



Holiday Season Is Here: Making It a Profitable One Is a Moving Target!

For many years, the formulas for preparing and executing plans to make the holiday season were pretty consistent. Get the staff ready, hire seasonal employees, adjust purchasing habits to reflect additional needs, modify schedules, and put a marketing plan together, among others. While the key components are still vital to be successful several months prior to the holidays, something that has been inching its way into the equation is now moving at rapid speeds and should be considered when making these plans.

That something is...

...the internet and its relevant components as they relate to your restaurant business. This includes social media marketing, online ordering, and the impact of the choices your guests have in how they do their holiday gift purchasing. It is November as you are reading this, and you are seeing these components unfold around you. At this stage, you are either at the head of the pack and enjoying the benefits the internet can offer, or you are still scrambling to put the pieces of the puzzle together — watching others succeed while believing there just isn't enough business out there.

It's in the cards

People are eating out more often through the year — and even more often during the months prior to the holidays. They are buying restaurant gift cards in record numbers. If you do not have a big, bold gift card program in place right now, you have been losing sales to the chain (and some local) restaurants for months now. Think about it. Hundreds of your great customers, patrons, and guests bought gift cards for Flemings, Roys, and Outback for their friends, co-workers, and families in September and October! They are no longer your prospective buyers, and the holidays are still over a month away! Put that program into play today: utilize window signs, register signs, table tents, website announcements, social media, etc. to make the public aware of your gift card program.

Holiday parties are another opportunity for you to reap the benefits of the season. However, do not wait for them to come to you. Again, create a visible sign such as, "The Perfect

Way to Enjoy the Holiday: We Cater in our Private Dining Rooms or at your Home or Office!" and place it near your gift card promotion announcement.

Other creative ways to be more proactive include:

Visit law offices, CPA firms, PR firms, etc. in walking distance to your restaurant with catering menus in hand and speak with the person responsible for booking holiday parties. They are there! Find them, offer them incentives, and be prepared to do a great job once you get them on board.

Take a look at your customer database (you have one, right?) — whether it be a frequency and loyalty club you have in place, a business card program, or Facebook friends — and evaluate the information you get from each of these sources. Discern what may work for a company that is close enough and large enough to approach by phone, email, or in person to offer your catering services.

Call or visit every business that had a party in your place this year and last and let them know their business is important to you. Further, you would be thrilled to help them again with their party and catering needs.

Though there are still the basic components which must be planned, the most important takeaway from this and every holiday, busy season, or weekend is be sure that your training is consistent, positive, and conveys a great attitude by your service staff and management. When it is busiest, be sure that the message is the clearest: your restaurant is great, fun, and offers wonderful choices and the best possible experience for your guests! In this way, while deploying the marketing ideas, you will be assured those guests will return in January and February and rave about their experiences to their friends year 'round.

Let me know if you could use some help and focus or if you just want to chat.

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