

MARKETING on a Dime

Operators and experts say effective marketing doesn't have to cost a lot of money or time.



As a small chain expands, it usually devotes its resources to areas such as operations, human resources and franchisee support with little left in the budget for marketing. But marketing doesn't have to be expensive or time consuming. *Chain Leader* spoke to several operators and experts about some cost-effective marketing tools that have proven to be successful.

Nancy Davies, group account director for Chicago-based Stir Crazy, Salmon Borre Group, Lake Forrest, Ill.

One of its effective—and inexpensive—marketing tools has been the “Stir Crazy’s Cook Like a

Wok Star.” The popular event can accommodate 25 people and is held every six weeks in a special section of the restaurant on a traditionally lower-traffic evening. It is hosted by a Stir Crazy chef, who takes guests through the process of creating an appetizer, entree and dessert. For the \$25 fee, guests enjoy two glasses of wine that complements the food they will be preparing, cooking instruction, and they leave the restaurant with a notebook containing the night’s class recipes, shopping list with comparable costs from multiple grocery stores as well as descriptions—with photos—of various rice, noodles and other ingredients used in Asian cooking.

Clearly at \$25 a guest, Stir Crazy’s Cook Like a Wok Star is not designed to be an immediate money-making venture. However, it is designed to break even. It provides the store with a public-relations opportunity, a great way to create unique word-of-mouth buzz, a way to interest and introduce the restaurant to new patrons and also act as a thank you to current patrons. Its ultimate goal of driving increased business to the individual restaurants has proved itself at the current locations that hold the event.

Linda Duke, CEO, Duke Marketing, San Rafael, Calif.

Using food instead of cash is a great way to gain momentum, such as sampling at kids soccer or baseball games and handing out an incentive to come into the restaurant. Dropping off a sample platter to area car dealers, who order food from various restaurants each Saturday for their sales staff, along with a menu and a first-order incentive, and following up on Saturday morning to take their order—this introduces your restaurant to some people that haven’t tried it and is usually a big cash order before the restaurant gets busy for Saturday lunch.

BIG idea CEO Linda Duke of Duke Marketing recommends delivering menu samples to five local businesses or organizations a week. By the end of the year, the restaurant will have introduced itself to 260 businesses and potentially hundreds of guests, with a very small investment in food and labor.

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