

Building a Better Beverage Program

Linda Duke offers 10 tips for boosting your beer, wine and spirits sales.

By Linda Duke

If you're looking to develop a program to boost beverage sales, you don't necessarily have to do it alone. Many beer, wine and spirits vendors prove to be excellent resources to help restaurant operators by providing table tents, posters, coasters, signage and other materials for in-store promotions. In some cases, they'll also assist restaurants in creating tasting seminars for the staff, menu pairings, bar promotions and eye-catching displays. They can also help you educate your customers about certain brands and provide giveaway materials bearing their logos to promote their brands—you won't pay anything, and your customers benefit from the freebies.

To learn more about these opportunities, reach out to your local or regional distributor and inquire about the possibilities. Meanwhile, if you want to get started right away on your own, consider the following marketing tips:

1. **The Power of Suggestion.** Make sure that your servers or cashiers use suggestive selling techniques for beverages prior to taking or ringing up orders. Keep half-bottles of wine or six-packs of craft beers near your register for customers with to-go orders.
2. **Mix It Up.** Promotions mix things up and generate interest and excitement among your guests. Whether it's March Madness or Merlot Mondays, promotional opportunities abound. Choose one or two, get creative and get started!
3. **Shine With Wines.** Offer wine dinners and serve wine by the glass. Make sure to provide pairing suggestions on your menus for those customers who are not especially knowledgeable. Make it easy for them, save them some embarrassment, and they'll appreciate you!
4. **'Tis the Season.** Seasonal ingredients can make a big splash with your customers—think orange Italian sodas for Halloween and cinnamon hot chocolate for the holidays. Craft beers are especially popular in the fall months, as are heartier wines. For next spring, consider strawberry martinis and lighter wines.
5. **A Hunger for Happy Hour.** A slice and a soda is a great, inexpensive food-and-drink offering to kick-start a successful and moneymaking happy hour promotion. Incorporate other food and beverage pairings to entice the happy hour and value-driven crowd.



6. **A Brew or Two.** Interest in craft beer has skyrocketed, so pizzeria operators must educate themselves about the latest beer offerings, especially those that are brewed locally or regionally. Many craft beer aficionados go looking for restaurants with new offerings, and they want to drink them in the appropriate glasses. In some cases, the brewers will develop their own proprietary glasses, which may have a certain cachet with their fans. Serving craft beers in incorrectly branded glassware can damage a pizzeria's credibility.
7. **Days to Remember.** Create a weekly promotion—such as Wine Wednesdays or Craft Beer Tuesdays—around a beverage and invite guests to join you for special tastings. Invite local beer experts, sommeliers or knowledgeable distributor representatives to pour and educate the guests. Promote these events heavily every week on your Facebook and Twitter pages.
8. **Kid Stuff.** Kids always love to get their own cool swirly straws or cartoon-decorated cups—and parents will often patronize the restaurants that their kids like the most.
9. **Hometown Favorites.** If there's a winery or brewery operating in your hometown, reach out and partner with them right away. Local customers appreciate hometown

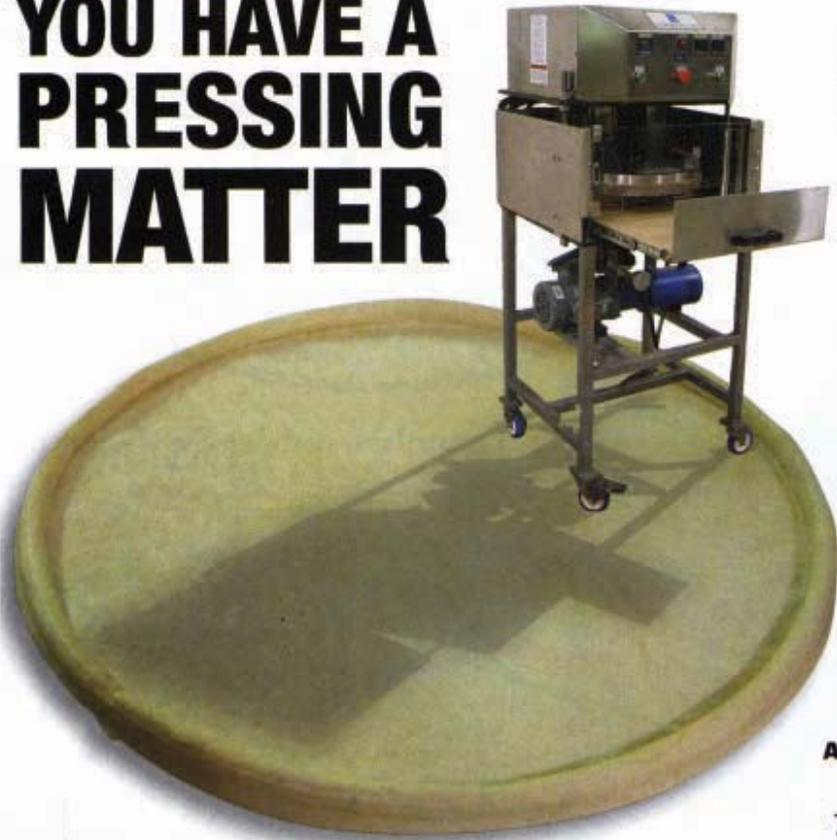
offerings because they're patronizing a local business and helping to create jobs and keep their tax dollars in their community. They also love to experience those hometown flavors and show them off to visitors and business associates from out of town. A "Hometown Favorites" promotion featuring local wines and beers could turn a slow night into a major moneymaker.

10. **Be a Good Sport.** For many customers, the only thing better than watching football is eating a pizza and drinking a beer while you're watching it. Create a Sunday Night Football or Monday Night Football promotion with pizzas and pitchers of beer for a special price during the games. Host a fantasy football league and offer postgame prizes as well as food and drink specials that keep customers hanging around for a little longer, especially if there's a big win to celebrate! 🍕



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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