



Catering to Families


Just like catering has become a profitable and important niche, there is another restaurant profit niche the fast-feeders and barbeque restaurants are capitalizing on. I call it the "Family Meal Deal."

Regardless of the name, dual-income families with children have a need for take-out at least two times a week. I call it the Soccer Mom Syndrome. Between work, getting little Susie to ballet and Johnnie to basketball, there's very little time to cook.

The Family Meal Deal is the working couple's version of a drop-off or pick-up catered event. It starts with a list of your most popular entrées, sides and bread. It's all packaged in large containers so the labor is far less than making individual to-go boxes. Just picture Dad walking in with a Family Meal Deal from your restaurant. He plops it on the table and there's a big con-

tainer of rotisserie chicken cut in pieces, large containers of mashed potatoes and mac and cheese and four of your famous cornbread muffins.

The Family Meal Deal works with any concept: Chinese, Mexican, Italian, pizza, barbeque, etc. You are passing on the savings to the consumer for their commitment to four to-go meals and your lower cost of labor and overhead. You are selling convenience.

Now how do you find these soccer-mom families? Start with a good mailing list broker. I would be looking for families within two to three miles of your restaurant with kids in the three- to twelve-year-old range. Create a sales letter that describes what your Family Meal Deals can do to simplify their life and include a strong offer. Then make sure and "wow" them to turn them into Family Meal Deal regulars. 

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By Michael Attias


Ask STS!

I'm great at apologizing when something gets screwed up, but how can I train servers to handle that when I'm not here?

Dealing with customer complaints is a vital part of running an effective (and profitable) restaurant. One bad experience can counteract months or even years of positive word of mouth. The good news is that if handled correctly, a bad experience can be turned into a loyal customer.

The first step is to apologize. Train your team to look the customer right in the eye, accept responsibility for the problem and offer a solution. It should sound something like this: "I am really sorry that your steak is overdone. I will have another one prepared for you immediately. Until then, please let me bring you another glass of wine. It's on me."

Have servers track their comps and review them with you at the end of the shift. It will give you the opportunity to find out what went wrong and help prevent abuse of this empowerment.

When a complaint is serious – a very upset customer, a "forgotten" reservation of 20, etc. – instruct servers to ask for an address, phone number or e-mail address. Then, send a customized apology and gift certificate in the mail in addition to whatever your servers did to rectify the situation. 

Role-Play: How'd You Get Here?

In an effort to be more efficient with marketing dollars, it's important to know what's bringing customers in. Here's how to train your servers to find out. (Then, be sure to have them record it.)

Server: Thank you for allowing us to serve you this evening. It was a pleasure meeting you both. Did you enjoy everything? Or is there something we could have done better?

Guest: No, this was our first time here and everything was wonderful!

Server: Great! I know that you have a lot of places to choose from and we're happy that you chose to have dinner with us. How did you hear about our restaurant?

Guest: Well, a friend at work told me about it... and I keep hearing your ads on the radio so I decided to try it!

Server: What radio station do you listen to?

Guest: Oh, that oldies station on 105.

Server: Well, we're glad you found us. Please come back! 

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