

Tips to maximise foot traffic during the holiday restaurant-rush

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December is a critical month for the hospitality industry and restaurateurs need to look at the preparations necessary to attract and properly entertain a bumper crowd at this time of the year. It is all about good planning and preparation and this should take place months in advance.



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The most important objective is to attract and maintain customer loyalty in every other month of the year, so that when December comes around, your restaurant is a natural choice for customers to bring their clients, friends and families for an end of year feast.

Remember that the holiday season is also a time when people are willing to try out new places to eat, especially for office lunches. Make the most of this opportunity to gain new long-term customers while you increase your December profits.

Restaurants should manage their stock control for the festive season, finding the right balance between avoiding stock-outs and over-stocking that could lead to wastage. Throughout the month of December, keep an extra-close watch on stock levels, so that any shortages can be identified in good time and quickly resolved.

Holiday shopping can make people quite irritable, so a below-par restaurant service owing to an unusually high number of diners can create a negative experience and cost you customers. It might be wise to consider taking on additional, but temporary, staff to maintain a high standard of service. These extra pairs of hands can be put to work cleaning tables, greeting and seating customers and generally freeing up your trained waitrons to provide a fast and efficient service. Refresher training of existing staff before the December rush is always a wise move, particularly if the restaurant is offering seasonal specials or promotions.

Adding festive spirit

Get your restaurant and staff in the holiday spirit with festive decorations and uniform items, and by creating holiday-themed drinks, desserts and meals. Play holiday themed music in the restaurant, light candles for a magical atmosphere and tie "doggy bags" with bright ribbons. If your staff members are having fun, so will your customers. A special area set aside for photographs with a jolly in-house Father Christmas can also be a big attraction for families with young children. The same photographer could offer group photographs of your festive diners, which is also a great way to add new contacts to your customer database.

During the festive season, diners are far more inclined to splash out on desserts and worry about the extra kilos in the New Year. A great way to push dessert sales is to organise a competition among the waitrons to see who can sell the most desserts. Offering a prize such as a gift voucher for holiday season shopping is a great incentive.

Marketing is also crucial to boost end of year profits. Communications to existing and potential customers should be ramped up and have a good vibe, reaching out through a spectrum of media, including email marketing, online advertising and social media. Structure special deals and discounts that create a competitive edge, such as family discounts, competitions, business lunches, etc. If the restaurant is in a mall or shopping centre, employ students to hand out flyers or menus to passing shoppers.

While the restaurant trade might boom during the festive season, other service providers may be winding down, so make sure your preparations for December include a list of electricians, plumbers, fridge repairman, etc. who will be readily available in an emergency.

No discussion on festive season preparations would be complete without a word on security. As customer traffic increases, the potential for both customer and staff theft inevitably increases. Managers should be extra-vigilant during this time and additional security measures put in place.

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