



Take our quiz

How to drive food sales in a tough economy

By Linda Duke

As published in: [Franchise Times - November-December 2008](#)

When times are lean, it's time to ...? You don't have to finish the sentence on your own. Here's some suggestions on how to drive sales to your restaurant.

1. What is the quickest way to get 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 yourself large to-go orders. Try taking samples of your menu items to area car dealers and big box retailers (Best Buy, Costco, etc.) and introduce yourself to the general manager. Ask if they would like to place an order with you for Saturday. Most every car dealer in the country brings food in for their staff on Saturdays since employees don't leave for a lunch break. Call to ask for their order Friday evening or Saturday morning. If you get several orders take them yourself and offer something extra - free soda, cookies, chips. Then keep this up each week with retailers and car dealers. You can make your sales goal on a Saturday before you even open for business with large to-go orders.

2. 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 after a particular menu item is discounted and then afterward when you raise the price back to regular. You will be left with the only one option...to continue discounting.

3. When times are lean, it is time to...(finish the sentence).

When times are lean, it's time to clean. During slow business it is a good time to have your staff get your restaurant spotless. Create a chore list and keep them busy making the kitchen, bathrooms, dining room and parking lot clean. Maybe your kitchen needs a major steam cleaning and dishes polished. Keep track of the accomplishments and give the team an incentive to keep up the good work.

4. What is the best way to drive trial?

Sample, sample sample. During slow times it is a perfect opportunity to take samples of your best tasting menu items out to area businesses, groups, organizations and teams. Before lunch, take samples and menus to area businesses. After lunch try visiting banks, the chamber of commerce and nonprofits to discuss upcoming events at which you could participate. Before dinner, try sampling at sports fields, gyms, and hand out free appetizer or drink coupons to get them into the restaurant.

5. 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.

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

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

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

Keep loyal guests happy. Even your best guests may be having a hard time with the economy, so be sure to offer them something extra and listen to their ideas.

Linda Duke is the founder of Duke Marketing and the author of "Recipes for Restaurateurs: Ingredients for Successful Sales Building."