

Restaurantology

By Brian Carver & Quincy Egert

Restaurantology - res-tau-rant-ol-ogy [réstərəntóləjee , réstə rɒnt ól ləjee] *Noun*

Definition: The study of restaurants, their success, their failures, and their effective techniques

This article is not to tell anyone how to run their restaurant but is only my observations/thoughts from restaurants that we have seen that are having success. Just remember that everyone has a good location until the chains arrive in full force.

Data Collection - Data Collection must always be done. It is easier (and cheaper) to get someone to return and bring in a new person with them than to get some one new. Information needed currently is email address, mailing address, and cell phone for text messaging.

External Advertising - None should be done until you get your restaurant under control. Good service and customer collection. At this current time radio, tv, and newspaper are useless, especially for what they cost. If you must do external advertising make sure that it is always geared to the campaign and has the correct call to action to optimize the effect. Also, any external advertising needs to be tracked to measure the effectiveness of the advertising source so you are not left simply guessing if it is making you busy or not.

Restaurant Marketing Campaign

Step 1 - Define the Campaign - The campaign should run for a year for the customers to understand what message you are trying to get across. Remember you are trying to get the same message in front of a customer 16 times. It must be easy to understand with a short paragraph that can explain the campaign overview to the customer. The campaign must be UNIQUE in its own form. It can not be something that the chains are currently doing or a local restaurant down the street. However, if a chain is currently doing it you can expand upon other ideas to make it more aggressive and better. Ideally, it should be able to be explained in as little as one sentence. The offers throughout the campaign *can* change but the overall campaign message must stay the same. The campaign can be focused on getting known for a certain type of menu/food item (this can include price points, portions, or quality, or all of the above) or your restaurant's atmosphere.

Step 2 - Identify First Wave of Offers - These are offers that are going to promote certain food items or time slots. The offers should some how relate back to the campaign message. Offers do not always have to be discounts, but can be menu items grouped together in a way that is attractive to the customer.

Step 3 - Identify Marketing Distribution - Everything inside and outside of the restaurant should match the overall campaign. Some unique marketing/advertising things might present themselves and you need to always be ready to adapt. Also, always make sure that your marketing material is built fast and flexible to allow you to make adjustments that are needed.

NO MORE BEER COMPANIES BANNERS/POSTERS IN THE RESTAURANT. ARE THEY PAYING YOU FOR THE SPACE? THIS SENDS MIXED MESSAGES TO THE CUSTOMER

Items that should change for the campaign: (Blocking and Tackling)

Menu - Should be the leader in the look of all marketing materials. Should be tied into what the campaign is about. My belief is the menu should be priced based on great portions, health, and group pricing. Also, remember kids can be a deal breaker if they like nothing on the menu. Trendy is short term and substance is long term. Supply and Demand Marketing. Do you have a McRib? The McRib is recognized by

everyone as a McDonald's only item. They take full advantage of this by making it available for a limited time only.

Website - Should resemble the menu and also echo the campaign. A website is nothing more than a fancy brochure. It should be informative and easy to navigate. Not everything needs to be on the front page of the website. A cluttered front page is overwhelming to the customer and they won't receive the main message you want to send. Also, the customer needs to be able to sign up online so you can collect their data and be able to track where they came from. Do not offer online coupons with no expiration date – these can haunt you for a long time!

Table Tents - Resemble the Menu and feature main food item of the campaign. These should be used to promote food items or drinks, not your \$2.00 Miller Lite special on Tuesday that every other restaurant is currently running.

Punch Reward Cards - Should highlight the campaign and match menu. Just because a few people cheat does not mean that you should scrap an entire program that is increasing business. Punch card rewards kill swipe cards in profitability and give you much greater flexibility.

E-mails - Should always highlight the campaign and match website. The emails need to be sent twice a month. They should be sent out Tuesday – Thursday, around lunch time or 4 pm to get your restaurant fresh in the customer's mind. If promoting an event make sure it goes out 4 days prior. Also, if you include an offer, have it expire no later than two weeks. One week is better. This creates a sense of urgency in the customer, urging them to come to your restaurant asap instead of letting the offer slip their mind.

Server Buttons - Should always have "Ask the server about X (the campaign)." This will engage the customer with the staff.

Mailings - Should always highlight the campaign and match menu. Better to use the customers that have signed up for the list. You are looking at 20% - 30% return for customers that have already signed up.

Banners - Should always highlight the campaign and match menu. These are best used for mentioning event and time schedules. If you have a good place to rotate banners, then use it.

Bathroom Signs - You should mention the campaign in your restrooms. You have more of the customer's undivided attention here than anywhere. Focus on events and time schedules.

Posters - Should always highlight the campaign and match menu. Look to highlight what you want people to order or your most eye-catching items.

Coupon Books - Should always highlight the campaign and match menu. It is very easy to track the effectiveness of the coupon books. Remember that it does not have to always be discounts. Should have 3 offers: low, medium, and high pricing.

T-Shirts & Apparel – Why wouldn't you want people as your walking billboard? Apparel further creates a branding effect for your restaurant.

Food Presentation - Do you have the WOW factor? Do heads turn as another table's food passes them by? Do other tables ask the server what is that?

PR - Adding a charity aspect to the campaign must be part of it. Should mention the campaign if possible.

Charity - Creating a charity aspect is very important, but make sure the charity is helping you at the same time. You have the option of charity nights or my favorite, a fund raising program in place. The charity can help you by selling gift cards, or handing out uniquely identified business cards.

Co-Branding - Who are you co-branding with locally? Charity, local businesses, or another restaurant. If you are co-branding, make sure your partner is promoting you as much as you are them.

Phone Answering - This should match or mention the campaign. One way to integrate this is by answering the phone with, "Your Restaurant, home of (your unique menu item)." This is not down to a science, though. Not sure if food special or events should be mentioned. Thought would be that it should be geared toward food since they are typically calling for something food related.

Online Sign Ups – The best route to go is to offer something of value, ie. a discount or free item (something that has a very low cost to you). You should not use a raffle as the enticement for a customer to provide their valuable information. We are yet to see raffle idea really take off. Most restaurants forget about the raffle and when some one is on the website they are typically more interested in food. (This is in reference to us, because we created half of the raffles out in the restaurants!)

No Office! - The managers or owner should be out talking and getting to know the customers every chance they get. A good owner/manager is a good people person. There are many benefits to the manager/owner being out on the floor. First, by greeting tables, it puts another face to the restaurant, not just the server's. Secondly, it is amazing how easily the owner/manager can diagnose problems and fix them (problem employees, problem food items, and problem customers as well). The pulse of the restaurant is in the front of the house, being in the office during the rush does not benefit anyone.

First Time Visitor - This needs to be marked with a colored setting so that every employee knows that this is the first visit. These customers should always be greeted by the owner/manager. You only get one chance to make a good impression.

Comment Cards - I prefer the tear off comment card because you stand a chance of people taking your info back to the office or home. The message of course, should match the campaign.

Step 4 - Start evaluating the success of the campaign after the first three months. It is important to note that even the Marlboro Man marketing campaign took one year to have any success.

Step 5 - Put your marketing materials away like Christmas lights because you never know when you will want to use them again. McDonald's always has the McRib and monopoly game in the back pocket.

These are our opinions and observations and are definitely open up for debate. Remember, if you haven't ever failed, then you are not really trying.

If you would like to add something to the article or disagree with this please email it to brian.carver@carveravola.com and I will site your addition if I add something.