

Leveraging Social Media— Part 1

In part one of a two-part series, Linda Duke explains how social media is the new word-of-mouth for restaurants.

By Linda Duke

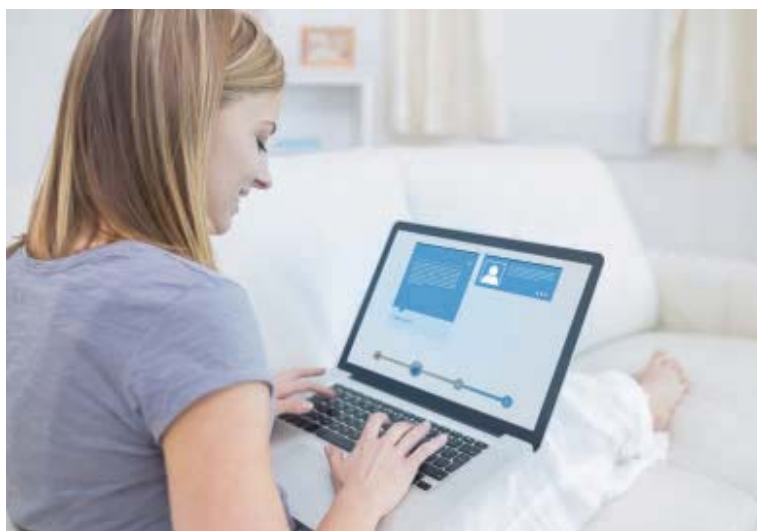
We've received many calls recently from small regional restaurant chains looking for help with social media and trying to understand how it fits into their overall marketing plan. Many have no idea what it takes to get social media outlets up and running or how to manage them once they're operational. Some worry that they lack the resources to put behind social media, including finding a person to manage it. Here are some common questions that I've heard:

1. How should I get started?

To get started with social media, my advice is, get started! Don't sit back and wait, and don't assume this is a "fad" that will fade away. (At first, many restaurant operators in the 1990s thought websites were a waste of time, too.) Start by doing research and, if you don't already have a personal Facebook or Twitter account, create one and learn how to use it. From your own account, study other restaurants' social media and learn from them. Once you've got a grasp of the basics, launch your own business page.

2. What are some of the most popular social media sites?

Facebook is probably a must for a restaurant, and Twitter is huge, too. Also look at Instagram, LinkedIn, Pinterest and Google+. There are also many tools available today that can help you to manage and monitor your activity on social media sites. You may want to start out with a free tool, such as Social Mention or Wildfire. Other tools offer a more in-depth look at engagement with your social media campaigns and better analytics, such as Sysomos Heartbeat, Vocus and Adobe Social.



3. How can I use digital marketing to reach consumers and grow my restaurant?

Social media should be integrated into your overall public relations and marketing strategy. It won't replace traditional marketing—it will enhance it. For example, if you've gotten coverage in a local newspaper or TV news outlet, you can use social media to continue generating buzz. Upload links of all media coverage to your Facebook or Twitter pages and call attention to them. This expands the "shelf life" of the actual coverage and allows for direct customer engagement and response as they leave comments, questions and congratulatory notes on your page. Monitor the results so you can chart the overall success of your campaign.

Additionally, news outlets with social media pages are always looking for interesting people and products to feature. Reach out to their social media managers with the latest news about your restaurant. You can offer them the inside scoop on new menu items or mouthwatering photos of your pies, or you can

announce the opening of a new store or spotlight your new pizza maker or a waitstaff member. There is real value when a media outlet posts a link about your pizzeria on Facebook or Twitter.

4. What kind of content should I post on my restaurant's social media pages?

For starters, you'll want to offer promotions, giveaways and new menu announcements. Try to create savvy content and promotions that engage consumers online and offline at the same time. We have found that a Facebook promotion—preferably with a definite beginning and end date—earns great response and boosts social media activity. For example, Straw Hat Pizza (strawhatpizza.com) created a one-weekend promotion that offered a special family dinner to its Facebook fans. Fans had to mention the Facebook promotion when they arrived at the restaurant in order to receive a special price on their meal on the designated Saturday and Sunday. We've found that giving guests a short promotional window—such as a single weekend—generates more response.

In another Straw Hat promotion, Duke Marketing asked guests to take photos of their party eating the family meal and post them onto Facebook, and the best photo earned a Straw Hat Pizza T-shirt. When the winner came into the store to pick it up, he was also given a free lunch. He then went back and posted about his positive experience on Straw Hat's Facebook



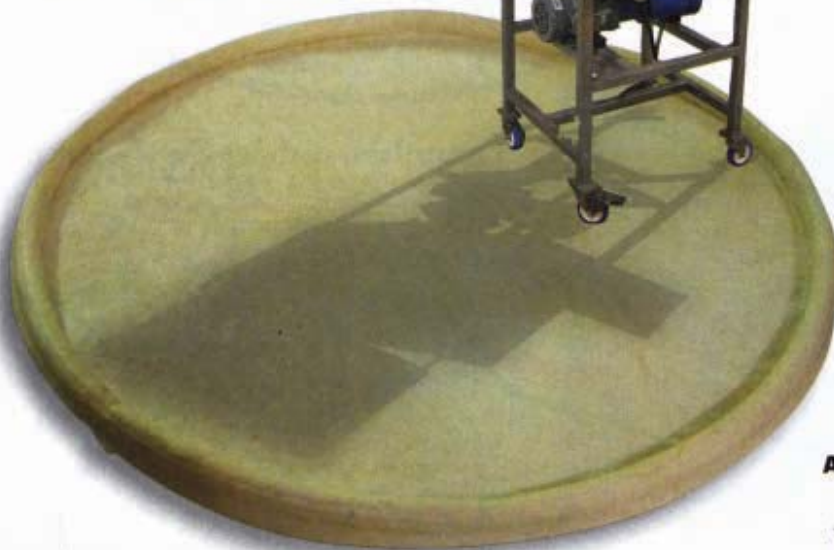
wall, creating great word-of-mouth with all of the other fans.

In fact, you might say social media is the new word-of-mouth for restaurants. I'll tell you more about how to leverage it in next month's issue! ▶



Linda Duke is the CEO of Duke Marketing and author of *Recipes for Restaurateurs* (marketing-cookbook.com), a "cookbook" of marketing ideas for restaurant owners, as well as *The LSM Diet: Improve Your Bottom Line, Not Your Waistline* (ismdiet.com), a self-help guide to local store marketing. She publishes a quarterly industry resource, *Restaurant Marketing Magazine*, and an educational program, LSM-U, Local Store Marketing University. Find out more at dukemarketing.com.

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