

How to Create Meaningful Offers that Spark Long-Term, Loyal Customer Relationships



Restaurant Owners – How To Create Offers & Loyal Customers

Modern Restaurant Magazine (September 2019) — It's a sad fact of being a restaurant owner: even if your food and service are excellent, and a first-time customer had a wonderful experience, it may still be a while before he or she comes through your doors again. After all, customers have choices. Lots of them.

It can be especially difficult for a restaurant owner to turn new customers into loyal ones if those people are new to the area. New residents often sample a variety of restaurants before choosing their favorite spots. That's why it's important to do more than offer incredible food and focus on creating a great first impression. Obviously, those things are important, but it's vital to create a relationship with that customer.

To begin building what will hopefully be a long-term relationship, you often have to offer an incentive — special offers or some kind of deal.

While some people find a place that they like and aren't interested in experimenting with other restaurants, many customers are understandably curious about what's around the corner. They don't want to miss out! While you could

accept that fact, the danger is that customer may decide not to return. People do like to experiment, but they're also creatures of habit. If your customers find a new favorite pizza place instead of yours, or a new French restaurant they adore instead of yours, or a new beloved burger joint instead of yours, and so on, you could be relegated to one of those "we'll go there because we haven't been there in forever" eateries. That's better than nothing, but obviously, you want more regulars than semi-regulars.

So how do you do that? Incentivize those new customers.

Offer Restaurant Discounts Based on Age

This is a classic; I'm not telling you anything that you haven't heard before, so just consider it a friendly reminder. You might want to offer a "kids eat free" or "kids eat for half-off" type of deal. If parents know that every time they come to your place — even if it's just on a particular day — they're going to shave a bit off their bill, that may encourage them to visit more often instead of going elsewhere. Just make sure your discount is well promoted.

Promote Dining Specials Based on the Day or Time of Day

Dynamic pricing at work. Bars have their happy hour, not just because it makes customers happy, but it makes bar owners happy to see customers coming in earlier, at a typically less-busy time. If you often see a lull on Monday nights, offer an awesome Monday-night special that your customers will have trouble refusing. Again, make sure this is well promoted, so customers coming on, say, Friday, will be reminded about what they can have when they come in on Mondays.

Market Restaurant Discounts to People who just Moved into Town

Granted, this is my wheelhouse, since my company markets to **new movers**, but I'd be remiss if I didn't mention it. If you aim your marketing at residents who are new to the community, and you can get them in the door, it's extremely important to offer them more deals so that they return. That might involve sending them home with an added incentive to return (half-off your next appetizer!) as they leave — or using a service that will send them a thank you note for coming paired with

another special offer for when they return. The new movers are the people in your community who haven't picked out any favorite restaurants yet. You could be their first.

Dining Loyalty Programs

This is an obvious idea. But I bring it up because it would feel silly not to. If you haven't developed a discount program for your most loyal customers yet, it's definitely something to think about.

Restaurant Incentives – Theme Days

Your customers aren't just people who like food. They're dog lovers. They're sports fans. They're marathon runners. Maybe some of them are birdwatchers. Depending on your restaurant, you could have days where anyone dressed as a TV character or their favorite superhero gets a 25 percent discount. Or hold a singles night and see who shows up. Or — if you won't be breaking health codes — invite your pet parents to bring their dogs.

Not every interest is going to be worth catering to, or practical, but if it's conducive to your dining establishment, you could host book clubs in the off-hours, where people gather for a drink and appetizers.

The point is — your customers are more than just anonymous people receiving a delivery, sitting at a table or standing at a counter, ready to pick up their food. They have interests. They also have challenges, ranging from time-management to finances and everything in between. If you can remember that and cater to their personality or situation as much as you do their taste buds, you're going to make a much stronger connection — the first step to building that oh-so-important relationship.

You may have to do that with some clever incentives, but getting your customers to come through the door (and keep them coming back!) is the ultimate goal. Because another fact of being a restaurant owner is that you need your customers more than they need you. That is, until the relationship is no longer one-sided. That's the day when your hungry and time-starved customer realizes that he or she needs your restaurant's help more than they thought.