



These two happy customers are prime candidates for collecting valuable details and gaining feedback.

On the right track

You have all the marketing bells and whistles—flashy advertising, a website, you name it. But are you properly tracking this activity to see if it's having an effect? If not, it's time you start. By **Stephanie Sword**

The key to longevity in the restaurant industry is promotion, promotion and more promotion. (And good food, of course.) But the days of placing an ad in the local paper and waiting for the customers to come to you have long been over. Today's owners need to attract customers by promoting through a variety of media, and as important as this is, there is one thing arguably more important—tracking the results of your promotion.

Deck 23 owner Tarek Ibrahim says he initially relied primarily on print media, but was unhappy with the results and lack of feedback. "I personally don't believe in the power of print media for small businesses. It doesn't work for businesses with small budgets," he says. "The print ad is out there for one day, and then the paper is in the bin. It simply wasn't cost effective for us; our ad

would just get lost in a sea of ads."

Frustrated, Ibrahim began building his own customer database in an effort to utilise other forms of marketing and to gather more information about his customers. After realising he and his staff lacked the proper know-how to effectively maintain a database, he hired Grant Lewers, the director of Restaurant Marketing (www.restaurantmarketing.com.au), a company that specialises in building email databases for restaurants. For the last three years, Lewers has helped Ibrahim build-up the e-marketing campaign for the Dee Why restaurant—and with effective results. "We had our first glimpse of the type of results that were possible after a special event. It was quite effective. In fact, it was instant—with in hours people were coming to see us," he says. "There's no question that e-marketing

is the single most effective tool I've used in 30 years in the business."

Marketing specialist Taki Moore, also of Restaurant Marketing, has been a firm advocate of promoting and tracking business through e-marketing. "Marketing is an investment, and there needs to be a return. It's crazy to have customers come in, have a great experience and then leave," he says. "Restaurant owners should build a database and then use it in a classy way to collect customer details and gain feedback.

"It is very important to track and do it in a way that's professional. You want to enhance your reputation, not cheapen it," says Moore.

For Deck 23, Ibrahim began offering bottles of wine for groups of six or more through their quarterly email newsletter. "It was to encourage people not to delete the

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email, and instead be the 'draw card'. You must always be looking for something fresh, offering customers new information.

"With e-marketing, you can't overuse it. If you do you'll kill this important tool. Too much of anything is too much. Be effective and smart with in—not greedy. You must not abuse it," says Ibrahim.

Done the right way, e-marketing has many advantages over traditional print advertising. The most important distinction is that it makes it easy to track the number of new customers who are utilising your promotions. "You can't know how many people read your print ad, but with this you can see who's reading," says Moore. "With print ads, you need a direct response mechanism for tracking. Most don't provide that.

"Instead of spending thousands of dollars on print ads trying to attract new people, in most cases you'd be better off investing the money into your existing customers and giving them a reason to come back sooner. The restaurant business is driven through repeat business and word-of-mouth, so building a customer database is crucial."

Veering away from print ads and utilising

the tools of e-marketing has already proven a smart move for Deck 23: "It saves us time and money, and makes us time and money because it's one less thing we have to spend all of our resources on. We have more time and money to make sure our staff is looked after. When it comes down to it, they're the

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Taki Moore, Restaurant Marketing

ones who have built-up the core clientele and who will bring the customers back," Ibrahim says.

Currently, Deck 23 sends out birthday vouchers for tables of four or more as a way to entice customers to come in, and hopefully bring new patrons with them. "We

gauge how many new clients are joining us by the number of vouchers turned in and the number of new customer emails we receive," explains Ibrahim.

Restaurant Marketing's Grant Lewers provides Ibrahim with a monthly report detailing the results of the e-marketing efforts. "I get a figure on how many birthday offers they're sending this month, and then I can track if people are still taking up the offers," Ibrahim says. "Tracking your marketing is based largely on numbers. If the restaurant is full, don't mess with a formula that works."

Moore says an effective formula should not only attract patrons, but should also clearly demonstrate the cost, the results and the customer feedback. "The whole idea of tracking is to know what's working and what's not working. E-marketing is an approach that is cost effective, trackable and brings in the best result at the lowest cost."

This sounds appealing, but are the majority of restaurant owners actually tracking their marketing? Moore doesn't think so. "Eighty per cent of restaurant owners have thought about building a database—it's

been on their 'to-do list' for ages. Unfortunately, most restaurateurs just don't have the time. That's why now we even do our customers' data entry for them. They can quickly send a promotion, track it and simply get on with running the restaurant."

Truth be told, most restaurant owners are not marketers, so the idea of using e-marketing and collecting information on a database may sound too daunting. But Moore asserts the methods behind these techniques are not just about the computer. "Walk over to your customer at the end of a meal and present them with a gift voucher for a complimentary bottle of wine, along with a feedback card. For a \$30 value, the cost will easily be recouped the next time that customer comes in."

Sometimes, the customers do much of the work for you. Ibrahim says Deck 23 patrons regularly fill out customer cards (which are delivered in the billfold) not only for themselves, but for their family and friends as well. "If the marketing results show us we'll have bums on the seats and a good turnover, then we'll have the confidence to move ahead in other areas of the restaurant." □

Ten ways to track

What's the key to successfully tracking your marketing? Restaurant Marketing's Taki Moore recommends the following steps:

1. Start by building a database. When customers come in, you need to gather—and collect—basic customer information and feedback. Keep it simple.
2. Make it easy to join, and give people a reason for the chance to be in your VIP list can all work.
3. Count how many people are joining the database each week, and set a goal to grow it each month.
4. Get a system that does most of the maths for you. "You want to know how many people read your message, how many people book a table as a result of your marketing and how much they spend."
5. Make sure it's easy, or you won't stick to it. Find a system where thank you's, birthday messages and special events, as well as tracking, is done for you.
6. It's important to test and measure, but doing so incorrectly, sporadically or not learning from the results can be a fatal flaw. "If you don't track and measure your basic numbers, it's just a prayer."
7. Think about it from your customer's point of view: would they feel uncomfortable bringing a coupon into your restaurant? If so, ask them to mention your promotion when they call and book.
8. Remember, the real goldmine in your restaurant is the customers you already have, so chances are print advertising isn't going to help. "How can you bring your current customers back a little more often, have them spend a little (not a lot) more and bring or tell their friends?"
9. Follow this formula: test, measure, review and improve.
10. Most importantly, you must always pay attention to your results. "If it doesn't work, stop doing it."