



Restaurant Marketing 101

Ideas, Tips, and Strategies to Get More Customers

Why is Restaurant Marketing Important?

In order to attract new customers, retain old ones, and create a seamless brand experience, your restaurant needs a solid marketing strategy.

While many restaurant owners agree with this statement, that's usually where their commitment to marketing ends. There's just no time (or budget) to post on social media, email loyal customers, or design a stunning website. For many restaurateurs, marketing starts with choosing a name and ends with designing a menu.

If you're someone who needs convincing about the importance of restaurant marketing, consider this. The most influential revenue drivers for your restaurant are the customers who order your food. If you can wow them, many of those customers will tell their friends. Many others, however, are finding out about your restaurant online. A typical research process journey for these customers might look like this:

1. Search "best Mexican food in Boston" on Google.
2. Scroll down until one restaurant catches their eye, either because of branding, reviews, or location.
3. Visit the website, paying extra attention to menu and hours.
4. Make plans to eat at this restaurant.
5. If they have a positive experience at the restaurant, follow them on Facebook and Instagram and join their email list.

You'll notice that this 5-step process includes search engines, restaurant websites, guest experience, email, and social media networks. Marketing helps build a connection with both past and future customers.

So why aren't more restaurants investing in marketing? As of 2012, only 50% of restaurants even had a website ([RIMS](#)). However, [SinglePlatform and Chadwick Martin Baily](#) found that 92% of consumers search for restaurants through a web browser, and 75% said they often choose a restaurant to dine at based on those search results.

Let's close that gap! This guide will provide an introduction to restaurant marketing, complete with actionable advice and data that you can start applying today. With tips about branding, search engine optimization, email marketing, and social media, we cover all the basics in this guide.

Branding

When you think of McDonald's, what's the first image that comes to mind?

If you answered "the golden arches" or "Ronald McDonald," that's because of the fast food giant's powerful branding.

When you think of Buffalo Wild Wings, what's the first image that comes to mind?

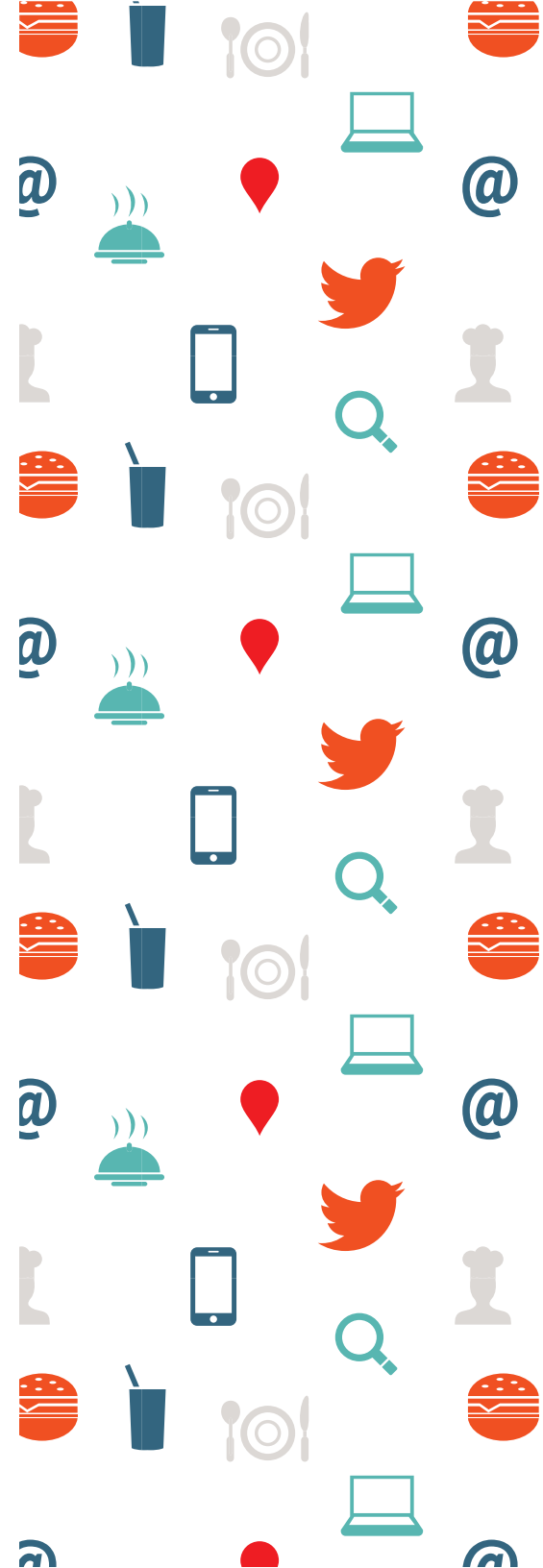
If you answered "sports bar" or "creative wings," that's good branding.

When you think of Starbucks, what's the first image that comes to mind?

If you answered "cozy coffee shop" or "sustainably sourced coffee," that's good branding.

The list goes on and on. The most memorable restaurants are experts at branding. While these examples are national chains, you can likely think of a local business in your area that conjures up similar, clear and differentiating phrases. Unique branding is essential to your restaurant. It's what sets you apart from your competitors. It's what customers will remember most when they leave. It's what influences their experience before, during, and after their visit. Your website, menu, social media updates, emails, and restaurant design all must have consistent branding.

What is branding, and how do you know if your restaurant needs a brand makeover? Let's talk about five important branding components your restaurant should focus on.



Your Name

Your brand starts with the name of your restaurant. Think about what your name evokes: an image of a family sitting and laughing around a table, or an image of two people on a fancy date with a single rose as the centerpiece? Does your name create expectations for visitors? For example, the name “Chipotle” implies Mexican food, whereas “Panera Bread” implies a bakery. Does it indicate an expertise in your field ([Chef Chang’s](#)), does it indicate a fun night out ([Fajita’s & Rita’s](#)), or does it indicate refinement ([Finale Desserterie](#))? If you’re interested in what your customers think when they see your restaurant name, simply ask them, whether in person or in your email list.

Your Logo

A logo is a memorable sign that customers can recognize, either on material you send them, billboard ads, or at the restaurant itself. There are many things to consider when creating a logo, namely font, color, and how the logo reflects your restaurant’s personality or the food you serve. For example, Pinkberry’s logo includes green and pink colors, reflecting the freshness of their food. The round font is simple and fun, reflecting a refreshing atmosphere. Brainstorm the [core values of your restaurant](#), and then work with a branding partner to refine your logo.



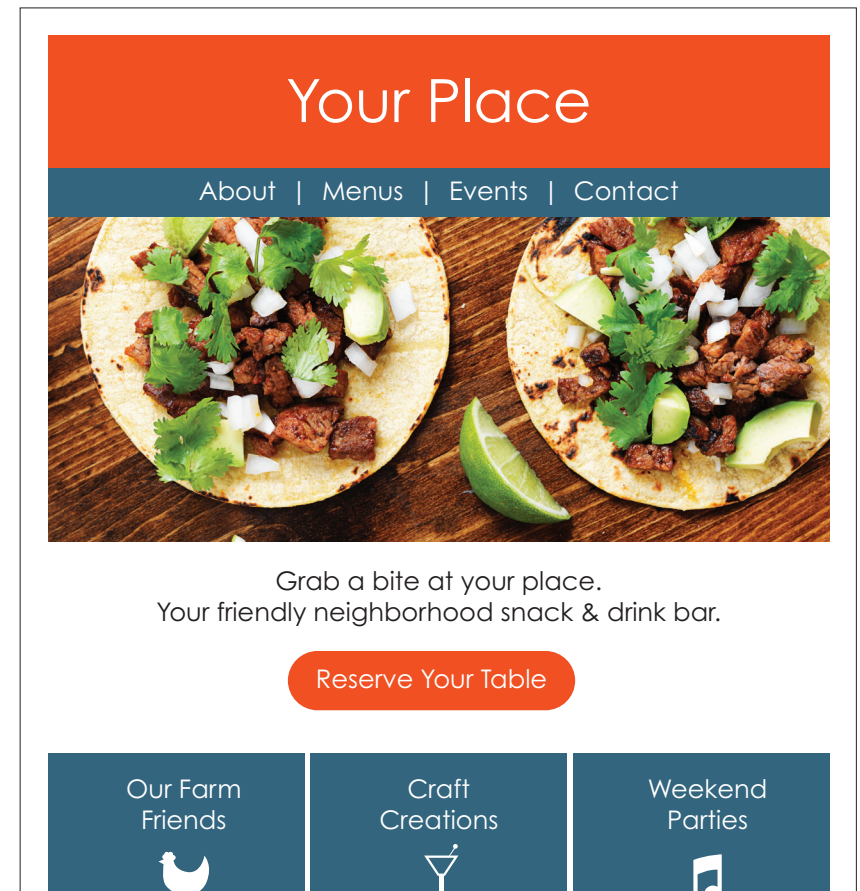
Your Website

86% of consumers “always” or “frequently” check out menus online before they dine out, and 59% habitually look at pictures of the restaurant (i.e. interior, exterior, or food), according to [OpenTable](#). While many restaurant owners are turning to Facebook as an interactive home for their restaurant (see Chapter 3), it’s important to also have a stable site to feature your menu, hours, location, history, and contact information, as well as email list signups, blog, and links to press written about your restaurant. Then you can link to your social profiles such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram on the home page. Check out [Mei Mei](#), [Greek Kitchen & Bar](#), and [Five Napkin Burger](#) for great examples of restaurant websites.

Your Content

As a restaurant, content can be anything including social updates, blog posts, website copy, video ads, or promo emails. What’s important from a branding perspective is that your voice stays consistent and that you make this content relevant to your customers. According to [Elite Daily](#), 62% of millennials say that online content makes them feel more connected to a brand. Find your brand voice, and send fun updates to your customers via the channels they’re most likely to use throughout their everyday lives.

Boloco, for example, welcomes new subscribers to their email list with a conversational “Hello new friend!” and continues with “You’ll be included every time we decide to randomly share the love.... which we do, often.” Think about your audience whenever you create branded content, and consider how your restaurant is being depicted. Is your voice formal, fun, funky, or all of the above?



Your Place

About | Menus | Events | Contact

Grab a bite at your place.
Your friendly neighborhood snack & drink bar.

Reserve Your Table

Our Farm Friends

Craft Creations

Weekend Parties

Your Restaurant Design

Finally, you can't ignore your offline branding. The design of your restaurant is just as important as the design of your website. When you [chose your restaurant's location](#), what drew you to it? Was it the potential it had to fulfill your design theme? Every little part of your physical restaurant, including the menus, plates, glasses, tables, wall art, lighting, and chairs, reflects back on your brand. Many enterprise chains know the importance of brand, and require consistent design across multiple locations. Subway, for example, features pictures of metro maps as well as pictures of sandwiches in all of their establishments.

Favorite Branding Resources

Restaurant Branding partners:

[Confluent Forms](#)

[Vigor Branding](#)

[Santy Integrated](#)

Make Your Own Website Tools:

[Squarespace](#)

[Wix](#)

[Wordpress](#)



SEO Marketing

Search engine optimization (SEO) should be a critical component of your restaurant's marketing strategy.

Did you know that your website is currently being "crawled" by Google "spiders" that create "threads" between several web pages and decide where they belong on search engine result pages, or SERPs?

Creepy imagery aside, it's all true. Search engines are constantly patrolling your site, comparing it to others and deciding whether your content is relevant enough to belong at the top of Google pages.

SEO marketing is not a "set it and forget it" marketing tactic. It requires continual improvement on your site. While Google is constantly making changes to its algorithm, it will always favor true, fresh content. When optimizing your site for search engines, consider these factors.



Key Elements: Keyword Research + Link Building

One way to improve your search engine rankings is to optimize for certain keywords. As a restaurant, your most important keyword is your restaurant name. However, keywords about the food, the experience, the amenities, and the atmosphere are also important. Your meta title and meta description, shown in the picture below, should include the keywords you want your business to show up for in Google.

Here's an example of a restaurant doing this right:

The image shows a Google search for "waterfront cafe". The search results are annotated with orange arrows and text:

- keyword heavy**: Points to the search result title "Waterfront Cafe - Boston's North End Sports Bar ... - Boston".
- meta title**: Points to the same search result title.
- meta description**: Points to the snippet below the title: "Boston's historic North End, Boston's premier dining spot on the Boston MA waterfront. Combining friendly North End Service with good food."

The search results include:

- Waterfront Cafe - Boston's North End Sports Bar ... - Boston**
waterfront-cafe.com/
Boston's historic North End, Boston's premier dining spot on the Boston MA waterfront. Combining friendly North End Service with good food.
3.3 ★★★★★ 16 Google reviews · Write a review · Google+ page
450 Commercial Street, Boston, MA 02109
(617) 523-4055
- Waterfront Cafe - Boston - Yelp**
www.yelp.com › Restaurants › American (Traditional) › Yelp
★★★★★ Rating: 3.5 - 70 reviews - Price range: \$\$
70 Reviews of Waterfront Cafe "Waterfront is an awesome little sports bar located in Boston's north end. I was brought to this place by the trusty UFC app as this ..."
- Waterfront Cafe Sports Bar & Grille - Boston - Street Hub**
m.mainstreethub.com/waterfrontcbg
Waterfront Cafe Sports Bar & Grille in the North End is one of Boston's premiere waterfront spots. Come by for friendly service, great food & spirit, and fun!
- The Waterfront Cafe Sports Bar & Grill - Boston, MA - Bar ...**
https://www.facebook.com/TheWaterfrontCafeNorthEnd
★★★★★ Rating: 4.4 - 43 votes
The Waterfront Cafe Sports Bar & Grill, Boston, MA. 400 likes · 29 talking about this · 966 were here. Waterfront Cafe Sports Bar & Grille is one of...

On the right side of the search results, there is a map and a detailed listing for "Waterfront Cafe Sports Bar & Grill":

- Waterfront Cafe Sports Bar & Grill** ★
- 3.3 ★★★★★ 16 Google reviews
- \$\$ · Sports Bar
- Relaxed, TV-packed sports bar & grill serving standard pub grub plus classic Italian dishes.
- Address:** 450 Commercial Street, Boston, MA 02109
- Phone:** (617) 523-4055
- Hours:** Open today · 11:00 am – 1:30 am
- Menu:** locu.com
- Reviews
- Write a review

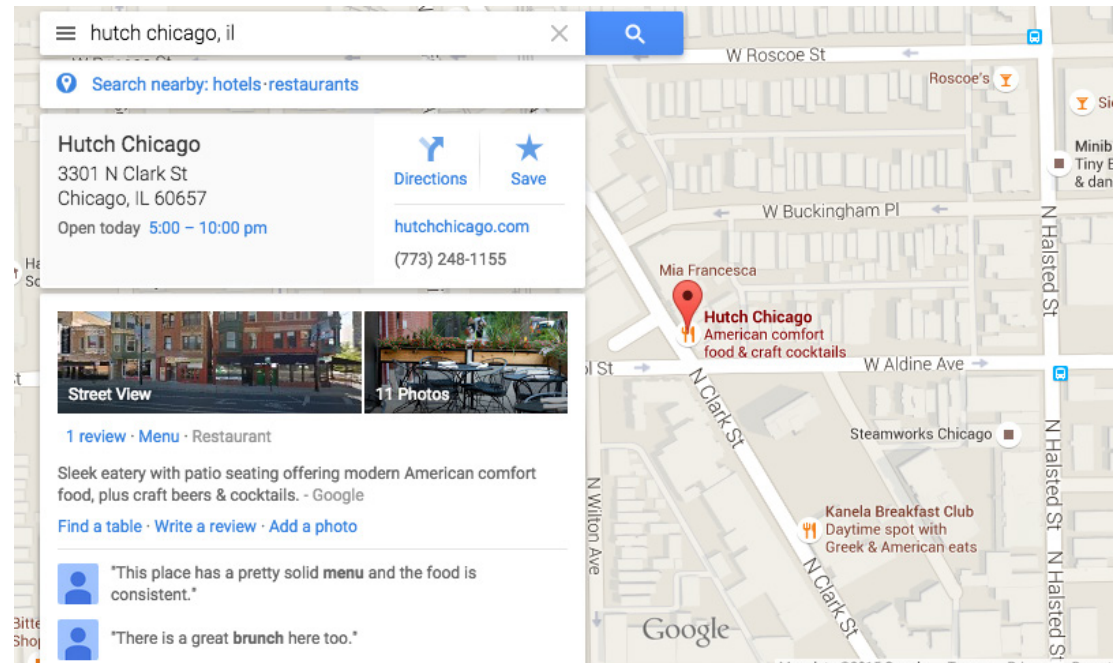
Another way to optimize your site for search engines is to get high-authority sites, or websites you know many people are visiting, to link to your website. That means setting up profiles on social networks, as well as on TripAdvisor, Yelp, and Menuism. Finally, connect with local bloggers, journalists, and restaurant reviewers, and ask them to write about your restaurant. Perhaps throw in a free meal! When they write about your restaurant, ask them to link to your website in the article. The higher authority the links, the better, so if you can get a profile in the New York Times, go for it!

Local SEO

Local SEO is especially important for restaurants who want to focus on attracting the local community. Like in the example above, use neighborhood, country, and city-related keywords on your website to attract visitors searching for keywords like “best sports bar in the north end.” Finally, offline marketing – such as getting involved in local food festivals or sponsoring a little league game – is a great way to get brand recognition and encourage more local people to look up your restaurant online. Feature a Google map on your site, either on the Contact page or at the bottom of your main page, to direct visitors to your location.

Google Business (Google Places / Google+)

Every restaurant should sign up for Google My Business, which helps Google recognize your site as belonging to an official business. Google My Business is how to get your restaurant on Google Maps, join Google+, and increase the legitimacy of your restaurant with a short card seen on the right-hand side of search engine results pages. [Signing up for Google My Business is easy](#), and only takes 10 minutes. After your restaurant is verified, Google will provide the necessary information about your restaurant, including address, phone, menu, hours, and reviews, to consumers every time they search your restaurant name. You might think, “Hey, that’s not sending traffic to my website!” However, the most important thing for restaurants is not that you have a lot of views to your website; it’s that you have a lot of customers at your restaurant. It’s important to make the customer experience as streamlined as possible, including their experience online, before they’ve even visited your restaurant.



Mobile and Search Engine Advertising

Paying for advertising on search engines or mobile devices could also be a driver to attract new or return customers. Search engine advertising, for example, guarantees that your website will be at the top of certain search results, with a small “Ad” button. You can also follow customers who search for certain things with banner ads on sites that allow it.

Mobile advertising is important because [81% of consumers have searched for a restaurant on a mobile device](#). Further, 75% say that they often choose a restaurant to dine at based on those search results. Making sure your website is front and center when they search on mobile can increase traffic to your restaurant. For this, use [Google Adwords](#) and [Google Adwords for Mobile](#). Also make sure your restaurant is mobile-friendly by using [this tool](#), and send the results to your web developer.

SEO Best Practices & Techniques

- **Use local and relevant keywords on your website.** What words define your restaurant: “unique Mexican food” or “prix fixe Italian meals?” Brainstorm which keywords will have high-volume searches or use [Google Keyword Planner](#) to research popular keywords. Then, place these keywords in your meta-title, meta-description, and throughout the content on your site, without sacrificing readability.
- **Sign up for Google My Business and get high-authority sites to link to you.** Signing up for Google My Business is absolutely crucial. It’s how you’ll get your restaurant featured on Google Maps, most importantly, so visitors can find directions easily. Also, research website that may have high-authority content, such as your local newspaper’s site, and ask if they will profile your restaurant in a feature. Don’t forget to provide free meals and wow these customers.
- **Dabble with mobile advertising to bring your restaurant to new audiences.** Especially if you are a chain restaurant, rather than a mom-and-pop, advertising can get your restaurant in front of new potential customers. Mobile advertising is equally, if not more, important, as many people are searching for a restaurant to dine at on the go. With the right budget and the right mindset, you may be able to attract many new customers.

Favorite SEO Resources

Keyword Research

[Google Keyword Planner](#)
[Buzzsumo](#)

Where to Register Your Website

[Google My Business](#)
[State Restaurant Associations](#)

Advertising and Mobile

[Google Adwords](#)
[Mobile-Friendly Test](#)

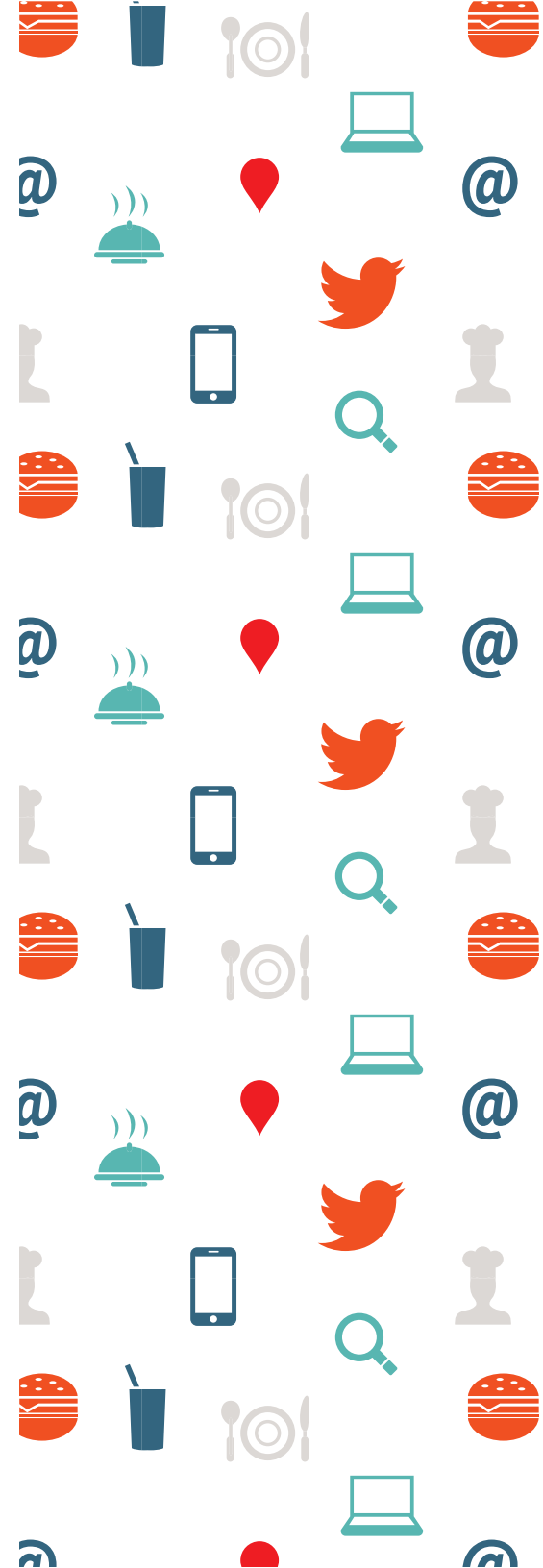
Social Media

Social media isn't a new medium anymore. What used to be a cutting-edge strategy is now a standard component of any marketing plan. What sets your business apart is how you use social media to entice new guests and drive repeat business.

According to a [2014 study from Pew Research Center](#), 74% of online adults and 89% of millennials are regularly using social media. Unless the vast majority of your clientele are senior citizens, your business should be on social media. The truth is, whether your restaurant is on social media or not, you can be sure that your customers are talking about it. They're tweeting about the skilled (and very cute) bartender, snapping Instagram photos of the chocolate lava cake, and checking in on Facebook.

Social media gives restaurants the opportunity to collect customer feedback, publicly share positive comments, capitalize on trending topics, and get guests excited about the restaurant before they even walk through the doors. Also, it's fun!

This section will dive into the top three social media platforms for restaurant marketing and provide some tips, tools, and best practices for taking advantage of each one.



Facebook

There are over 936 million people on Facebook [every day](#), making it the [most widely used social media network in the world](#). It's also the most commonly used social media platform by restaurants. If you're new to social media marketing, this is a good place to start.

Start by [creating a Facebook Business Page](#). Then, start growing your network by inviting your friends and colleagues and posting interesting content on your page. Growing your Facebook presence takes time, but if you follow the best practices below, you'll gain traction in no time.

Best Practices & Techniques

- **Post a minimum of once per week.** If you're managing social media and the restaurant itself, there may not be time for anything more. An ideal frequency is 2-3 times per week. The more you post, the more opportunity there is for your network to share that content, extending your reach beyond those who like your page.
- **Post photos frequently. Facebook is a visual platform.** One study showed that photos on Facebook drove [120% more engagement](#) than the average post. Share pictures of your food, your staff, your signage, and your local neighborhood. Photos are a great way to represent your restaurant's concept and values. If you're big into sustainability, share photos of the local farms you support. If you've got an expert staff, showcase them by posting photos of them at work.
- **Match your website.** Think of your Facebook page as an extension of your website. Some restaurants choose to use a Facebook Business Page instead of a website. While that's not necessarily recommended, it does exemplify the depth of information and imagery that should be visible on your Facebook page. Use your profile picture, cover photo, and description to match the environment that people experience when they enter the restaurant.



Power User: [Hutch Chicago](#)

Hutch is an American bistro in Chicago. Their Facebook page is a fantastic extension of their website, with similar branding and imagery. Their posts mostly include photos, with event promotion and special deal announcements sprinkled in. Hutch has included their address, phone number, website, and hours on their Facebook page. They even go a step further by [uploading their restaurant's menu to Facebook](#), cutting down on the steps it takes for customers to get vital information about the business.

Instagram

More than any other industry, restaurants have a unique opportunity to utilize Instagram; the platform was basically designed for sharing pictures of food.

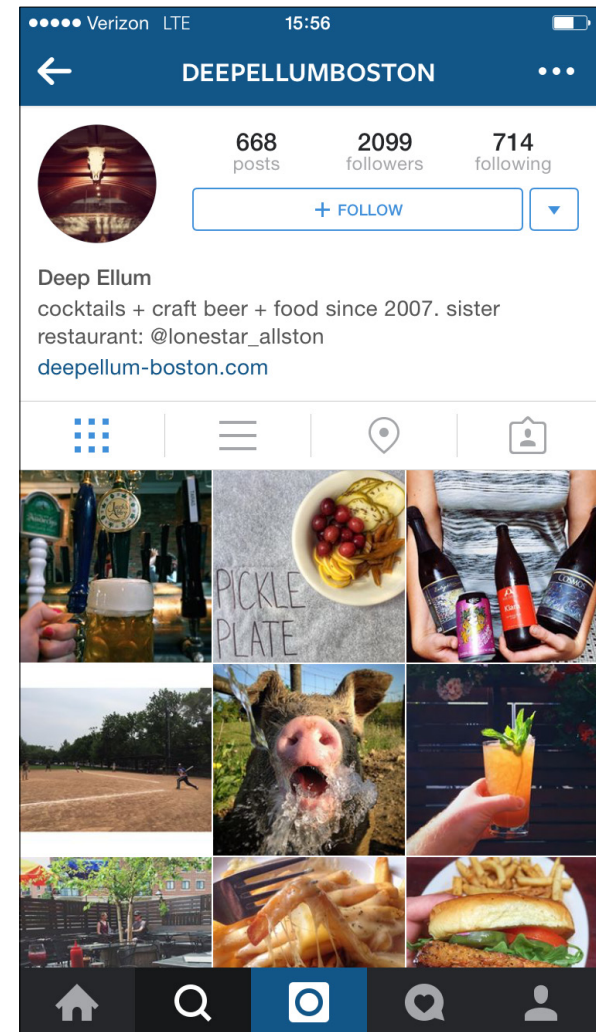
Photos are the only type of content allowed on Instagram. You're not even allowed to post links (except in your profile description). As a result, Instagram boasts a [higher engagement rate than Twitter](#) (3.31% vs. 0.07%). So, savvy restaurant marketer with a whole room full of food, give the people what they want!

Best Practices & Techniques

- **Post beautiful photos.** Instagram only allows you to post one photo at a time, so make the most of it. Users expect your food photography to be high quality or, at least, appear to be. Use the built-in filters and other photo settings to spruce up those mobile phone pics.
- **Use geotagging.** When you upload a photo, be sure to search for and enter your restaurant location. Instagram will compile the photos taken there. Once your photo is posted, click on your location to see other photos taken by your customers.
- **Experiment with Video.** Posting videos is just as easy as posting photos – you can even apply the same editing techniques. Show your followers how a favorite dish is made, the charismatic personalities of your staff, or the array of specials prepared for the day. t that people experience when they enter the restaurant.

Power User: [Deep Ellum](#)

Deep Ellum is a trendy, comfortable restaurant and bar in Allston, MA. Their Instagram account is a great example of a mix of photo and video, showcasing both their food and their excellent staff. They've also included their sister restaurants and website in their account description, making it easy for their followers to support the business in other ways.



Twitter

Unlike its visually-driven contemporaries, Twitter is all about real-time updates. Because of that, Twitter can end up being more work than the other platforms because it requires more babysitting. Branding and imagery are less important (although photos do well here too). Clever 140-character-or-less posts and rapid response time are the keys to success.

Best Practices & Techniques

- **Post a minimum of three times per week.** Because Twitter is so heavily focused on real-time updates, you could get away with posting 5-8 times per day, if you have time.
- **Respond to guest feedback.** Twitter is an easy platform for users to ask questions and give feedback. They expect you to respond. Be prepared to promptly answer questions and address complaints on this platform. If someone tweets praise about their experience, retweet it! It's a great way to put a spotlight on your happy and loyal customers.
- **Tag other businesses.** Whether you're on a catering run, hosting a company party, or participating in a city event, it's always a good idea to tag other businesses in tweets. Share the love! They'll be inclined to talk about you too, and you'll grow your network exponentially. To tag another business in a post, type "@" and the business name, Twitter will give you some suggestions based on the keyword.

Power User: Costa Vida

Costa Vida is a coastal-inspired fast casual restaurant based in Lehi, Utah. Their Twitter page is abuzz with activity, averaging a few posts every day from many different sources. Costa Vida's Twitter account executes on key best practices like retweeting positive customer comments, answering questions, and interacting with other businesses.

SMART MEETS SATISFYING GRILLED CHICKEN SALAD

Costa Vida
@CostaVida

We bring the fresh flavors and relaxed feel of the Baja Coast to you using custom-made, real ingredients. Eat Well, Live Inspired.

Locations in 10 states
costavida.net
Joined June 2008

TWEETS 3,219 FOLLOWING 1,750 FOLLOWERS 3,482 FAVORITES 1,116

Costa Vida @CostaVida · Jul 14
This guy took engagement photos with a BURRITO! He's a man after our own hearts! buzzfeed.com/jessicamisener... #CostaVida #TrueLove

Costa Vida @CostaVida · Jul 14
Thank you for the feature @utahbuzznews!

Utah Buzz @utahbuzznews
@CostaVida doesn't play around with #food. #infographic

Who to follow · Refresh · View all

- Max Grinnell** @theurbanolo...
Followed by The Fenway an...
Follow
- Barry Conley** @SMIBarry
Followed by Donald Burns a...
Follow
- The Merchant** @merchantb...
Followed by Boston's Best ...
Follow

Favorite Social Media Resources

- **HootSuite Free** - This a free tool that will pull together your social media platforms into one view. Hook up your Twitter and Facebook pages to monitor comments, likes, and mentions.
- **Monitor Social in 10 Minutes a Day** - A free ebook from the marketing experts at HubSpot that will help you avoid getting overwhelmed with this new aspect of your business.
- **In-App Analytics** - Both Twitter and Facebook come with built-in analytics that allow you to view key social metrics like new followers and engagement. Learn more about Facebook Insights and Twitter Analytics.

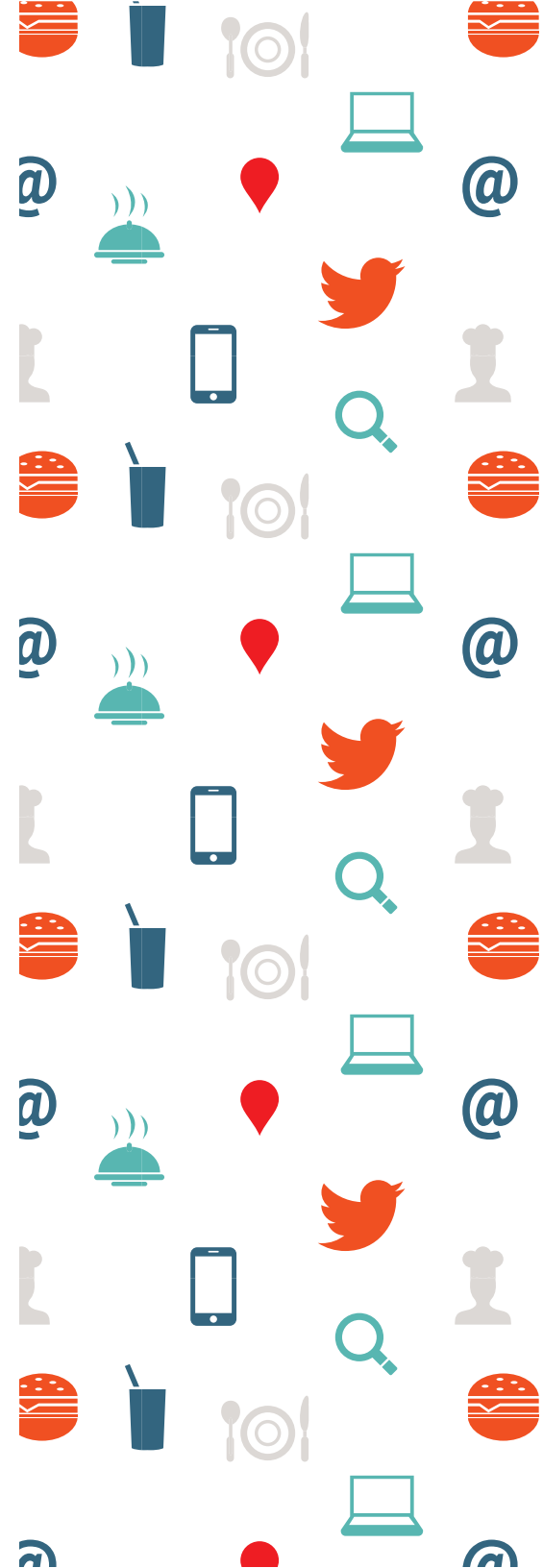


Email Marketing

How do you attract repeat customers to your restaurant? Instead of the “hope and pray” approach, use targeted emails and promotions to entice your customers to come back.

Email marketing is probably the most important component of your restaurant marketing arsenal. Why? Well, first of all, email marketing has a 4,300% ROI according to [Direct Marketing Association](#). If that’s not enough to convince you, [86% of U.S. adults](#) would like to receive promo emails at least monthly from brands they trust. Email is a direct link to your existing customer base.

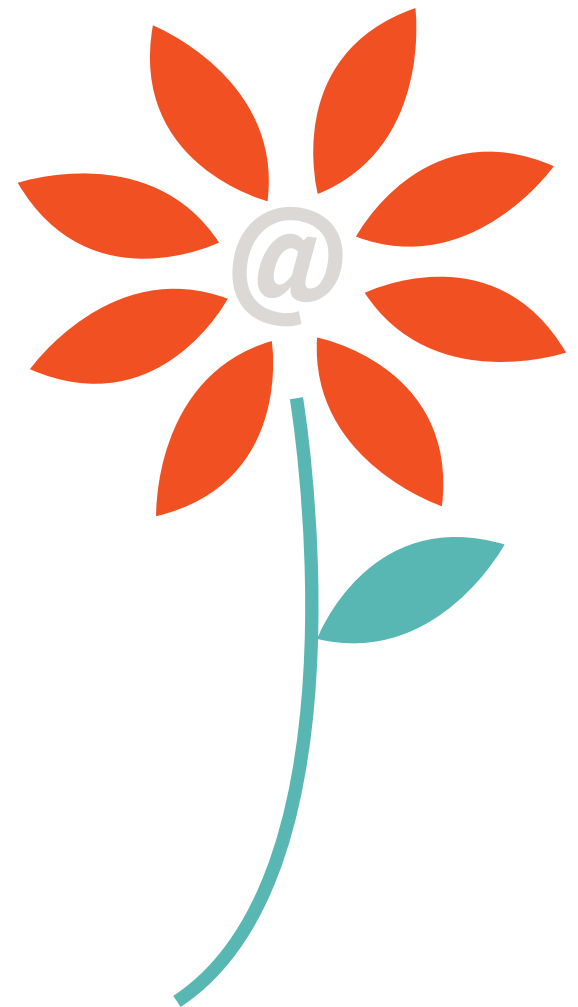
Despite the benefits, only 18% of restaurant owners are actually engaging in email marketing campaigns according to [Benchmark](#). Restaurant owners and managers need to realize that there’s an immediate need to launch their own email campaigns. In this section, learn more about how email marketing can grow your business.



Growing Your Email List

When you're just getting started with email marketing, you might sigh when you see your email list signups — your mom, your daughter's friends, your own employees. Don't worry! It's easy to start building a list with real customers. Here are three methods for doing just that:

- 1. Ask in person at the end of the meal or before payment.** When returning the check or at the checkout counter, have staff ask customers if they want to join your email list for promotions, offers, and other perks. Train your staff on how to “sell” the email sign-up to the customer. They should promise not to spam guests' inboxes and to keep their information safe.
- 2. Collect email addresses when sending email receipts.** Modern POS systems give you the option to send different types of receipts: print, email, or text. When a customer requests to have their receipt emailed to them, your [restaurant CRM](#) can store this information. If the customer opts in to your marketing program during this process, you can use their information in targeted marketing efforts.
- 3. Create a forwarding offer.** People love referring their friends to restaurants they enjoy. In the first email to your email list, entice people to forward the message to a friend in exchange for a reward, perhaps 25% off the next order for both of them. Your email marketing platform, such as [Constant Contact](#) and [MailChimp](#), should be able to automate this type of campaign so you can track who referred new email subscribers.



Formatting Your Email

Adhere to the [anatomy of a successful email](#) and you will succeed in both standing out in customers' busy inboxes and making them excited to open every email you send.

Start with the subject line. How can you reel people in? Will puns work? Or are you going to appeal to their emotions or their cravings? Once they open the email, be sure to keep the design simple, with a clear call-to-action towards the top of the email. A call-to-action (CTA) tells the recipient exactly what you want them to do. Your CTA might be "Refer a friend," "Write a review," or "Make a reservation."

In email, less is more. Keep your email copy short so customers don't have to spend more than one minute reading the whole thing. Make the benefits clear and immediately apparent. Finally, don't forget to include unsubscribe options at the end of your email as per [CAN-SPAM regulations](#).

Content Ideas for Your Emails

Don't send the same type of email over and over to your email list. In fact, start off sending emails occasionally; we recommend only sending monthly at first until you build a substantial list, and then running some tests to see how often people actually read your emails. If you're creative with the content of these emails, open rates and click-through rates will increase.

Some ideas for your emails:

- Welcome email
- Birthday email
- Seasonal promo email
- Holiday email
- Survey email
- Email teasing new updates to your restaurant.
- Restaurant news, press, and blog posts
- Customer stories
- Charity and sponsorship events

Favorite Tools

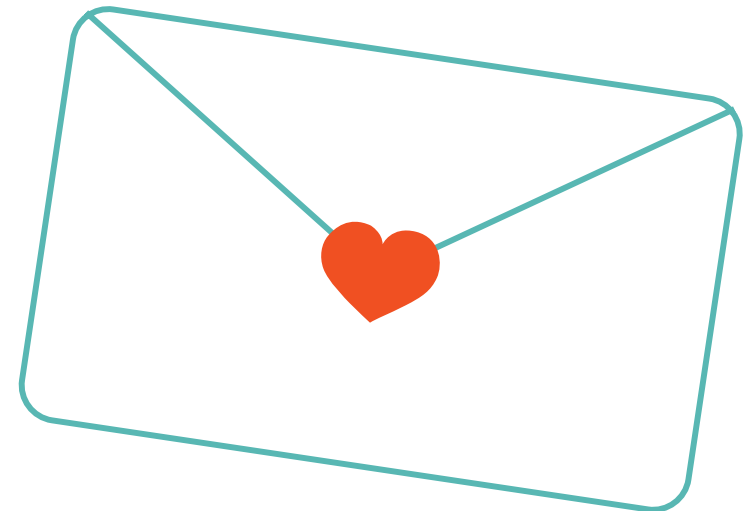
[Wordstream & Constant Contact](#)

[Mailchimp](#)

[Emma](#)

[Aweber](#)

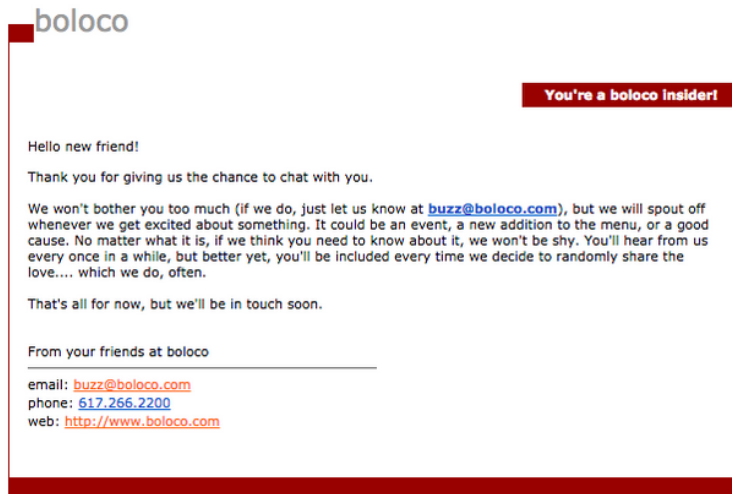
[Constant Contact](#)



Favorite Examples

Below are a few of our favorite examples of restaurant email marketing done right.

Boloco Welcome Email



Kona Grill Promo Email



Qdoba Rewards Email



Conclusion

With these beginner restaurant marketing tips in your arsenal, you can now attract and delight customers through branding, SEO, social media, and email marketing.

For more intermediate and advanced restaurant marketing tips, [subscribe to the Toast blog](#). We write about a variety of topics, including menu engineering, restaurant management, and restaurant finances.

With Toast's All-In-One POS system, you can collect customer email addresses, include marketing on receipts, and integrate online ordering into your website. The system also contributes to a seamless guest experience, one of the most important factors for restaurant success, as it is cloud-based and allows customers to pay immediately at the table. Learn more about Toast, including our robust CRM and reporting capabilities, by clicking below.



Are you hungry
for a Toast demo?

Sign me up!

