

A person is holding a smartphone in their hands, looking at the screen. The background is a blurred restaurant setting with a wooden table, a cup of coffee, and some food. The text is overlaid on the image.

THE EXPERT GUIDE:
**RESTAURANT
SOCIAL MEDIA**

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INTRODUCTION

It's Friday afternoon at 4:00pm. The work week is coming to a close and John's fridge is empty. His cell phone chimes. It's Jeff. "What r u doing for dinner? Wanna grab a bite?" Does he ever. He remembers a picture Julie posted last week, sipping a bloody Mary topped with a lobster claw, an overflowing roll of crustacean meat in front of her. The caption read, "Wrap your claws around this... "

John responds, "I know this new seafood joint around the corner..." And that's how it begins.

If you've heard it once, you've heard it 1000 times: social media has changed the way we do business. For restaurants, it's changed the way consumers eat, what they crave, and how they choose where to grab a bite.

43% of people are eating out more than once a week.

47% of people are influenced in their purchases by social media.

This is great news for restaurants. But, the competition is stark: nearly 40% of all family, casual, and fine dining restaurants are very active on social media. The question is no longer, should you use social media? But rather: how can you use it to stand out?

This quick guide goes beyond the mechanics of social media and gives you tactics that you can put into action to fill seats, generate revenue, and make social media a part of the dining experience.

THE “MUST-HAVE” PLATFORMS:



INSTAGRAM

Best used for: photos, short videos, contests, promotions, hashtagging

Frequency: 1 or 2 times per day.



Hot tip: tag all your photos with a custom hashtag and geo-tag your restaurant’s location.



FACEBOOK

Best used for: check-ins, promotions, generating customer relationships, customer service

Frequency: 2 times per day maximum.

Two times per day is the max you should post before interactions drop off dramatically.



Hot tip: make sure you set up your restaurant’s Facebook Page as a “Place.” This way, customers can “check-in” when they visit.



TWITTER

Best used for: promotions, behind-the-scenes, customer service

Frequency: 3 or more times per day.

Engagement with followers decreases slightly after the third tweet.



Hot tip: Use Hootsuite - a free social media dashboard app - to schedule tweets in advance.

HOW OFTEN IS TOO OFTEN?

Finding the ideal posting frequency

There’s an age-old advertising concept that an audience must see an ad three times before it registers with them. But now, its disputed that seven times is more effective.

In any effect, repetition is key so posting the same image or link to your social media accounts isn’t a bad thing. It reinforces your message! But, your ad copy needs to change. In other words, use other words. Do repost the same content in a different way, but don’t repost the same message on Twitter as you do on Facebook. Twitter is best for 140 character quips, Instagram for hashtagging, and Facebook for more lengthy posts.

SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISING

Most Effective Platform: Facebook

Purpose: Brand Awareness and Revenue Generation

“If you just spend \$1 per day on Facebook ads, you will get in front of 4,000 people that wouldn’t have seen you otherwise. If you are doing that and your competitors aren’t, you win the awareness game in your niche.”

- Brian Carter, Author, Speaker, Marketer at The Carter Group in Charleston, SC

The most effective social ad platform for restaurants, Facebook Ads allows you to reach new audiences in a number of ways. You can: boost your Facebook posts, promote your page as a whole, advertise an offer, send people to your website, and more.

Facebook ads are effective because you can drill down into audiences by location (down to the zip code!), age, and their behaviors. This means if you’re offering a special on SuperBowl Sunday, for example, you can target customers by location and by their sports interest.

Another way Facebook allows you to drill down and capture new customers is by targeting the “friends of people” who like your page. Stats show that 80% of people said that because of social media, they’re more likely to try new things based on friends’ suggestions, so when a prospect sees that their friend likes your page, they’re more likely to have an interest too.

As for the content on your advertisements, promotions always work best, but informational content, like recipes and how-tos, work well too. The key to content is to ensure that your prospects are getting something in return for their click.



CONNECT WITH INFLUENCERS

Most Effective Platform: Where the influencer has the most engagement.

Purpose: Brand Awareness and Credibility Building

While having Guy Fieri post a picture of your signature dish to his Instagram, which boasts some 109K+ followers, might be the ideal, the reality is inviting local food bloggers and influencers of any kind will serve to get your name out on the web. Inviting a blogger or food influencer to dinner with the promise of an Instagram post or short blog post might seem like it has a small ROI but [one study](#) showed that 81% of US consumers trust advice and information from blogs and 61% of US consumers have made a purchase based on a blog's recommendation.

Why is the impact so great? Because bloggers make business personal. They invite consumers into their lives, so their endorsements feel like they're coming from a friend. Since these influencers are established and trusted purveyors of deliciousness, when they say something's good, their followers believe them.

Examples:

New York

Nick Solares @NickSolares

<http://ny.eater.com>

Alex Reichel @chekmarkeats

<http://www.chekmarkeats.com>

Danyelle Freeman @restaurantgirl1

<http://www.restaurantgirl.com>

Toronto:

Abbey Sharpe @AbbeysKitchen

<http://www.abbeyskitchen.com>

Grace Y @FoodintheCityTO

<http://foodinthecitytoronto.com>

Hurbert L @goodfoodtoronto

<http://www.goodfoodtoronto.com>



#JOINCONVERSATIONS

Most Effective Platform: Instagram and Twitter

Purpose: Brand Awareness

There are two types of hashtags you should use on your social media pages: unique and niche.

Unique hashtags are those that you create. For example, the name of your restaurant or the name of a contest or promotion you're running.

Niche hashtags are those that already exist. They might be geographical, industry related, or event-driven. Avoid excessive hashtagging. Your prospective customers won't be looking for #fork #butterknife or #greencurtains, but they might be looking for #foodspotting, #comfortfood, or #homemadeburger.

But posting photos to hashtags isn't the be all, end all. If you're looking to increase brand awareness, interact with other accounts posting to those hashtags. Like photos. Comment on accounts. Start conversations with your followers. Show a genuine interest in their lives. This not only promotes good will, but it reminds them that you exist.




POST-VISUAL CONTENT

Most Effective Platform: All

Purpose: Brand Awareness and Revenue Generation

According to a [recent study](#), visual content gets 94% more total views and is 40% more likely to be shared on social networks. That is HUGE. Especially for restaurants because you have so many amazing visual opportunities. Post pictures of your signature dishes, guests, and special events. You can take behind the scenes snaps, post a timelapse of a meal being plated, unveil a new drink – the possibilities are endless. The bottom line: images are visual stimuli. They whet the appetite. And for a hungry scroller on Instagram, it might be just be the thing they need to get them in the door.

 **Hot tip:** Make your photos look professional!
Consider using a photo editing app before you post:



Afterlight



SnapSeed



Fused



VSCOcam



CONTESTS

Most Effective Platform: All

Purpose: Revenue Generation and Customer Retention

Everyone likes free stuff. Contests are a great way to build relationships with your social media following and get people in the door. One survey showed that 79% of social media contest participants felt more positively towards the brand after a contest and 74% reported a positive influence on future word-of-mouth recommendations. There's no better way to engage your followers and spread the word of your restaurant in a fun and engaging way.

CONTEST TIPS:

- Ask participants to tag a friend or two in their entry to help spread the word.
- Make sure you read the social media platform's contest rules. Platforms like Facebook and Twitter may require you to have a separate landing page for your contest rules, while Instagram is a little more lenient. You can release Instagram from any liability by attaching a statement like this to your contest launch photo:
Per Instagram rules, we must mention this is in no way sponsored, administered, or associated with Instagram, Inc. By entering, entrants confirm they are 13+ years of age, release Instagram of responsibility, and agree to Instagram's term of use.
- Make the prize worth while! The more you're asking of your followers, the bigger the prize should be.

CONTEST IDEAS:

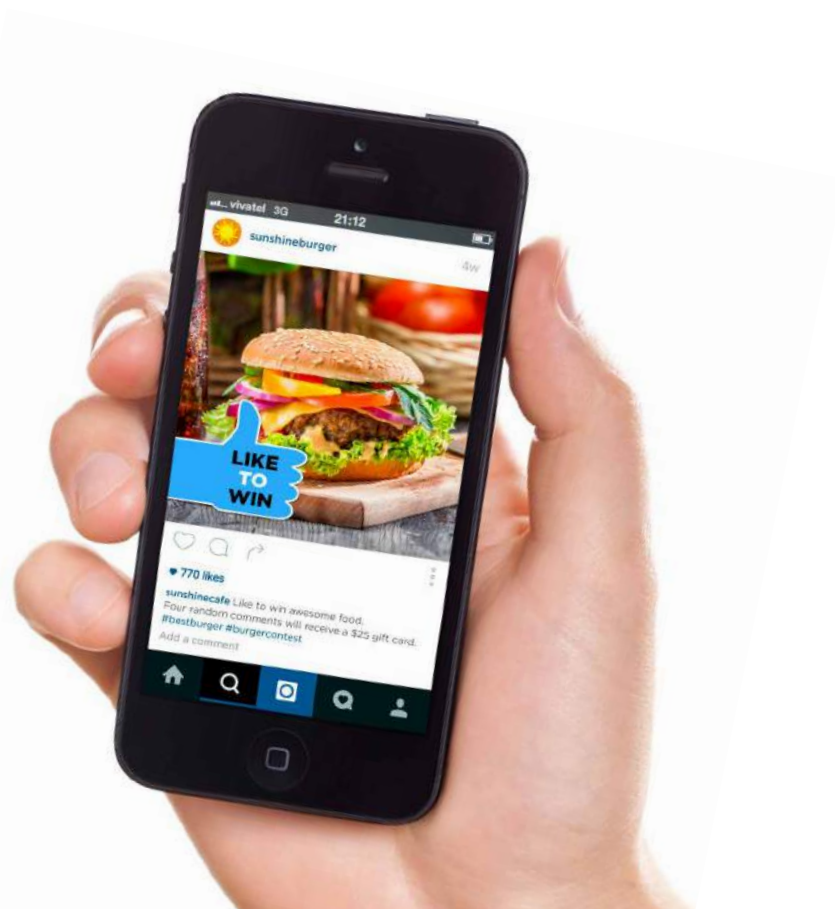
Simple photo contest: take a picture with friends and a favorite meal at your restaurant

Guess the menu item: take a picture of a signature dish. Post it. The person who guesses it right first wins.

Name this dish: cook up something new. Take a picture that makes 'em drool. Then have your followers suggest a name for the dish.

What's on my spoon/plate?: Create something mouth watering. Give no clues. Have your followers guess the make up of the plate. This works really well with sauces and smoothies!

Submit a recipe: get your followers to submit a recipe that could be featured on your menu. There's so much you could do with this contest. Break it down to three finalists. Video tape the adjudication. Have your followers weigh in on the recipe they'd like to win.





CONCLUSION:

BE SOCIAL MEDIA FRIENDLY!

You've got personality. You've created your amazing brand, your unique dining concept. You strive to give your guests an experience. Now it's time to share it digitally.

We're living in a social media world. Even if you're not running contests, commenting on external feeds and posting five times a day, being social media friendly can be as easy as creating a photo op or advertising your hashtag around your restaurant. You need to have your basics covered if you want to come to mind the next time a patron's stomach growls.



And why not – social media is fun! It's a great way for you not only to get creative, but share the experience of your venue that you've worked so hard to create.



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