sticking it in the sink an hour beforehand.

**22** **Starve the dishwasher beast** – Commercial dishwashers are energy hogs, pure and simple, but that doesn't mean you can't at least cut down their usage. Start by washing only full racks of pre-rinsed dishes. Next check the water pressure in the unit against the manufacturer recommendation. If it's more then cut it down to save water. Finally, turn off booster and tank heaters at the end of the night to save energy.

**23** **Replace refrigerator door gaskets** – Cracked, compressed, and worn door gaskets on refrigeration units are costing you money! That's because cold air is escaping the unit through these old, worn-out gaskets. Even worse, there's a food safety threat involved: grime and dirt breed bacteria in those cracks and the temperatures of food product near the door may enter the danger zone.



**24** **Replace steam table pans** – If you use a steam table then you've probably got more pans than you know what to do with, and that's why the new year is a perfect opportunity to get rid of the ones that are costing you money. Over time the corners and edges of steam table pans bend and crumple from use. Every crack between the edge of the steam table and the lip of the pan is allowing heat to escape – and that means your table is working far harder than it should be.

**25** **Get a rebate when you upgrade equipment** – upgrading restaurant equipment is no small expense, but sooner or later it will be a necessary one for your business. As long as you are upgrading, you might as well maximize energy efficiency with an Energy-Star rated piece. That way you can save on monthly energy bills and also qualify for local, state, and federal tax rebates.



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