

Tricks of the Trade: If You're Celebrating a National Food Holiday, Be Prepared for War!

National food days are a great marketing strategy! If they weren't, we wouldn't have a national food day for literally every day of the month. Don't believe me? Check out this site: [Foodimentary presents "Today in National Food Holidays"](#). Some businesses have even made food holidays famous! Most people know about IHOP's National Pancake Day or that they can get free Ice Cream at Dairy Queen on Ice Cream Day. By the way, both are marked down on my calendar.

So why am I making a big deal about insignificant holidays that are basically PR stunts? Well if you're advertising free food in celebration of a holiday, be prepared for war! Or at least a massive crowd of people.

I ran into this problem during my lunch break when I called in an order to McAlister's. When I walked up to the entrance of the food chain I was greeted with a few lines out the door and a giant inflatable iced tea bouncing about the wind. The inflatable announced it was National Iced Tea Day! Great, I can save two or three dollars on my meal today I thought. As I made my way through the door, I was met by a panicked employee who asked me to get back in line. I thought she was mistaken obviously, I called in my order, the call-in line should be much shorter. Nope, the call-in line was hanging outside as well. I jumped in line and waited... and waited... and waited. My lunch break was only 40 minutes long and I was now 15 minutes into it with a line that hadn't budged.

At this point, I was a little frustrated but figured I could cancel the order and speed over to the Mickey D's before the end of my break. I pushed by the pile of people and told a stressed out cashier to cancel my order. The distraught workers hopelessly looked through the heap of food orders and finally agreed to cancel, once mine couldn't be found. They were still nice enough to send me on my way with one of their famous half-gallon sized sweet teas.

I've worked at a variety of restaurants in the past, so I understand that pain that comes with trying to serve an overabundance of people. Celebrating a National Food Holiday is good marketing, but celebrating a National Food Holiday, keeping the lines in control, and giving a level of service so your customers feel like it was any other day is GREAT marketing!

As a business, use these high traffic days to prove to your customers that no matter the hurdle, you can still provide them with an excellent product in a reasonable amount of time. Of course, some days can be a wild card, but with Food Holidays you can create a strategy and dominate!

Here are a few tips for preparing for a busy day:

Be fully staffed

Assign someone to be a greeter. A greeter can create order and assure customers that they are going to be served. Also staff extra bussers or cleaners. A larger crowd just means more trash and debris. It is crucial to have tables wiped down, trash taken out, and counters cleared. A messy restaurant just

contributes to the overall look of chaos. Plus, if people are waiting for a table to be cleaned this increases the time for table turnover!

Mobilize your POS

By now, people are tired of hearing about Chick-fil-a. Let's be honest, though. There is a reason they're getting so much hype. Their food isn't much better than the hundreds of other chicken places out there, but their customer service is. Chick-fil-a knows how to handle a crowd with style. When their two drive-thru lines weren't enough, they mobilized their POS and started having employees walk up to cars with iPads to take orders and payments. Their lines can get extremely long, but they usually speed along when they have a team to tackle them.

I noticed at our local McAlister's, they simply did not have enough registers to keep up with demand. If they were to have a mobile POS setup, employees could have taken orders of people further down the line and brought their order to them.

Organize lines

Nothing is worse than walking up to an unorganized line. Where does it start? What is it for exactly? Did that person just cut in front of me? These are just some of the unsettling thoughts that bounced around my head during my wait. My McAlister's trip was made even more frustrating when I couldn't distinguish between the called-in order line vs. the dine-in line.

The best way to organize lines is to set up barriers. Get cheap stanchions and ropes and use them to create direct paths to the registers. This will also prevent customers from jockeying between lines, which adds time and frustration to your customers' wait. Use your greeter to direct traffic to correct destinations.

Motivate your staff

On busy days, your staff are the real rock stars. Have them come in early and prep them for the day they have ahead. Have contests and issue out free meal vouchers or gift cards to the hardest working employees. Mentally prepare your employees on your plan and ensure they feel like they can handle their responsibilities. When employees look and act confident, customers will definitely take notice!

So, celebrate these National Food Holidays, but don't go in without a game plan! Get your employees and restaurant organized and make the day as awesome and fun as it can be for your employees and customers both! Oh, and Happy National Pancake, Ice Cream, Chicken Finger, Margarita, etc. Day!