

Coronavirus Era: 13 Restaurant Marketing Ideas

Introduction

The rapid spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19) has heavily impacted every industry in the United States practically overnight. The bar and restaurant service space has been hit especially hard by this outbreak, with some states such as New York, Illinois, and Washington shutting down dine-in service completely. From restaurant owners and operators to servers, delivery drivers, and staff, each individual in the restaurant business can expect to feel the effects of the coronavirus era.

The safety of your staff and guests is of course the utmost priority, but it's also crucial to have a plan to generate revenue if a dip in customer visits occurs. Check out the below ideas and tips that may help you to navigate this unsettling industry landscape.

1 Pickup Incentives

You can capitalize on peoples' cabin fever during this time of self-quarantine by promoting your order pickup services. Try offering free curbside pickup for all orders placed directly through your establishment, saving the cost of third-party services. To sweeten the pot, consider adding on an item such as an appetizer or dessert free of charge that has a high perceived value – but a low actual cost to you – to encourage pickup business.

2 Prompt Future Visits

With each delivery and/or pickup order it's a good idea to include a coupon or gift card that can be used in the future only during a dine-in visit. This will keep your establishment top of mind for guests that may be avoiding dining inside a restaurant right now but will be craving (no pun intended) to do so in the future.

3 Kids Eat Free

Offering a free kids' menu item with the purchase of an adult meal is a great tactic for gaining business and increasing check amounts, especially with most schools being closed during this time. This idea can be applied to dine-in, pickup, and delivery orders. A parent may be more apt to choose your restaurant over a competitor's if they know that their child's meal will incur no additional cost.

4 Bulk Is Best

If feasible, you can offer customers the option of placing bulk pickup and/or delivery orders. Communicate that meals can be placed in the fridge/freezer upon receipt and include reheating instructions to ensure that they experience your food the best way possible. This will incite large orders, which can help to offset any dine-in business that was lost.

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Gift Cards

Customers may not feel like dining out right now, but many people still are searching for ways to support their favorite local businesses. Allow gift cards to be easily purchased online or through email, so that patrons can support your restaurant now and enjoy their dining experience at your spot later.

6

Rotating Pre-fixed Menu

Another possible marketing technique is to create a special pre-fixed menu that appeals to both adults and children. Providing a cost-effective option that's perfect for singles, couples, and the entire family, during an uncertain time, can help guests to feel more at ease. Featuring unique menus that change every few days is a great way to create higher frequency return customers.

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Get Creative

Although not all your regular customers may be walking through your doors to dine, you can still add value and stay connected with your consumer base in other creative ways. For example, if you're a pizza joint, offer a remote pizza making class online or on social media where people can connect with you and your cuisine from the comfort of their own home. This will give you the helpful, human touchpoint that influences brand loyalty in many consumers.

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Be Social

As more and more people choose to practice social distancing, a desire to connect with others and their go-to local businesses only intensifies. Keep your customer base in the loop on what measures you're taking, what specials you're running, and how you and your staff are coping at the moment with the ever-shifting industry scene. Don't be afraid to have fun or show the inner workings of your restaurant at a time where many people are looking for unique outlets.

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No Contact

For both pickup and delivery orders, you can assure customers that they can request a “no contact” experience by leaving instructions on how they’d like their food delivered. Maybe they feel most comfortable with your employee placing it on the hood of their car for curbside pickup or perhaps ringing the doorbell and leaving it outside for delivery is their preference.

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Set a Theme

Reenergize your guests with a bit of fun by hosting a virtual game night, trivia night, or themed party on Instagram or Facebook Live. Tap into trending shows and movies that have a large fan base, like *The Office* or *Star Wars*, and create themed food and drink recipes that viewers can make at home. Not only can this initiative spur brand awareness and increase your social following, but it can foster a much-needed sense of community.

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Keep Employees Informed

In order to ease any worries among your staff, send out daily email communications to guarantee that everyone is on the same page. This can include workplace hygiene updates, social distancing tips when seating parties, new promotions, and any other pertinent information.

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Create New Roles

It’s a savvy idea to monitor the trajectory of each arm of your business and alter employee roles accordingly. For example, if delivery orders are through the roof and in-house dining has slowed, prompt employees that have cars to take shifts as delivery drivers instead of their usual server, bartender, or back-of-the-house role.

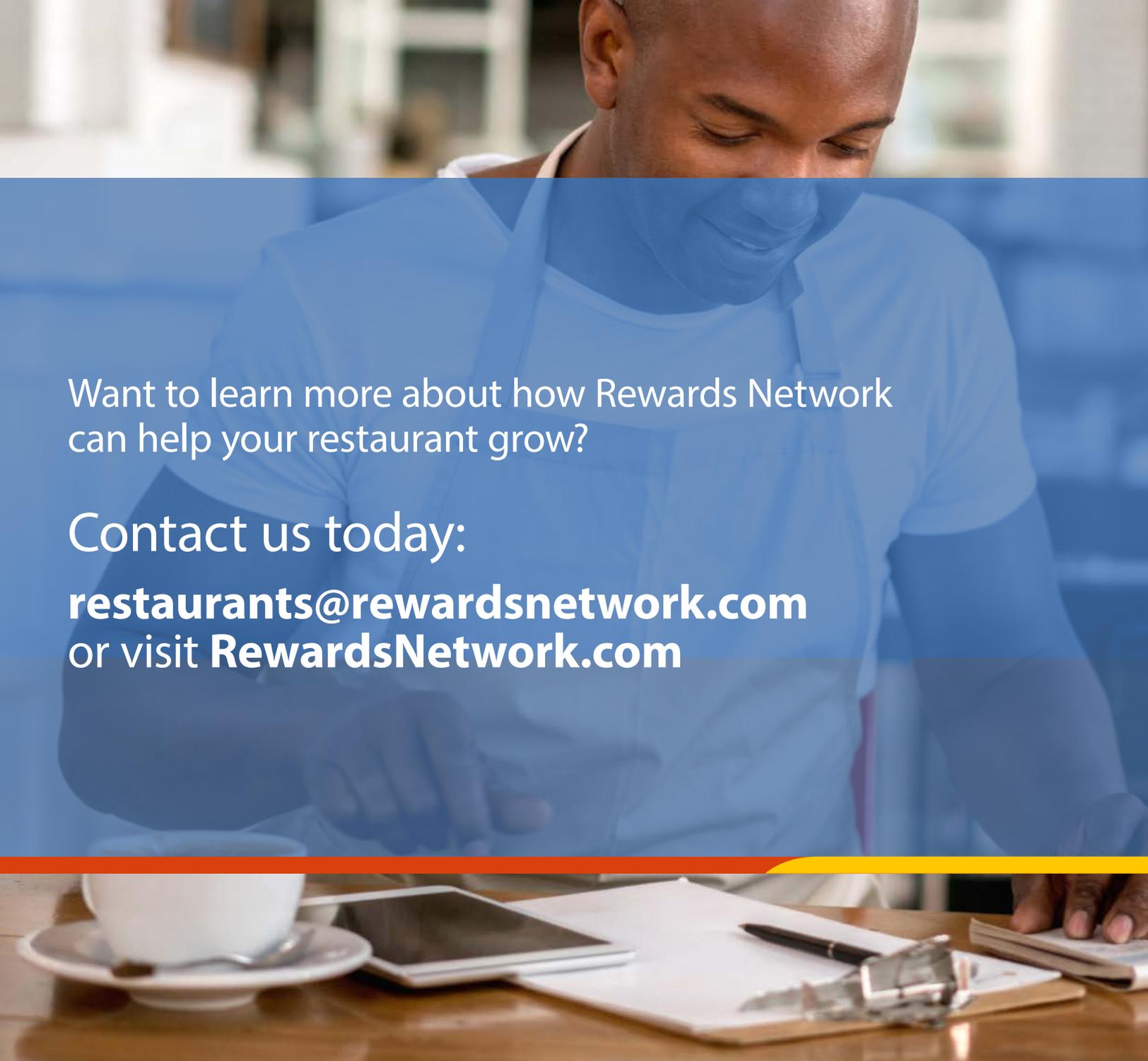
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Restrict Hours

Information relating to the virus is changing on a day-by-day basis, so your staff may need to alter their schedules to accommodate unforeseen circumstances. Decide if it makes sense to implement restricted or altered business hours for your restaurant. If the answer is yes, it’s a good idea to update your website and social platforms with this new information for customers.

Conclusion

Now, more than ever, it's crucial to encourage customers to support local businesses, specifically bars and restaurants, in any way possible — such as pickup orders, delivery, and gift card purchases — to ensure the success and longevity of these establishments.



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