



## IT'S A WRAP! Seasonal Service Adds Sales

By **Bill Marvin**


One of my all-time great holiday ideas comes from Peter and David Troutman, owners of the Scargo Cafe on Cape Cod. For the past ten years, they have turned one of their dining rooms into Gift Wrap Central during the week before Christmas. They supply rolls and rolls of wrapping paper, tags, ribbon, tape, scissors, and anything else their guests might need in order to wrap their holiday gifts. Best of all, this service is absolutely free.

If you have ever tried to “secretly” wrap a present in a house full of children or keep a surprise away from a curious spouse, you can appreciate the service they provide. It gives their guests a reason to come to the restaurant at a time when they easily could be “too busy with other things,” relax, and enjoy the true spirit of the holidays in a warm and friendly place. And yes, they sell a fair amount of food and grog to the weary wrappers!

The wrapping tables are up for a week, but they promote the opening first day to

their database list to make it into more of an event. It is the Troutmans' way of saying Happy Holidays to their current (and future) regular guests. Scargo Cafe is a great example of a determined independent operation doing all the right things to stay in front of their guests in a very seasonal market.

Whether guests actually use the service or not, they talk about it to their friends... which brings up another point about promotions. Whether they “work” may be less important than the fact that you have them. When there is something going on, it provides an energy in the place that is compelling.

Of course, it is nice when a promotion brings in a surge of business, but don't let that be your sole standard for measuring success. Promotions—successful or not—are a great way to break the boredom... and you cannot afford to run a boring restaurant. 


## Customer Feedback: How To Get More Of It

This holiday season is the perfect time to find out what customers are really thinking. With the steady stream of traffic—and opportunities to shine (and bomb)—you'll pinpoint problems that you may have been unaware of as well as discover what *is* working. To get the most out of customer feedback, try these tips:

- **Set objectives.** Before you write anything, evaluate the areas where you get the most complaints—wait time, cleanliness, etc.—and the opportunities you'd like to explore in your operation. It's fine to have more than one objective as long as you're completely clear what those objectives are. Then, tailor the questions to generate the responses you'll *really* use.

- **Include open and closed questions.** A survey should be able to be completed in less than 10 minutes. Begin with a series of closed questions (rate service, select “yes” or “no,” circle menu choices of interest, etc.). Then include no more than three open-ended questions. Tailor questions that provoke thought and encourage honesty, such as, “Why—or why not—would you recommend this restaurant to a friend?”

- **Ask for details.** Ask about order accuracy, the quality and presentation of the food, the service of the staff, etc.

- **Offer an incentive.** Nobody wants to fill out a survey, but free coffee while they do so certainly helps. Arrange for drawings (customers fill out survey cards and throw them into fishbowls) and offer discounts on meals to draw response. 


## Ask STS!

***There have been a lot of car break-ins near our restaurant lately. Any ideas to make these holidays safer?***

You're wise to be worried about the safety of your customers and your employees. Theft is at a high during the holidays (pretty much killing that “giving spirit”), but research shows that up to 90 percent of car break-ins could be avoided. Here are some ways to make the season a little safer for your customers:

- **Light up.** There's absolutely no excuse for poor lighting in your parking lot. In addition to deferring crime, it also can illuminate slick spots and other potential hazards.

- **Staff up.** If you can, hire someone to monitor the parking lot and assist guests to cars. If that's out of your budget, instruct hosts to frequently inspect parking lots and offer assistance to single or elderly guests. Train everyone how to recognize suspicious activity—a local police officer will usually provide this training for free—and encourage them to call immediately (even before contacting you).

- **Post it up.** Put signs up that remind guests to hide valuables, bags and purses under seats or place them in trunks and to double check that doors are locked. Signs that promise action—like Neighborhood Watch—also have been shown to deter criminals. 

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