

Offering Online Ordering Can Drive New Business

Launching an online food ordering service is an excellent convenience business that will draw in new customers looking for a great meal on the go and keep existing patrons coming back.

Offering quality takeout meals is one of the fastest growing segments of the hospitality industry and making the ordering service available online will set your business apart from less technology focused businesses.

Customers are already using the Internet to research menus, reviews and locations of restaurants. Some patrons are taking the next step and ordering food online. Sixty-nine percent of mobile users have ordered food online, says a study produced by the Interactive Advertising Bureau.

The IAB study also found that 50 percent of patrons downloaded a restaurant app to a mobile device and more than half have used a mobile restaurant app like Yelp and Urbanspoon.

Jump On The Mobile App Trend

To take advantage of the ordering online trend restaurants need to get a mobile application. This technology tool is on the cusp of exploding in popularity and you don't want to lag behind your competitors. Many patrons find online ordering easier and quicker than calling because they have easy access to the menu.

If you get the right application, it's easy to track sales and you might see a jump in revenues, says foodeditorials.com. You can also use the application in your marketing plan and offer special online promotions. The mobile application is also an easy way for patrons to pre-pay for the food by credit card or Pay Pal.

Use Quality Packaging And Service

Make sure to buy quality takeout packaging. It doesn't matter if the food is delivered or picked up by the customer there is a risk of food losing its heat. You need to duplicate the same results in the dining room at the customer's home. In picking food packaging materials, be cognizant of how food reactions when it's sealed. Some food will sweat, changing its texture and taste. Find the right packaging materials that preserve the presentation of your food.

Don't Underestimate The Takeout Service Success.

There is nothing worse than being unable to meet demand and having disappointed customers. Make sure you have a great service launch and start on a positive note. Have one person on staff in charge of overseeing the takeout orders. Make sure they are arranging the orders so that they are completed in the delivery window.

While customers appreciate and praise being able to order food using a mobile device, they can also be hyper critical of mistakes and slowness. A restaurant is especially vulnerable online and unhappy customers are not shy in expressing opinions. Many customer review sites cite cold food and a two-hour delivery wait in negative reviews about mobile ordering.

Restaurants shouldn't be afraid of trying something new, especially if it will increase sales and bring in new customers. Don't fear technology because it's the new frontier in restaurant marketing and service offerings. Customers want more convenience and are willing to pay for quality food offered in a quick way. How are you modernizing your restaurant?

Is WiFi important to your business?

You're selling drinks and food and are wondering what does the Internet have to do with your business? Everything.

Technology has permeated every aspect of our lives. Appliances have become more sophisticated as have phones, cars and computers. Still, you are wondering what does that have to do with my bar? Everything.

Your Customers Want Access to WiFi

Technology has evolved and so have our decisions as they relate to technology. According to a 2012 University of South Florida study on the impact of WiFi, 70 percent of survey respondents said they preferred bars and restaurants with WiFi hotspots. The survey results showed that people purposely choose restaurants, bars and coffee shops with WiFi hotspots.

Since setting up a WiFi hotspot is fairly cheap, this should be your top priority if you don't already have one. The demand for WiFi will only grow, the study said, as customers use the wireless network to make phone calls so as to avoid using cell phone minutes.

The University of South Florida study also found there is a correlation between having a WiFi hotspot and a customer's likelihood in being a repeat customer. Don't miss out if you don't have a hotspot already. It's a cheap way to get customers in the door.

Use WiFi For Marketing

This may sound trivial but there are features of social media tools that allow customers to identify where they are when they post messages. The free marketing is done by your customers, posting messages or photographs from your bar, identifying they've been a customer there having fun.

The next step is yours. Use your free WiFi as part of your marketing package. Advertise in Twitter and Facebook messages that you are one of the only restaurants or bars on your street, in your area that has free WiFi.

Make sure you have signs in your windows or on your front door advertising that you have free WiFi. Get a sandwich board if you are doing a WiFi launch. You want to get the message out because as the study showed, people in part make decisions on where to eat or drink based on the availability of WiFi.

Can Customers Sour On Your WiFi?

People are concerned about the security of WiFi and that is why your establishment should be password protected and encrypted. You give out the password to customers as they ask ensuring that no one sitting in a car in your parking lot can hop on your free network without being a customer.

Don't charge for your WiFi. It might be tempting to make money off a service you are providing, but the University of South Florida showed that the one way customers are turned off by WiFi is when an establishment charges for the service.

Customers want as much as they can get free and since this service is very low cost to the business, it's not that much of a sacrifice to offer it.

WiFi Is Never Going Away

While it may seem as if WiFi was only invented a couple of years ago, it's been in existence for more than a decade. As more and more people buy equipment that uses wireless technology to connect to the Internet, the more appealing having a WiFi hotspot is to your business. Don't miss out on offering this service. It's not a fad, it's here to stay. Where do you use WiFi?

Top 10 items to keep in your car

During a snow storm in March hundreds of drivers were trapped in their cars for up to 14 hours on I-65 in Kentucky. Over Memorial Day weekend thousands of drivers were stranded on I-30 in Texas because flood waters made the highway impassable. How many times have you seen a car pulled off the side of the road with a flat tire?

Road emergencies occur every day regardless of weather events. Drivers need to prepare for every eventuality, although they should keep in mind seasonal needs and change out items every six months. Here are the top 10 items every driver should have in their car:

What to do about a flat tire?

While it's super easy to call your road service to help when you get a flat tire, sometimes your cell phone doesn't have service or the phone battery is dead so you can't always count on others. Even if you call a road service, you still need to have the right equipment. So the top item on our list is a spare tire. Check it every six months to make sure it's inflated because some drivers have been super stuck when they've tried to replace a flat with another flat.

To change a tire you need the appropriate tire iron and car jack to elevate the vehicle. These items may sound silly to include except many drivers have retrieved the spare tire from the trunk only to find the tire iron or jack missing. Make sure you have all the parts you need to change your tire.

My car doesn't have room for a spare tire?

Many small cars like convertibles don't have room for a spare tire. Does that mean you shouldn't drive them much? No, it means you need to have another plan for when you get a flat. The best alternative is a tire inflator-sealant product. You have a choice between two types:

- Tire sealant is in a pressurized can. The pressure pushes the product into the tire to seal the flat and inflates the tire.
- A tire sealant kit that comes with a 12-volt air compressor and replaceable container of sealant. These are more expensive than the pressurized cans.

These products should only be used if there is a small hole in the tread. They won't work if there is a rip in the tire sidewall. This is also not a long term fix. Use the product and get yourself to a tire shop to buy a new tire or get the hole fixed permanently.

Some tire sealant products have mixed reviews so try one out before you settle on your choice. There is nothing worse than picking a product that fails you in an emergency.

I'm thirsty

Water is a year-round item to have in your car. We need to drink regardless of the season. Most drivers can get by with a couple of small water bottles, but carrying around large quantities of water is especially important if:

- You have a clunker and the car tends to overheat. You will need to keep a gallon or two in your car at all times.
- You have a large family and are unable to share 20 fluid ounces over 12 hours.

My battery is dead

Jumper cables in good working order are a must. You can always call your car service, but your car radio isn't working and you might have to wait a couple of hours until they find you. If you have your own jumper cables you can ask a Good Samaritan at work or in the grocery store parking lot to give you a boost.

My hose has a hole in it

Duct tape is a miracle product. It's strong, made from cloth, flexible and super sticky. It resists water and can seal a leak in a hose. It's a "you never know when you'll need it" product and they use it in space. What better endorsement can you get?

Map

I don't need a map, I have my smart phone. True phones and GPS devices have become must haves in the car, but what if you can't get a GPS signal because it's too cloudy or your phone can't get a cell signal because you're in a dead zone? If you need to figure out where you are it's always best to have a paper backup no matter how "old school" that sounds.

It's raining cats and dogs

It's always smart to recognize that you don't know when it will rain so have an umbrella in your car at all times. The same can be said for an ice scraper. These are seasonal items that you can switch out, but always have an umbrella in the spring and summer and an ice scraper in the fall and winter.

I have an emergency

Put together an emergency kit that will address all of your needs. If you are stuck in a car for 12 hours, you might need a snack, so energy bars or nuts are a good choice. Band-Aids, a flashlight and a blanket can come in handy if you are stranded and have to spend the night camped out in your car. Coins for parking, tissues, phone charger and solar powered weather radio are bits and pieces that can be useful.

Warning traffic to stay away

Working on your car on the side of the road is supremely dangerous. If you are fixing a flat tire or performing an emergency engine repair, it's always smart to carry around flares or reflective triangles to warn drivers of your distress and to slow down. While the flares aren't reusable, the triangles are.

The miracle carpet

This is a seasonal item that doesn't have a summer equivalent. Your car is stuck in an ice or snow rut and there's no one around to push. Your tires are spinning and rocking your car back and forth hasn't accomplished anything. A piece of carpet or cardboard is the perfect solution. Carrying around bags of sand or gravel are impractical, but a small piece of carpet or cardboard can give your tire the grip it needs.