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Where brands share their insights What's This?

4 Tips for Serving Up Digital Success for Your Restaurant

Our standards and expectations for a restaurant's website and social channels higher than ever.

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By Emily Martin

In today's digital age, nothing has the power to draw customers to a restaurant like a strong online and social media presence. Increasingly, diners are going online to decide where they want to eat, which makes their standards and expectations for a restaurant's website and social channels higher than ever.

I started my own communications and events firm, Emily Martin Communications and Events, because I was passionate about food, wine, travel, and hospitality. I knew that I could use my digital expertise to help my clients in the restaurant industry and beyond build an online presence through their website, social media channels, and email marketing campaigns to increase revenue and brand awareness.

With my professional background in retail, I started The JetSetting Fashionista to detail my adventures with travel, food, wine, and fashion nine years ago. Over the years, I have built a substantial following. Through the blog, I learned how to craft a digital strategy that keeps people engaged and coming back for more. Some of the brands I have partnered with for blog and social media coverage include The Four Seasons, The Ritz Carlton, Virgin Atlantic, Audi, Lexus, Jonathan Adler, and Jo Malone London.

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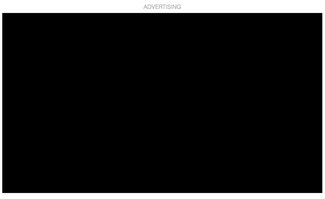

Entrepreneur Elevator Pitch Ep11: Find Your Niche

Are you wondering where to get started or how to improve your restaurant's social channels and website? I've taken what I learned from my years in the food industry and blogger know-how to come up with some tips that any restaurant can follow!

1. Know your competition and make sure to set yourself apart.

I tell my clients all the time that we need to ***differentiate*** them from their competition. In order to do this, you have to know what else is out there. I would suggest finding three to four other restaurant websites for inspiration. Make sure these restaurants are similar to yours: if your business is fast-casual, make sure you look at other fast casual websites. It is always best to know what you want and draw inspiration from restaurants you admire, then create your own unique version based on what you offer that differentiates you from your competition.

To really stand out and show your specific vision, invest in beautiful photography. This is especially important as Instagram and Pinterest are so impactful and guests expect to see -- and share -- beautiful images.

This is also very true with millennials, as nearly 30 percent of the age group seeks out pictures of a restaurant's food before eating there. This is something I learned from creating and building my blog – high-quality images can make or break how visitors to your site view your business and perceive your brand's success.

2. Make sure your website and social channels work together.

Too often, restaurants neglect to continually update their website and social channels. However, digital branding is one of the easiest ways to reach new customers and keep existing customers happy.

For example, one of my recent clients saw double-digit growth in reservations in the first month that I started working on their digital strategy. They quickly attributed this traffic to our new social media success after they gained more than 650 Instagram followers in that single month, simply by increasing the frequency of their posts, making the photos more aesthetically interesting, engaging on Instagram, and using the appropriate hashtags to reach new followers.

A website is also essential to weave into your digital strategy. There are a host of easy-to-use website builders like GoDaddy's GoCentral that make it simple to get a site online that communicates your restaurant's look, feel, and food. Make sure you include links on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter that will direct customers back to your restaurant's website.

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For example, if you share a dish on social media, you should then mention in your post, "visit our website for ingredients or for the full recipe so you can enjoy this dish at home". Driving guests to your website from your social media channels (and vice versa) is critical for a strong digital presence and your website's SEO. It's also important to remember to geotag your restaurant and tag it as your location on all of your posts. This will make it easier for people to find your physical location and tag you in their own pictures! Last, but certainly not least, engage. Thank your customers for sharing pictures, invite them back in, respond, like and build a relationship with them.

3. Don't make customers work too hard to find you.

Once you have a great website built, you have to make sure it's searchable. SEO is something restaurants can help build through customer reviews on platforms such as Google Business, Yelp, and Facebook, with media or blogger coverage, and with the help of specific SEO tools. These days, website builders often come equipped with SEO services which are easy to take advantage of and can make a huge difference in how searchable your restaurant is to potential customers.

I always recommend that my clients have a media page on their website where they can post the links of any positive reviews and coverage they've received from publications and bloggers. This helps improve your website's SEO and brings attention to positive conversations others are having about your restaurant.

4. Stay top of mind for customers.

An easy way to make your restaurant memorable is to personalize your brand and share stories about the founders, the chef, and the front of house team on your website and through your digital marketing strategy. Guests are more likely to return and tell their friends about an amazing place if they feel personally invested. It's very important that customers feel that your restaurant has a warm, inviting atmosphere when they're dining with you, but also make sure that same attention to detail and extra effort continues when they visit your website and social channels.

A newsletter is also a great way to retain customers by communicating menu changes, publicizing special fundraising events, or just sharing fun updates that keep your customers in touch. Regular correspondence, as I discovered with my blog and my business, re-engages customers, helps you share your successes and vision, and builds a relationship with your customers. I recommend one e-blast a month, or at the least, one every other month.

Trying to tackle a digital strategy can feel daunting, but don't worry! It's easy to get started with simple, do-it-yourself website builders. Plus, if you feel like you need even more help, there are tons of