



## The Family and Friends Plan: Getting a Full House

By **Bill Marvin**


How many seats do you have in your dining room? When the whole place is full, how many fannies do you have on chairs? If you are typical, by the time you figure in the couples taking up those four-tops and the party of five sitting at the table for eight, a "full house" actually means more like three-quarters full.

Ideally, your mix of tables would match the mix of your parties... but the world is seldom ideal and re-configuring all your tables is probably not in the cards. So those seats sit idle in the middle of the rush. But if there was a way to fill up those empty seats during peak times... well, that would be like getting a 25 percent increase in volume without having to spend a dime to get it.

So how would you do that? Simply by making your regular guests an offer they can't refuse. You see, the people who know and love you have friends who have

never set foot in your place. If you try to pitch to these strangers, you are just another annoying commercial interruption. But if these folks were invited to join their friends for dinner at their favorite restaurant (yours!), they would certainly come... wouldn't they?

Your task is to create incentives for your regulars to bring their friends with them. It could be a free bottle of wine for parties of six or half-price bottles of wine on Monday nights. Perhaps a free round of appetizers or desserts for parties of four or more? Use your imagination and you can turn those deuces into four-tops and the fours into sixes.

Then, make sure these newbies have the most memorable meal of their lives. Sign them up for your Birthday Club... give them a reason to return and you'll add a few more regulars to your herd. 


## Sell Smart: Track Marketing Success

Instead of looking at cold, hard facts – what was the response rate of that coupon? – many of us keep throwing time and money into marketing materials that may not be effective. If you work with a marketing group, demand that results be tracked and analyzed. If you're on your own – even with small projects – consider these information-gathering tips:

- **Design a database.** You can only track and analyze information if you organize it. Include fields to include dates of campaigns, recipients, type of offers or specials, etc.

- **Ask your customers.** Coupons are no-brainers, but how did that party of eight hear about your happy hour special? Train servers to ask customers and record responses.

- **Keep it simple.** Your tracking system should be easy for servers and others to use. Coupons, dining cards, attendance at special events, etc. should be input at the end of each shift. Also consider adding marketing inquiries to your guest comment cards and including that information in your database.


- **Use what you know.** Before you update that flyer you send every year before Easter, ask yourself how much it really generated last year. Sure, you had a full house, but did you get anyone new? Did they come back? Was it the offer or the menu? Your location next to the church? Too often, we tally information and then forget to apply it. Instead, we fall back on what we've always done... and ignore the facts. The result is a waste in time, money and opportunities. 

## Marketing Tip: Mail Matters!

One way you can increase efficiency is to market more effectively. When mailing letters or other marketing materials, consider these mailing tips:

- **When appropriate, use third-class or bulk rate.** Personal letters are almost always the most effective form of direct marketing, but for marketing campaigns that require a wider audience, consider bulk rates. Postage costs are more than 70 percent less and it can often be just as fast as first-class.

- **Visit the post office.** If you're mailing a package or some other type of unusual container, take it down to the post office and make sure that it will mail easily. Too often, marketers are unpleasantly surprised when their mailing materials are only delivered back to them!

- **Source out.** Mail houses can supply lists, handle and sort mass mailings and generally have low fees. It's a great way to be more efficient... saving time and money! 

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