



A Beginner's Guide to Marketing for Restaurants & Coffee Shops



TABLE OF CONTENTS

→ The “Why” Behind the Guide	Page 4
→ Section 1: The Basics of Local Restaurant Marketing	Page 5 & 6
→ Section 2: What You Need to Know Before Getting Started	Page 7 - 9
→ Section 3: How to Develop a Marketing Plan for Your Restaurant or Coffee Shop	Page 10 - 13
→ Section 4: Common Pitfalls	Page 14 & 15
→ Section 5: Restaurant Marketing Ideas	Page 16 - 17
→ Section 6: 3 Restaurant Marketing Strategies to Start With	Page 18 - 20
→ Section 7: Wrapping Up	Page 21 & 22
→ About the Authors	Page 23

A Beginner's Guide to Marketing for Restaurants & Coffee Shops

Managing employees, dealing with finances, handling operations, and developing menus. Restaurant owners are responsible for so much more than simply “owning” a restaurant.

While this unwavering sense of commitment is one of the things we respect most about restaurant owners... we also know it can lead to some tricky decisions.

Because, when you're juggling never-ending “To-dos” and constantly competing priorities...

When you're always short on time, energy, and resources (or all three)...

When you have employees to pay and operations to sustain...

You have to pick and choose what to focus on.

And restaurant marketing usually loses that coin toss.

But why?

Well, it's not because marketing doesn't work. 80% of restaurant owners think digital marketing is “**vital for survival and growth.**” And it's not because your customers don't like marketing, either. **45% of U.S. diners** have cited social media as the reason for trying a new restaurant.

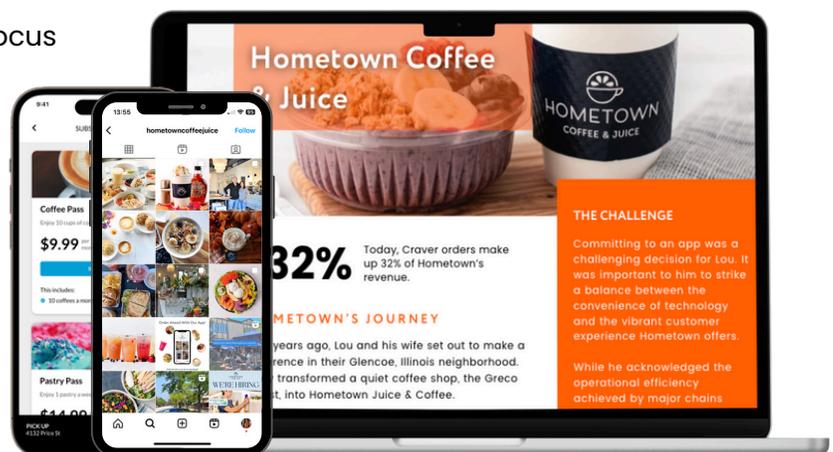
It's because restaurant marketing is just too unfamiliar.

It's an abstract, intimidating, and overwhelming concept that restaurant owners are just too dang busy to add to their plate.

We hear you.

But it doesn't have to be like that, y'know.

This guide is here to show you that.



The “Why” Behind the Guide

A Beginner's Guide to Marketing for Restaurants & Coffee Shops is for restaurant owners and managers who want to start marketing their restaurants, but aren't quite sure where to begin.

Developed in collaboration with Deena McKinley – the Managing Partner and Founder of Maverick Marketing Solutions, LLC – this guide will take you through everything you need to start marketing your restaurant, from definitions and finances to strategies and first steps.

By the end of this guide, you'll understand:

- The basics of local restaurant marketing
- What you need before getting started
- How to develop a marketing plan for your restaurant or coffee shop
- Common pitfalls and mistakes to avoid
- What ideas are easy/inexpensive to start with
- 3 things you can easily start doing today
- How to look ahead/evaluate success

So, without further ado...

Let's start marketing your restaurant, shall we?



Section 1:

The Basics of Local Restaurant Marketing

The Basics of Local Restaurant Marketing

Glossary

- **Return on Investment (ROI):** a metric that demonstrates how effectively money has been spent depending on what results were delivered
- **Trade Area:** the three-mile radius surrounding a restaurant's location
- **Top of Find:** the need for restaurants to maintain a high-ranking digital presence on search engines, making it easy for customers to find them via internet search; a play on the phrase "top of mind"

What is local restaurant marketing?

Local restaurant marketing refers to the tactics and strategies that restaurant owners can use to promote their businesses within their trade area.

The goal of local restaurant marketing is to build (and/or increase) local awareness of your restaurant, attracting new customers and building stronger connections within your neighborhood and community.

Why does marketing matter to restaurants/restaurant owners?

Local restaurant marketing is important for restaurant owners for a few reasons.

Effective marketing strategies can also improve your restaurant's credibility and reputation, build customer loyalty, and ensure you stay on top of find online.



Section 2: **What You Need to** **Know Before** **Getting Started?**

What You Need to Know Before Getting Started?

Glossary

- **Gross sales:** the money your business makes before subtracting expenditures
- **Marketing spend:** the money your business puts toward marketing efforts
- **Historical results:** information/statistics/data collected from past events, initiatives, and efforts; used to inform predictions about future trends and performance
 - Also called “historical data”

When should I start marketing my restaurant?

You should start marketing your restaurant as soon as possible!

If your restaurant is brand new, you should start marketing as soon as you have confirmation that you’re on track to open. If your restaurant is already open but you haven’t started marketing, consider this your sign to start now!

It’s never too early (or too late!) to start restaurant marketing.

How much should I spend on marketing my restaurant?

Much like no two restaurants are the same, no two marketing spends are the same, either.

Every restaurant’s marketing spend is influenced by several highly variable (and highly individualized) factors, including:

- Your restaurant’s location
- Your restaurant’s competition
- Your restaurant’s target audience
- Your restaurant’s specific marketing goals



To calculate a tailored marketing spend for your restaurant, you’ll need to look at:

- Historical revenue data
- Projected sales
- Specific marketing goals
- The cost of different marketing channels
- The expected ROI from each channel



Generally speaking, putting 3–6% of gross sales toward marketing is a good rule of thumb.



What You Need to Know Before Getting Started?

Where should I start when it comes to local restaurant marketing?

Before you start marketing your restaurant, you need to be able to answer the following questions about your restaurant.

1. Brand Information
 - What is your brand identity?
 - Who are your competitors?
2. Historical Results
 - What marketing has worked in the past for you?
 - What marketing has worked in the past for your competitors?
3. Target Audience
 - Who are your best customers?
 - What matters most to them?
 - What need do you fulfill for them?
 - What platforms/channels do they hang out on?
4. Measurable Goals
 - What are your (clear and measurable) marketing goals?
 - How will they be measured?
5. Tracking and Analysis
 - How will you track your goals over time?
 - What will you do with that information?



Knowing and understanding how each of these topics is key when developing a strong marketing strategy (but more on that in Section 6).

Section 3:

How to Develop a Marketing Plan for Your Restaurant or Coffee Shop

How to Develop a Marketing Plan for Your Restaurant or Coffee Shop

Glossary

- **Outcome:** a development that, if achieved, indicates success in your business
- **Marketing channel:** a medium that you use to communicate with your customers
 - Examples: Social media, email marketing, networking events, word of mouth
- **Content:** information (text, images, video, or audio) designed to provide value
 - Examples: Blogs, social media posts, YouTube videos
- **Content calendar:** a schedule that dictates how/when/where you publish content
 - Also called an “editorial calendar”

What is a restaurant marketing plan and why do I need one?

A restaurant marketing plan is a strategic framework that guides all marketing efforts to ensure they align with your business goals and target audience. Think of it like a marketing roadmap, designed to promote your restaurant’s growth, enhance visibility, and maximize profitability.

A strong restaurant marketing plan typically includes a few key components:

- **Market analysis** -> An exploration of your market/competitors/customer demographics
- **Brand positioning** -> A definition of what makes your restaurant unique
- **Marketing goals** -> Your restaurant’s specific, measurable objectives
- **Marketing strategies** -> The tactics you will use to achieve your goals (i.e. social media marketing, email campaigns, local SEO, community engagement, etc.)

- **Budget** -> an overview of how much you are willing to/can afford to invest in marketing
- **Monitoring and evaluation** -> An overview of the metrics you’ll use to measure the effectiveness of your marketing activities

Now, if you’re a restaurant owner interested in scaling or growing your business, then developing a marketing plan just became a non-negotiable... and here are 5 reasons why.

1. A marketing plan keeps you focused

A marketing plan helps your efforts stay focused and aligned with your overall business objectives. It also prevents wasteful spending on ineffective tactics and ensures every marketing dollar you spend directly supports your strategic goals.

How to Develop a Marketing Plan for Your Restaurant or Coffee Shop

2. A marketing plan helps with customer acquisition

In the (highly competitive) restaurant industry, good food isn't enough for strong, sustainable customer acquisition. A marketing plan helps you systematically (and consistently) attract new customers with strategies to keep them coming back.

3. A marketing plan gives you a competitive edge

As a restaurant owner, you know how difficult it can be to prioritize marketing. That's why putting the effort into a strong marketing plan gives you a competitive advantage over other restaurants that can't – or won't – make time to do the same thing.

4. A marketing plan keeps you adaptable

Markets are constantly changing, with trends and preferences evolving almost daily. A marketing plan helps you stay flexible and on track, making it easier to respond dynamically and stay ahead of the curve (and your competitors).

5. A marketing plan increases profitability

If we're talking bottom line, then the main reason you need a marketing plan is because it's profitable.

A well-crafted marketing plan optimizes your marketing spend, helping you focus your efforts on high ROI activities that actually make you money.

What makes a good local restaurant marketing plan?

The recipe for a good restaurant marketing plan has a few key ingredients.

1. An outcome/goal

A good marketing plan has a specific outcome. Work on identifying one main outcome (and what that outcome looks like for you) before moving on to anything else.

→ **Ask yourself:** "What's one big outcome I want to accomplish?"

2. A target audience

A good marketing plan has a clear audience. Think about what those customers want, what they value, what they're struggling with, and how your restaurant is their solution.

→ **Ask yourself:** "Who are my very best customers, and why?"

How to Develop a Marketing Plan for Your Restaurant or Coffee Shop

3. A target channel(s)

A good marketing plan has a target channel (or multiple). Figure out what channels your target audience uses and generate your content to meet them where they're at.

→ **Ask yourself:** "Where are my customers already spending their time?"

4. A content calendar

A good marketing plan has a guide for content creation. Best practices vary from channel to channel, and a content calendar keeps your marketing on track and in line.

→ **Ask yourself:** "What kind of content works best on my channels?"

5. A tracking process

A good marketing plan has a way to track and analyze performance. Determine the metrics you're measuring, a sustainable way to track them, and how to learn from the data afterward.

→ **Ask yourself:** "What metrics am I trying to measure, and what can I learn?"

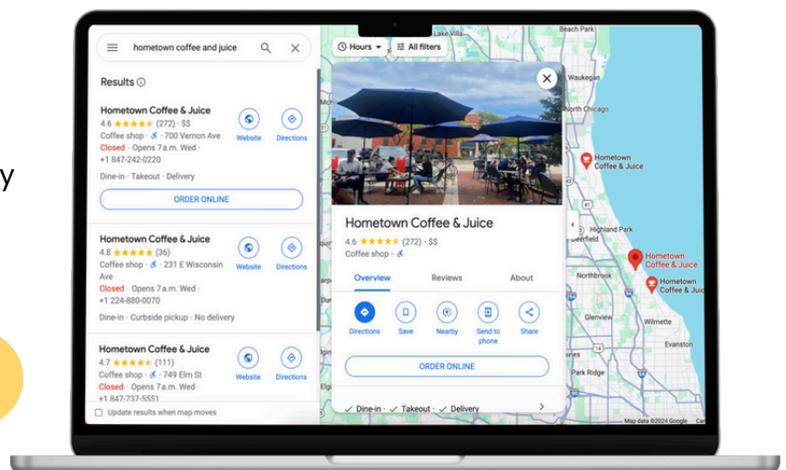
What marketing channels should I be exploring?

The marketing channels your restaurant should be exploring depend on what channels your target audience is using.

However, here are some common channels that many restaurants find effective:

- Social media
 - Instagram, Facebook, TikTok
- "Traditional" media
 - Radio
- Google Business Profile
- Email marketing*
- Local sponsorships
- Local collaborations

**Tip: Always prioritize avenues that allow you to "own" your audience (like email marketing, but more on that in Section 5!)*



Section 4:

Common Pitfalls

Common Pitfalls

Glossary

- **Marketing mix:** a combination of focus areas that form a marketing plan
- **Key Performance Indicator (KPI):** a quantifiable metric that evaluates progress toward a goal or result

What are some of the most common challenges in restaurant marketing?

There are a number of common challenges in restaurant marketing:

- Budget constraints (check out page 17)
- Finding the right marketing mix (check out page 11)
- Measuring the effectiveness of marketing campaigns (check out page 22)
- Standing out in a competitive market (check out page 19)

NEGLECTING CUSTOMER FEEDBACK

In restaurant marketing, your message might vary from channel to channel and campaign to campaign. But there's one thing that should never change, no matter what: your brand!

In hospitality, nothing is more important than the customer experience. That's why it's important to read and answer reviews. Responses show that you care; neglect shows that you don't.

INCONSISTENCY IN BRANDING

NOT IDENTIFYING DESIRED OUTCOMES

It's easy to get caught up on tracking, data, and KPIs. But, if the KPIs you're obsessing over aren't tied to an outcome, they don't mean anything! Remember: outcomes drive marketing.

Tracking results is a great way to make sure you're on the right trajectory... as long as you're tracking the right thing. Keep your tracking aligned with the outcome you're working toward.

NOT TRACKING THE RIGHT RESULTS

4 MOST COMMON PITFALLS IN RESTAURANT MARKETING

Section 5:

Restaurant Marketing Ideas

Restaurant Marketing Ideas

What are some effective marketing strategies for new restaurants?

- Host a strong launch event
- Partner with local businesses
- Offer an opening special
- Create a buzz through social media
- Lean on the pull of social influencers
- Run targeted ads in local media
- Build a strong digital presence (from day one)



Are there any low-budget marketing ideas for restaurants?

- Utilize social media effectively
- Encourage word-of-mouth by offering exceptional customer service
- Host community events
- Form partnerships with local businesses
- Implement a customer referral program
- Build an SEO strategy (and continually optimize it!)
- Answer every online review
- Curate better in-house experiences
- Improve your digital presence
- Join community groups on Facebook

As mentioned back in Section 3, marketing avenues where you own your audience are the best, like email marketing. Tons of email service providers have free (or low-cost) plans that are great starting points. Once you're signed up there, focus on capturing your guest's emails (and their consent!), deliver high-value emails at least weekly, and grow a highly engaged audience... and one you own!

How am I supposed to compete with marketing from big restaurant chains?

Chains like McDonald's have lots of people doing lots of marketing with lots of budget, something that just isn't feasible for smaller, locally owned restaurants.

Comparing your local restaurant marketing efforts to that of a big chain like McDonald's is like comparing apples to oranges...but that doesn't mean your restaurant doesn't have an edge over McDonald's in other ways.

The way that your marketing stands out from the big players is authenticity.

As a smaller business, you're able to connect with your customers personally, emotionally, and individually — something McDonald's could never do in the same way.

Section 6:

3 Restaurant Marketing Strategies to Start With

3 Restaurant Marketing Strategies to Start With

At this point in the guide, your brain is probably *bursting* at the seams.

New definitions and terminology to learn... Strategies and concepts you want to experiment with...A fresh "To Do" list that seems to be growing exponentially.

It's a lot to take in, especially if you've already picked out a few things you know you want to try.

Lucky for you – and your shiny new marketing motivation—there are a few easy ways to start channeling this energy.

(And you can do 'em as early as today if you're feelin' spicy.)

1. Respond to customer feedback (both good and bad)

Back before the days of Google Reviews, restaurant owners would put aside a few hours every day (or week) to call their customers... yes, call them... yes, like on a phone. During these calls, the restaurant owner would ask the customer for real-time feedback, gaining incredible and invaluable insights in just a few minutes.

The same concept easily applies to Google Reviews. Spend a few minutes every day responding to recent customer reviews (both good ones and bad ones). Look for common themes or recurring complaints, take note of what people say is working well, and leave a meaningful response to each review.

Responding to customer feedback is good for your business – because it shows you what people are thinking – and it's good for your reputation – because it shows that you care.

Win-win.

-> **Today's action:** Take 30 mins and respond to any new customer feedback/reviews.

-> **Long-term action:** Set aside an hour daily to respond to customer feedback/reviews on Google (and other platforms). Making this a daily habit demonstrates a stellar commitment to customer service by ensuring all feedback gets a same-day (or next-day) response.

3 Restaurant Marketing Strategies to Start With

2. Develop meaningful community and partnerships

As a local business owner — especially one with a brick-and-mortar store — you're pretty tied to that "local" bit.

But that's definitely *not* a bad thing, especially once you start leaning into that "local-ness." Like with a brand new, super exciting community partnership!

Developing meaningful community partnerships with other local businesses is a great way to improve your restaurant's visibility and reach. Not only do these kinds of partnerships connect you with a brand new local audience (and brand new potential customers), but they let you show off your local pride, too.

So, whether you're giving back to local organizations making a difference or partnering with a long-time community favorite, you're making yourself a pillar of your community.

And people who love where they live want to support businesses that feel the same way.

→ **Today's action:** Poke around on Google (or social media) and find one organization in your community with a similar audience.

→ **Long-term action:** Reach out to that organization to introduce yourself/your business and share why you're connecting. If it's a good match, start exploring ways you can collaborate (like co-hosting a fundraiser, for example!).

3. Reward word-of-mouth advertising/referrals

Restaurant rewards are all the rage right now, making the jump from a "nice to have" restaurant feature to a "non-negotiable" one (especially if you ask **Gen Z**).

But, one of the nicest things about rewards programs? They can reward you right back.

Take referral-based rewards programs, for example. They don't take a ton of heavy lifting to implement, they can be physical or digital, and they attract both existing and brand-new customers. Referral rewards also do a good job of keeping advertising within your restaurant's trade area, because you wouldn't refer someone who doesn't live close enough to visit.

If you've never done referral rewards before, don't let the process intimidate you. Referral rewards can be as simple as you like... plus there's a software or app for everything, now!

→ **Today's action:** Brainstorm some reward ideas you think would entice your target audience to refer friends/family.

→ **Long-term action:** Start developing a word-of-mouth referral program. Establish the reward, the redemption process, limitations/exclusions, whether it's digital/physical and then start rewarding your audience for their support!

Section 7: **Wrapping Up**

Wrapping Up

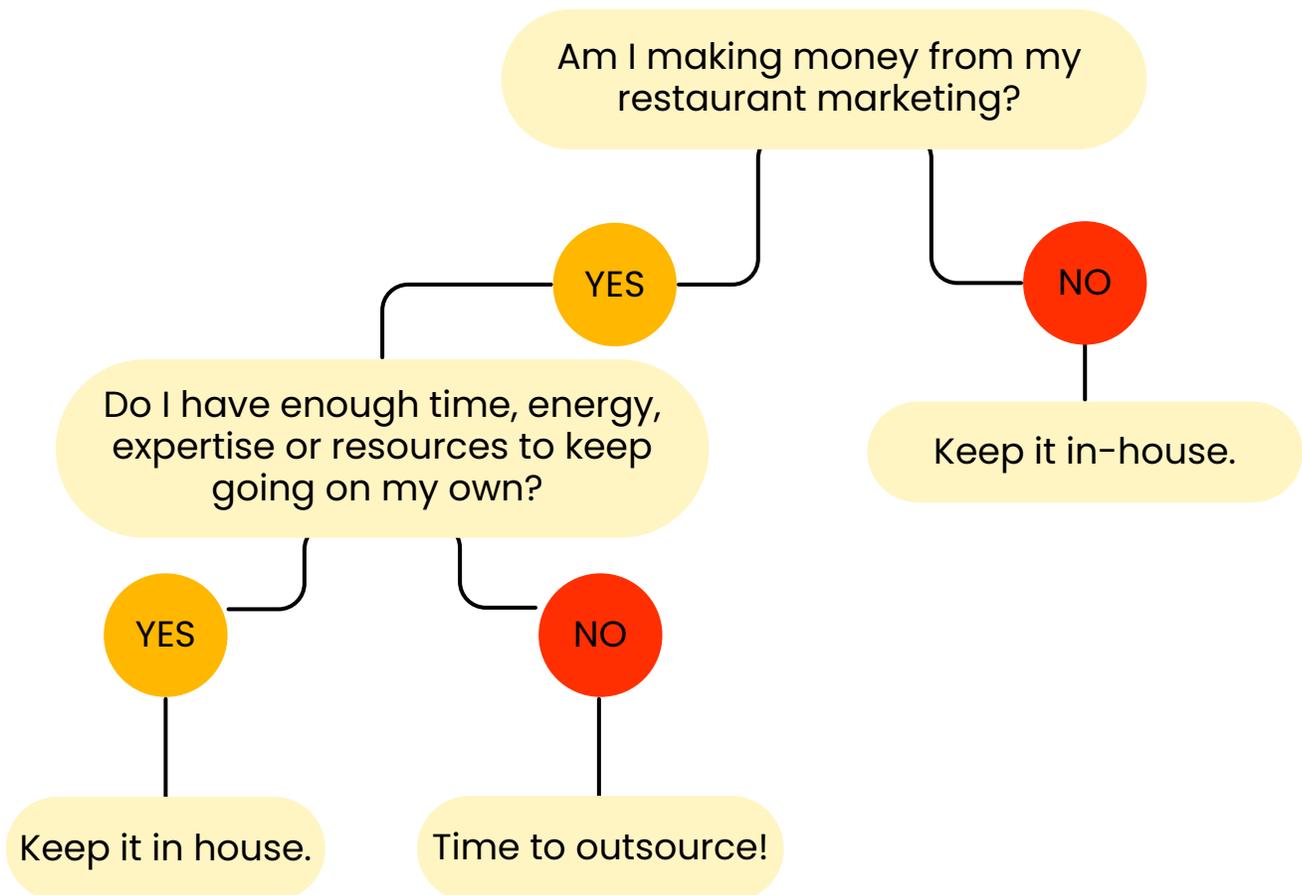
How can I calculate the ROI of my marketing efforts?

Here's how to calculate the ROI of your marketing efforts:

ROI = net profit from marketing-driven sales / total cost of marketing efforts

How do I know it's time to consider outsourcing my marketing?

Use this simple flow chart to determine whether or not it's time to outsource your marketing?



About the Author

About Deena McKinley

With over 20 years working with leading QSR and Fast Casual brands, Deena McKinley helps restaurants create data-driven marketing and digital strategies to increase customer engagement and improve financial performance.

Most recently, Deena was Chief Experience Officer for Papa Gino's Pizzeria and D'Angelo Grilled Sandwiches, two iconic New England brands with a combined 150 locations in the Northeast. In her role, she oversaw the digital, strategic marketing, technology, catering, and guest experience teams, leading the digital transformation of these legacy brands through the implementation of a new online ordering platform, app, and loyalty experience.

Previously, Deena was Chief Experience Officer at Mobivity, providing multi-unit restaurants like Subway, Sonic, and Dairy Queen a platform to increase retention, guest engagement, frequency and spend. Deena was also Chief Client Officer at Zimmerman Advertising, working with restaurant clients such as Papa John's Pizza, Boston Market, and Firehouse Subs.

Where to connect with Deena:

- [Website](#)
- [LinkedIn](#)
- [Email](#)





If you're interested in learning more about **Craver**, scan or **click here** to book a demo.

