

# FAST CASUAL

IDEAS &amp; TRENDS FOR THE FAST-CASUAL RESTAURANT

marketing

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## Test your marketing I.Q.

Operators need to rev up — not slow down — in a tough economy

**T**imes are lean. Fewer customers may be coming in the door, or they may be spending less. In this uncertain economy, the temptation many operators face is to cut back on marketing efforts.

But Linda Duke, CEO of Duke Marketing, says operators should not pull back on their marketing efforts, but they should put more energy behind their tactics.

"It takes consistent time and effort," said Duke, who recently published a book on marketing tips called *Recipes for Restaurateurs* (found at [www.marketing-cookbook.com](http://www.marketing-cookbook.com)).

Operators who implement strategic and concerted marketing efforts not only will make it through the lean times, but also will be ahead of those competitors who reined in their advertising.

"If you're putting in the effort during this time, then as the economy . . . corrects itself, you'll be ahead of your competitors," Duke said.

Turn the page to take Duke's hard-times marketing quiz.

# The Hard-Times Marketing Quiz

What is the quickest way to garner more sales during tough economic times?

➤➤ Large to-go orders. When sales slow, the best way to get them back up quickly is to land large to-go orders. Try taking samples of menu items to area car dealers and big-box retailers (Best Buy, Costco, etc.), and introduce yourself to the general manager. Ask if he would like to place an order with you for Saturday. Most car dealers bring food in for their staff on Saturdays because employees don't leave for a lunch break.

This is your chance to land some big sales early on a Saturday. Call to ask for their order Friday evening or Saturday morning. If you get several orders, deliver them yourself and offer something extra (free soda, cookies, chips). Then keep this up each week. You can make your sales goal on a Saturday before you even open for business.

Why is discounting not a good idea in a tough economy?

➤➤ Looking desperate will only hurt your brand and your value. Guests will not understand once a particular menu item is discounted and then returned to the regular price. You will be left with only one option, to continue discounting. Don't discount or cut prices. Try other tactics before doing anything drastic.

When there's time to lean, there's time to \_\_\_\_\_?

➤➤ When there's time to lean, there's time to clean. When business is slow, it is a good time to have your staff make your restaurant spotless. Create a chore list and keep staff busy getting the kitchen, bathrooms, dining room and parking lot clean. Maybe your kitchen needs a major steam cleaning or your bathrooms need a good scrubbing. Keep track

of the accomplishments and give the team an incentive to keep up the good work.

What is the best way to test products with new customers?

➤➤ Sample, sample, sample. Slow times are a perfect opportunity to take samples of your best-tasting menu items out to area businesses, groups, organizations and teams. Before lunch, take samples of your food and menus to area businesses. After lunch, try visiting banks, the chamber of commerce and nonprofits, and discuss upcoming events in which to participate. Before dinner, try sampling at sports fields or gyms, and hand out free appetizer or drink coupons to get them in.

What are the best menu items to promote during tough economic times?

➤➤ Promote high-margin, low-cost menu items. Instead of spending time and money introducing new menu items during slow periods, reintroduce your best-selling, highest margin and lowest food cost item. Keep it simple!

What is the most cost-effective advertising medium to generate awareness during tough economic times?

➤➤ Trade. Use your food in place of cash for radio advertising. Give away gift certificates to a local radio station to get on-air mentions.

What type of marketing focus is the most important during difficult economic times?

➤➤ Keeping loyal guests happy. Even your best guests may be having a hard time with the economy, so be sure to offer them something extra. Spend some extra time finding out what they like about your restaurant and your food — everyone loves to be heard. Then make changes if the ideas and feedback warrant them.

➤ Find more articles at [fastcasual.com/marketing](http://fastcasual.com/marketing).

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