

Outsource your marketing...restaurants told!

Calashock Marketing, a specialist hospitality branding and marketing agency is launching a new campaign to get restaurants to invest in marketing.

Latest research has shown that on average less than 2% of annual turnover is spent on marketing by the majority of independent restaurants and hotels. To ensure effective marketing, and therefore a higher return on investment, companies should be budgeting no less than 3% of annual turnover on marketing.

Companies should also be looking at the bigger picture to ensure the marketing is fitting in with the overall marketing strategy.

Luigi Moccia, Director, said: *"We've all had last minute, too good to miss, advertising deals with newspapers and magazines. But a one off advert will rarely bring in the return expected"*.

An excellent and admirable example is Dell. How many times does Dell send you catalogues and offers – and note how one seems to arrive shortly after buying a new PC from Dell. This is because you may not need a PC today; you may not need one in 2 month's time. But when the time comes to consider buying a new PC, rest assured Dell will be on your list, because they undertake a constant marketing campaign. Restaurants could learn from this example.

Obviously we all want to publicise special events or evenings, but if your target client knows of your brand by previously having seen your publicity, your advertising will stand out and go further.

At the end of the day, as the adage goes, 'Marketing is an investment, not a cost'. If you invest £600 in a marketing campaign, you do not expect anything less than £600 of business. Correct?

Considering the UK is facing an uncertain economic future, it has never been more important to ensure money is spent well and made to work as hard as possible. There will be an influx of restaurants and other eateries advertising offers and deals to entice bums on seats, but with falling paper advertising rates, restaurants can take advantage of this ad use advertising as a medium for growing the brand, exposing it to targeted clients, and not just to publicise discounts and offers.

However, advertising is only a small piece of the marketing puzzle.

Every restaurant should have a marketing strategy, which should be reviewed and adjusted regularly. After all, 'Failing to plan is planning to fail'.

The different marketing elements – advertising, branding, e.mail marketing, web sites and PR – can be interlinked to work together. For instance, when leaving feedback forms with customers, capturing e.mail addresses gives you the opportunity of sending regular e.mails with offers to current customers, thus ensuring good Customer Relationship Management practices. Too many businesses focus on targeting new customers and not nurturing the loyal customers. The hard work has already been done – they have visited your establishment, now keep hold of them!

Lest we not forget a very important buzz work – branding. A brand, put simply, is a promise. People will remember your brand for good food, or bad food, good service, or bad service, a good atmosphere, or bad atmosphere. You get the gist. And a brand is not simply a logo or colour scheme. A brand extends to the food, uniform, quality of service, menu, etc. Anything which your customers will notice is part of your brand.

If your eatery targets families with children, ensure your staff are good with children and address customers enthusiastically. If your eatery is up-market and targeted to businessmen, then your staff should ensure they make your customers feel uber-important. Give your customers what they expect (or want!).

Poor menu design and appearance can also reflect on your brand – invest in a professionally designed menu which exhumes quality and taste. After all, what image does your menu portray when it is sticky and dirty or cluttered with too many dishes in 10 different fonts and sizes?

Virgin is the king of brands; you know that when you buy into Virgin you are guaranteed a good service or product, with a modern and fun approach. In a recent survey, Virgin was rated as one of the most trusted UK brands. Surprised?

Most restaurants focus on targeting local customers, and growing a brand on a local, or provincial, basis. There are many newspapers and magazines that have local or provincial readership, and are a perfect channel through which to target new customers. And not just through advertising.

PR can span from having a review – risky unless you know your establishment will get the critic raving about it – to running an offer with the publication. For instance, readers of your local magazine qualify for a 25% discount when coming in between Monday evening and Wednesday evening – thus not only giving your brand exposure to those who will not take up the offer, but also getting people to come in on what is normally a quiet evening. And PR does not have to be expensive. Several marketing agencies work on a pay as you go model. After all, agencies working with small to medium sized restaurants and hotels know that their clients will rarely be in a position to spend £1,000 a month on a PR retainer, and therefore build their business model around this.

Like anything; if you invest correctly then the returns will follow.

It is understandable that marketing is always the last thing on the list; after all you may still get customers visiting without having seen any marketing. But good marketing is important and will help you grow in not only monetary terms but also in terms of a brand. And when it comes to selling businesses, your brand will be an asset which will add value.

Unless you are able to employ a marketing professional internally, consider outsourcing your marketing to an agency – you will only pay for the work they do without the responsibility of employing a marketing manager who needs to be paid on top of advertising costs, and regardless of whether there is work for them to do or not.

Marketing needn't be as expensive or complex as you might imagine.

About the author

Luigi Moccia is a founding Director of Calashock Marketing Ltd. He has over 7 years experience in marketing within the hospitality and leisure sector. More reports and whitepapers by the author can be obtained by contacting Calashock on 020 8440 9535 or by e.mail info.uk@calashock.com.