



The Ultimate Guide *to* **Restaurant Marketing**

Restaurant marketing
used to be simple.
Make great food,
welcome people in,
run an ad in the paper,
and let the good word
spread around town
all on its own.

If you really wanted to make a splash, coupons and a wacky waving inflatable tube man would do the trick.

But now, with an increase in competition from other restaurants and the rise of digital channels pulling people off streets and onto their phones, the restaurant marketing landscape has changed. And that's left many restaurant owners scrambling to #catchup.

While it might seem like restaurant marketing is now way more complicated and time consuming (and it can be), the benefit of these changes is that you have so many more channels and opportunities at your fingertips than you used to with just traditional marketing. There's social media, review sites, email marketing, and so, so much more.

While it may take some time to sort through what's available and design your ideal marketing plan, with a digital + traditional marketing plan you have the potential of a much greater impact – and by that we mean attracting more new customers and influencing existing ones to keep coming back.

In this guide, we'll walk you through all the basics of both digital and traditional restaurant marketing, including:

- Digital advertising
- Search
- Social media
- Third-party apps
- Wi-Fi marketing
- Email marketing
- Loyalty programs
- Traditional Marketing

Let's get started!





The Ultimate Guide
to Restaurant Marketing

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Where to Start Your Restaurant Marketing

Before you opened your restaurant, you probably created a **business plan** to outline your vision and determine how you'll run the business, where it will be located, how it will be staffed, financed, etc.

Well, before you start your restaurant marketing, you need to create a restaurant marketing plan. A marketing plan is an extension of your business plan, taking the information in that document about what kind of business you have and adding on the layer of how you'll promote that business. It's your promotion instruction manual.

A marketing plan helps you understand the landscape, set goals, and determine who does what with how much money.

Before you start actually writing the marketing plan, there are three things you need to do:

1. Competitor Analysis: Determine who you're competing against for customers and what they're up to.

- Sign up for your competitors' emails and newsletters.
- Follow your competitors on social media (Instagram and Facebook).
- Keep a spreadsheet of your competitors' offers and promotions, noting what you like and what you don't.
- Then perform a formal competitive analysis: their channels, voice and tone, target audience, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities you have to beat them, and threats they may pose to your business.





2. SWOT Analysis: You might have already done this with your business plan, but this is your chance to drill down into your own restaurant.

- List your business' strengths: the things that make you stand out.
- List your business' weaknesses – and make sure to be brutally honest.
- Write down any opportunities your restaurant has to stand out (e.g. food, experience, etc.).
- List any threats to your business, like your competitors, industry trends, changes in your neighborhood.
- Compare your SWOT analysis to the ones you did for your competitors.

Note any interesting overlap, and keep this information close at hand when you're writing your marketing plan.

3. Restaurant Overview: Put your vision, goals, and target audience in writing and keep it handy throughout your planning.

- **Mission statement:** Describe your restaurant's value and why it exists in 50 words or less.
- **Elevator pitch:** Describe your restaurant's food and what makes it unique in one sentence.
- **Target audience:** Describe your ideal customer. This can include demographics (age, location, ethnicity, gender, etc.) and psychographics (values, beliefs, priorities, etc.).
- **Voice and tone:** Describe the language you want to use to talk to that target audience. What's your restaurant's personality? Is it cheeky? Sophisticated?
- **Goals:** Describe what you want to achieve through your marketing plan (e.g. acquire new customers, retain existing customers, media mentions for brand awareness, etc.). Once you get into the specifics of your plan, you'll be able to add hard numbers to these high-level goals.

These three steps will set you up with the research and framework you need to decide which channels you want to use and what tactics will help you achieve your goals.



Digital Marketing

You may have heard of the phrase, “Pics or it didn’t happen.”

This mentality is great for your social media efforts because it’s tied back to the growing need for consumers to snap shots of everything they do (including going out to eat or ordering in) and share it online. But the same mentality can be applied to digital marketing as a whole:

- If you don’t have a website, you don’t exist.
- If you don’t have a social media presence you don’t exist.
- If your patrons aren’t interacting with you, they never came to your restaurant.

But you do exist! You just need to sharpen these strategies to make your digital presence more effective.

In this section, we’ll go over different channels within digital marketing that restaurants can use – and most of them are free.





Search

Fifty-one percent of people turn to the Internet when they're looking for a restaurant and 31% rely on search engines to get them there. People search by restaurant name, their current location, the type of food, the type of venue, and more. This means you need to have a strong digital presence in order to show up in these searches and bring customers through your doors.



Here are three ways you can digitally lead people to your restaurant.

1. Create Business Profiles and Optimize for Local Search

According to [ReviewTrackers](#), local searches account for 35% of all searches on the Internet. What this means is that the search term “restaurants near me” is one of the most common “near me” searches in Google – and also potentially very profitable.

Whenever a customer types this search query into Google, they're immediately presented with three restaurants. If you can get featured in the top three, you will improve your chances of being clicked on from a restaurant search. But how exactly do you optimize for these local searches?

Three steps:

A) Start by creating business profiles on all the major directories: [Google](#), [Bing](#), [Yelp](#), [Facebook](#), [Foursquare](#), [Apple Maps](#), and [TripAdvisor](#). There are more search engines, mapping services, and review sites, but these are the major ones and will give you quick wins with minimal effort.

B) Make sure all your business information is consistent across platforms. If you don't maintain consistency – with different addresses or even a different business name, for example – Google will probably penalize you and you won't show up in as many searches.

C) Monitor, manage, and respond to the reviews on these business platforms. Why? Your review scores, the volume of reviews, and how quickly you respond to them are all ranking factors that determine how you rank for local search.

2. Update Your Website

Your restaurant is constantly changing – your menu, your promotions, your daily features. While having a website is a given, a website that's easy to update is not. The good thing is, if you choose the right provider, websites are really easy to manage and – for the cost-wary – relatively inexpensive.

[Wix](#) and [SquareSpace](#) are two viable options if you want to do it yourself. Both offer templated websites specifically for restaurants and the flexibility within those templates to customize and highlight your brand. You can also hire someone to build your website – the downside is that you'll likely need their help if you want to make significant changes to the content or structure.

Just like with your business profiles, make sure all of the information on your site is up-to-date, relevant, and easy to find:

- Menus
- Hours of operation
- Location
- Contact information
- About us (share your restaurant's story and mission)
- Social media icons (including links, especially Facebook and Instagram)
- Health and safety information (these days, people want to know how you're cleaning, keeping guests and staff safe, etc.)
- Online ordering (including links to in-house or third-party platforms)
- Online bookings (including links or how to make a reservation)

BONUS: If you'd like to learn more about creating a restaurant website, check out our [Ultimate Guide to Creating a Restaurant Website](#).

3. Optimize Your Site

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is the process of improving how search engines interpret the content of your site and present it to people looking for relevant search terms. The goal of SEO is to have your restaurant appear as one of the top search results in Google – the first page, or first nine search results. While it may sound like an engineer’s task, it’s a lot easier than you think.

Here are four steps to basic SEO for your restaurant’s website:

A) Create a mobile-responsive site:

Since close to 60% of search queries come from mobile devices, your website should be built with this platform in mind. The good news is that if you use Wix or Squarespace, your website will automatically be mobile responsive.



B) Optimize for speed: If a site takes more than three seconds to load, 40% of people will leave. Speed things up by removing the number of plugins and reducing the file size of any images or videos you have on the site. You can do this either by compressing the file size (make sure to use JPG files where possible) or cropping the image to the correct size for your template (otherwise your page has to load the full image and then adjust it, which slows things down).

C) Include important keywords: Select relevant keywords customers use to find your restaurant and optimize your website pages for these keywords. Start with local search terms that also incorporate the type of restaurant you are or even the type of food you serve (e.g. If you run a vegan restaurant in Chicago, use “vegan restaurants in Chicago,” “veggie grill Chicago,” “fancy vegan restaurants Chicago” or even “best vegan places in Chicago” on key pages within your site.).



D) Use SEO metadata: Each page should have a **meta title**, displayed on the top tab of each website page and the title of your page in Google (60 characters or less), and a meta description, which appears under your title in the search results (150 characters or less).

E) Start link building: Include your own internal links from one page to the next, as well as external links to other relevant and high-quality sites. You can also try to get backlinks from other sites that help to build your overall “link juice” and indicate to Google that your site is trustworthy.

Social Media

Whether it's on a feed, a rolling homepage, in a comment, or on a review site, the reach of a single social media post is far and wide. It can be a public endorsement or a public shaming. This is the new word of mouth marketing. But it's about more than just words. Posts come with a photo, a geo-tag, hashtags, and more – all things that can amplify one post (either yours or your customers') to the masses.

The case for social media has long been made, but just in case you're not convinced, in the \$700 billion restaurant industry, 9 out of 10 restaurants are using social media. With stats like that, there's no denying its impact. Now the question becomes: how do you create engaging content and which platforms are worth your precious time?

Must-Have Social Media Presence

 Instagram

 Facebook

Nice-to-Have Social Media Presence

 Twitter

 TikTok

Having a presence on social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram have been a part of restaurant marketing plans for awhile. But these platforms are more important now than ever before. With 51% of US adults reporting increased social media use during the pandemic, restaurateurs have an opportunity to leverage social platforms to reach guests while foot traffic is down.

In general, active social media accounts keep your brand top of mind, drives traffic to your site, and drives people through your front door. It's also one of the best ways to get the word out about your online ordering or reservations – how, what, and when customers can order from you or dine with you.

Here are some of six top tips for restaurant social media marketing.

1. Set Up and Optimize Accounts

If you don't already have social media accounts, you'll want to start by getting set up.

Luckily, getting started on is super simple. At the most basic level, you'll just need an email address, password, username, and profile photo (could be your restaurant logo or signature dish or landmark building).

Before you start posting, check all the details of your account to make sure you'll get the most from it.

Whether you're starting from scratch or working on existing accounts, take a look at your bio. You don't have a ton of room, so you'll want to cover the most important information, including:

- Hours of operation
- What you're offering (takeout, delivery, dine-in, etc.)
- Contact information
- Address

BONUS: You can also add a link that goes directly to your order page if you have [online ordering](#). This can be a link in your bio description or a "Order Food" button (set-up instructions [here](#)) that links to the page – we recommend including both!



“You don’t have to spend a ton of money on paid posts, but a small budget will help you reach more people.”

2. Figure Out What to Post

Go back to the documents you created at the very beginning, with what your competitors are doing well and what your restaurant is all about. That will help you figure out what content to post on social media.

We recommend regular posts about:

- Your current menu (daily specials, happy hour promotions, seasonal menu changes)
- Real stories that give your business a human element (why you started your restaurant, staff spotlights, etc.)
- Food safety measures (how are you keeping diners and staff safe?)
- How to order and incentives for ordering direct (to save on commission fees from third-party apps)

3. Figure Out When to Post

This will be different for every restaurant, depending on your concept and venue type. For example, a brewery and coffee shop may have completely different audiences with different social media patterns based on when their audiences are online and looking for this content. Longterm, you’ll want to experiment with the timing and cadence of your posts and find what works best for your audience.

In the meantime, there are some general recommendations to consider. On both Facebook and Instagram, [studies show](#) that Wednesday is the overall best day with higher engagement on weekdays from about 9am to 3pm.

What about how often?

Facebook: 3x per week minimum

Instagram: 1-3x per day maximum

4. Grow Your Following

One way to grow your social media following is through **paid ads** or **boosted content**. Both of these promotion types will help you reach new audiences through paid pushes where you target different people based on age, location, and other factors. You can even target people who are similar to those who already like your page or follow your account. You don't have to spend a ton of money on paid posts, but a small budget will help you reach more people.

The main difference between ads and boosted content is that **boosted content** will live in your "feeds" forever – you can promote an Instagram image or a blog post on Facebook to get more eyes on it. A **paid ad** will disappear after your run dates.

However, if you don't have a budget for paid social media right now, you can also build out a pretty solid organic strategy with hashtags. Hashtags are a way that users on social media find new content.

Use hashtags that describe the post (#burgers, #foodporn), where you are (#nyc #chicago), and what you offer (#takeout #takeoutnyc #curbside). Instagram allows up to 30 hashtags per post, but too many may make it seem spammy. Limit each post to three or four max.



5. Encourage Audience Sharing

When customers post about their experience with your restaurant or food and tag you in that post, they're essentially sharing your business with their whole audience. This is a great way to reach new diners for free.

To encourage audience sharing, give diners everything they need to do so easily. As part of your takeout and delivery orders, include a handout that motivates people to share on social media – include social media handles or hashtags you would want diners to use when posting. Even something as simple as takeout food packaging can encourage sharing. Make it stand out while capturing your brand and it becomes a subtle encouragement to share

5. Look into Influencers

Social media influencers are people who have a large – and dedicated – social following. The idea is that if they post about a product or experience, their followers will engage with said brand and become customers.

You could have an influencer post about enjoying their meal from your restaurant, sharing how easy the ordering was, or raving about how the quality of food was great even at home.

If you go this route, make sure to consider:

- **Location:** They should be local to your restaurant's neighborhood.
- **Price:** Know what you're willing to pay and be clear about that from the start.
- **Messaging:** Discuss with the influencer what you want them to include in the post. You may not be able to control exactly what they say, but giving them some direction can help.

Once you brainstorm your social media plans, create a calendar to help you keep track of what you're posting (and boosting) and when. You can get a free fillable social media calendar [here](#).



Third-Party Apps

As we mentioned before, so many people are on mobile devices today. Everyone has a smartphone. Beyond search queries, they're also using apps on their phones. Three types of apps present great marketing opportunities you'll want to consider for your restaurant: **review apps, reservation apps, and takeout/delivery apps.**

Restaurant review apps and sites are another form of word of mouth marketing, similar to social. Because most restaurant-goers regularly look at online reviews to help them make decisions about where to eat, you want to tap into these reviews for marketing.

As mentioned in the search section, the first thing to do is to claim your business on each one of these apps, ensuring your information is correct. For reviews, a few of the top ones include:

- [Zagat](#)
- [TripAdvisor](#)
- [Google](#)
- [Yelp](#)
- [Facebook](#)
- [Zomato](#)
- [TouchBistro Dine](#)
(or your reservations platform)

⚡ Hot Tips

for Review Apps:

- Update your page with promotions and event listings
- Acknowledge every review left about your restaurant – positive (say thank you!) and negative (offer solutions)
- Have fun engaging with customers
- Share your best reviews on your website or social media



If you use online booking software, like TouchBistro Reservations, you probably also have access to their consumer-facing reservation app where diners can search and book reservations directly. These will have a review section to which you can apply the previous tips. Beyond that, here are some ways to market your restaurant through your reservation app.

Hot Tips

for Reservation Apps:

- Write a description of your venue, including the type of food you serve, the atmosphere, your special or notable dishes, and more. Keep it short and sweet – perfect for reading on a smartphone.
- Set up appropriate labels or “tags” for your restaurant that will help the app recommend your restaurant to diners searching for your venue type, food type, and location.
- Include photos that are high-quality, accurate, and mouth-watering.
- Some reservation apps let you purchase advertising or boosted results so you appear at the top of relevant searches on the app.

Takeout and delivery apps will function in much of the same way, with some additional features available at a cost.

Hot Tips

for Takeout/Deliver Apps:

- Set up appropriate labels or “tags” for your restaurant that will help the app recommend your restaurant to diners searching for your venue type, food type, and location.
- Include photos of each menu item that are high-quality, accurate, and mouth-watering.
- Include detailed descriptions of each menu item.
- Organize your menu so that popular items or promotions appear at the top for quickly ordering.
- Consider purchasing priority placement, promoted listings, and featured offerings or specials that make it easier and/or more appealing for customers to choose your restaurant from the marketplace available on the app.

Wi-Fi Marketing

Wi-Fi marketing allows you to collect customer info (name, email, social media profile, etc.) in exchange for Wi-Fi access when they're at your restaurant. You can then also advertise to those same customers through what's called a splash page – the page that appears after they've filled in their info and connect to the Internet. You could offer them a special promotion for them to return or advertise your current specials.

After offering free in-house Wi-Fi to customers, business owners have seen growth in foot traffic, time spent at the restaurant, and overall money spent.

But a big draw of Wi-Fi marketing is being able to build up a database of customer contacts. You can then market to this customer database by sending messages, coupons, or promotions – often through email marketing.

Here are a few providers that can get your started with Wi-Fi marketing:

- **Aislelabs:** With big restaurant names as clients – such as Panera Bread and Pizza Nova – Aislelabs offers Wi-Fi marketing packages specific to the restaurant industry.
- **Yelp WiFi:** Yelp purchased Turnstyle Solutions to create Yelp WiFi with the goal to provide more services to help businesses grow customer retention and loyalty.
- **Social WiFi:** If you're a large venue, Social WiFi will send their engineers to help with installation

We'll get into the ins and outs of email marketing in the next section.



Email Marketing

Did you know email marketing has the highest ROI of any marketing practice? That means when it comes to restaurant marketing strategies, it's a good place to start.

Studies have shown that many people – especially Millennials – are willing to exchange contact info for a promotion or deal. So whether you're offering free Wi-Fi or 10% off someone's first order for signing up to your restaurants weekly, monthly, or occasional emails, it probably won't be too hard to start building your list.

But your work starts before you have the captive audience. Here are 4 steps to get you started with email marketing:

1. Find a Solution

The great thing about email marketing is that many excellent platforms offer "free-mium" tiers. For instance, MailChimp is free for small businesses with small email lists. Other platforms with free versions include MailerLite, SendPulse, and Sendinblue.

For a more complete system that offers customer relationship management (CRM) tools, loyalty or rewards programs, and connects with your POS, consider a system like TouchBistro Loyalty (more on that in the following section).

2. Develop Your Voice

Again, this goes back to those exercises you did at the beginning. Figure out how the overall tone, voice, and brand applies to the language and content of your emails. The most important advice here is to write for a human. Use simple, conversational language, and try to think about what type of subject lines would make you open an email and what body copy you'd want to read.

“...whether you’re offering free Wi-Fi or 10% off someone’s first order... it probably won’t be too hard to start building your list.”

3. Set Up Your Templates

Every platform will be different, but most systems these days offer pre-designed templates and a simple drag-and-drop editor that make it easy to customize.

Just be sure to stay on brand – use the same colors, fonts, and imagery someone would see on your site and your social media accounts (which should also be reflected in your venue).

4. Decide on Your Goals

Outline clear goals that you want to achieve through email marketing, benchmarks that go beyond how many people open each email. These could include:

- To drive foot traffic into your restaurant.
- To drive an increase in your catering agreements.
- To drive customer loyalty.
- To drive merchandise sales.
- To drive event attendance.

Put tangible numbers with each goal you set and track them regularly, so it’s easy to measure success and make improvements.

Once you’re up and running with your email strategy, focus on building that database. You can offer Wi-Fi marketing, or run a contest for a free lunch, or even offer to email receipts. Just make sure you’re getting permission to contact them. Also, always give customers the option to unsubscribe. Depending on your region and your database, some email marketing regulations stipulate that recipients must be able to unsubscribe in a single click and you must have records of their explicit opt-in.

For more information, see Canadian email regulations [here](#) or American regulations [here](#).

Loyalty Programs

Adopting a loyalty program for your customers can increase sales by 30%. True story.

Loyalty programs were born out of the traditional stamp or punch cards that customers kept in their wallets and use to accumulate points toward free or discounted items. In simple terms, customers get rewarded each time they dine at that same restaurant.

In the digital age, POS technology and apps make it so much easier to set up a program and keep track of success. These digital loyalty programs offer value through these rewards and appeals to customers through gamification – turning the loyalty experience into a fun game.

Loyalty programs allow you to:

- Reward customers with points that encourage repeat visits.
- Keep in touch with customers through email marketing and SMS (text), so you stay top of mind and they keep coming back.
- Collect data on what your customers want, so you can adjust menus, operations, promotions based on what works – and what doesn't.

The key is finding the right solution that will be easy to set up and use, as well as effective for your operations, like TouchBistro Loyalty. You want to consider budget, ease of use, channels you want to use (e.g. email marketing can often be done through these platforms, as well as SMS, or in-app push notifications), as well as the overall experience for your customers. How easy will it be for them to collect, track, and redeem points? Does the platform offer multiple reward options? What about reporting to help track success?

Once you find the solution that's right for you, ask for tips from that provider – many will have free resources that will help you make the most of their system.



Traditional Marketing

While digital is the way of the future, there is something refreshing about good old-fashioned boots-on-the-ground marketing. Traditional marketing has gone from being the only way to market your restaurant, to something that – when done well – is a great way to stand out from the rest of the (digital) noise.



Here are a few traditional marketing tactics to keep up:

Print Advertising: “Print” refers to ads in magazines or newspapers. Local publications, like Edible Boston, are great for independent restaurants to reach their local audience. Ask the publication’s advertising department for information about their readership to make sure that their demographics match your campaign’s target audience.

Live Events or Pop-Ups: If your restaurant is in an area that doesn’t get a lot of car or foot traffic, you may need to bring your restaurant to your customers by having an event. You could host a pop-up at your neighborhood’s block party, rent out a food truck for a limited time, or even organize a picnic. Focus on the Limited Time Offer (LTO) here – people respond well to this sense of urgency.

Outdoor Signage: You know that chalkboard sign you pass every day that always has clever one-liners or inspirational messages? Outdoor signage can be a simple but effective way to draw attention to your brand and your specials – daily promotions, happy hour, or a prix fixe. Use the space you have outside your venue to draw foot traffic inside.

Sponsorships: A little good goes a long way. Sponsoring a local sports team, event or charity, not only gets your logo out there, it creates a positive brand association and good will. This might also lead to more opportunities for you to get your product into the mouths of like-minded supporters.

Guerilla Food Drops: While this may bring to mind parachutes of food dropped off in the center of the jungle, more and more restaurants are choosing to surprise neighboring businesses with free lunch. Way more effective than the coupon, this gesture inspires good will with your neighbors and is the perfect introduction to your brand.

Direct Mail: Send existing customers (using addresses from your brand new loyalty program) or potential customers (by buying local mailing lists) promotions in the mail in the form of postcards, letters, or brochures.

Conclusion

Ready to get started with your restaurant marketing plan? Download this [free template](#) and fill out each section based on what we've gone over in this guide.

Remember that no two restaurant marketing plans are the same – you'll want to prioritize marketing efforts that are the most important to your restaurant based on your budget, time, and resources. But also don't be afraid to take some risks, since you'll need to test certain initiatives before you can know whether or not they worked. Make sure to fail fast, learn, and optimize your efforts for the next round.





TouchBistro is an iPad and integrated payments solution built for restaurant people, by restaurant people. Our system helps thousands of restaurateurs around the world increase sales, delight guests, and save both time and money. Find out how our solutions can help make it easier to run your restaurant. [Book a demo today!](#)

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