

As soon as a potential customer parks out front and head towards your door, you are challenged with creating a guest experience that will entice them to return again and again!

How do I turn a new customer into a “regular” customer? While it is equally important to go after new customers, it is much easier and less expensive to build loyalty and gain return customers. If you can get every customer to return once, you’ve doubled your business!

The Red Napkin Tactic

You only get one chance to make a first impression...to make someone a lifelong patron of your restaurant. This is a 5 step process to guarantee repeat business...

1. Have a way to identify the first time diners (or VIP’s).

The hostess must ask each guest if this is their first time dining at the restaurant and alert the rest of the staff if it is. Perhaps use a red beverage napkin instead of the standard white to identify tables with first time guests.

2. Tell them your story.

If you want people to talk about you, you must give them something to talk about.

3. At the end of the meal, have the manager or owner make a personal introduction and a sincere “Thank You” for dining at your restaurant.

This is a great time for the manager to “pay for” their dessert. Make it seem as if it is going on the manager’s tab...not just free.

4. Take the opportunity to get their contact information.

Ask them to join your VIP Club or something similar.

5. Since you now have their contact information, send them a “thank you card” the next day.

Perhaps even offer them something to entice them to come back. When is the last time you got that kind of treatment at a restaurant?

Create an Event Calendar

Creating a “Marketing Calendar” for the entire year is an excellent way to promote your restaurant and encourage repeat business. You should consider the following when you create your calendar:

- Make sure that there is something going on every week in your restaurant.

- Even if it is not a holiday or event, create something... Wine Tastings, “Cheeseburger in Paradise” Night, “Local Appreciation” Night, etc.
- Keep it fun and entertaining!
- Incorporate this and next week’s event details into pre-shift meetings with your wait-staff and hosts/hostesses.
- When dropping off the check, always invite every table back and mention the next “event”. You don’t want to let a customer go out the door without giving them a reason or a personal invitation to come back.
- Don’t forget the array of options you have to promote your events:
 - Your Website
 - Tabletop Marketing
 - Bathroom Marketing
 - e-Newsletter
 - Ad Campaign

Server Loyalty Program

People are more loyal to people than they are to places. This idea paired with an ongoing server training program encourages your wait staff to connect with customers on a personal level, thus building loyalty instead of just serving them a meal.

Basically, the idea is that you bonus your wait staff \$1.00 every time a customer requests their section. This is easy for the host station to manage and rewards servers for building repeat business. With a successful implementation of this program, you can have your wait staff acting as Marketing Ambassadors for your restaurant... and not just servers.

This “program” will eventually become part of your culture and separate your service level from your competition.

Rewards Program

Reward programs come in all shapes & sizes:

- Buy 5, Get One Free Punch Card
- Get 10% of what you spend today off your next visit
- Priority Seating
- VIP Clubs
- Birthday and/or Anniversary Programs
- Points Programs that are redeemable for a “free gift”

Depending on your computer systems, these rewards programs can be in the form of cards that are swiped, cards that are punched or simply a web-based coupon. You can use a reward program to capture buying habits and reward customers based on their demographics or dining prefer-

ences.

Another advantage of a successful rewards program is gathering contact information. This allows you to re-connect with them when they are outside of the four walls of your restaurant.