

marketing 101

six easy tips
to improve
your marketing
and earn more
business—
both online
and off

As a busy owner or manager of a catering business, you have proven your ability to deliver a product that pleases your customers. Your service is outstanding, your food is delicious, and your prices are competitive.

Now if only you could book new business on a more regular basis! Customer referrals are the lifeblood of your company, but your efforts to drive better referrals from your existing customers, as well as achieve better market awareness, have been uneven to date.

Following are some proven tips for bolstering your existing marketing efforts in order to allow new customers to find you more easily. Why should you keep reading? Our clients are foodservice leaders—from industry associations such as FCSI - The Americas (www.fcsi.org) to design consultants to equipment makers—and they turn to us to help them improve or revive their own marketing efforts.

1 Just Like Your Customers, the Search Engines Are Hungry

Small businesses absolutely must have functional websites, which is the basis for any meaningful digital presence. Google reports that 97 percent of consumers search for local businesses online. If you aren't showing up in the organic search engine results, then chances are your website isn't providing the search engines with anything useful.

And what, you ask, is useful to a search engine? In the simplest terms, original content is useful. So is the ability to provide frequent content updates. Search engines are hungry and must be fed new content. If they aren't, they will seek nourishment elsewhere (and punish you by pushing your natural search rankings down).

You don't need to be the world's best writer, or a professional website programmer, to have a useful website. But you do need a clear and concise message for your business. And there are plenty of free blog platforms available today that greatly simplify the technical aspects of building a website, including WordPress (www.wordpress.org) and Blogger (www.blogger.com).

As mentioned, search engines must be fed. In fact, search

engines never want to stop eating. But keep in mind that unlike your extra-hungry guest who eats three portions (instead of the one that was allotted to him), search engines are only hungry for useful content.

So how do you define "useful content" for a caterer's website or blog? For starters, consider bolstering your website with updates (i.e., news briefs) about business happenings, about customer news, about great recipes, or about seasonal deals and special offers for repeat customers. Just make sure you are adding content regularly—at least once each month. And by all means, don't forget to update your social connections when you add content to your website or blog (i.e., your Twitter and Facebook followers love content, too). It only takes a second to mention on Twitter (which you should have tethered to your Facebook page) that you updated your website.

It should take you less than 30 minutes to compile a schedule of news briefs that you can then post each month to your website and social media connections.

2 Website Programming Basics

Adding content to your website is a proven approach to improving your organic search rankings. But don't overlook the importance of optimizing your website, either. Optimization is done specifically to serve the search engines, which are looking for more than just content on your pages that matches a search request. They also seek images, video, plus connections to local and even vertical market search queries.

The keywords built into your website will likely include many of the same phrases that other successful caterers use. That is fine. But don't forget to include terms that are specifically relevant to your business (such as your business name, your location, some of your specialties and the markets you serve). And don't forget to tag the images and videos on your website with keywords, too.



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Twitter can be an amazing tool for helping you find new followers that are actually close to you.



And these days, newsrooms are fairly stressed out. There are fewer journalists handling more work. They need help!

If you aren't already familiar with the reporter who covers the hospitality beat, find out who it is, and send that person an email that invites the reporter to interview you as an expert source. Suggest a Q&A with the reporter, in which you would reflect on your experiences serving the community, and recount a story about a lesson learned in catering that should be useful for the newspaper's readers.

What is that story? That's for you to decide. But you would need to let the reporter know, so make sure it's true—perhaps something on lessons learned catering weddings, bar mitzvahs, business events or Super Bowl parties.

My last bit of advice—make your pitch topical and relevant. Don't offer a Q&A on catering Super Bowl parties to your new reporter friend in September. It will be the last time he or she ever takes your call. But offering advice on catering a football kick-off party in the fall? That type of advice is meaningful. You already have something in mind, don't you? Then get going. ●

Pete Wiltjer is the public relations manager for FCSI - The Americas, the only consulting society dedicated to serving independent foodservice design and hospitality management professionals in North and South America. He is also the principal at Pete Wiltjer Marketing Group, a B2B public relations and marketing firm. To contact him, email petew@pwmginc.com. To learn more about FCSI - The Americas, visit www.fcsi.org.

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