

Finding the Holiday Spirit

The holidays are approaching fast, and there's opportunity everywhere. Don't forget, though, that even with your regular holiday event lineup in full swing, there are chances to earn new customers—and reach them in new ways. Done right, you can even take your holiday-season visibility and extend it well past New Year's Eve!

HOLIDAY PARTY IN A BOX

By Michael Attias



Gone are the days of June Cleaver adorned in pearls, making the finishing touches for a holiday dinner party for all of Ward's coworkers. Though it is a warming thought, most families haven't the time or energy to prepare such an undertaking (or the pearls).

Just as restaurant takeout has taken a big bite out of last-minute grocery store purchases, creating and offering a "Holiday Party in a Box" is a way for restaurant owners to share a piece of the enormous holiday party pie with caterers and grocery stores. This strategy does not involve ordering any extra food, but taking advantage of the foods your customers know, love and trust.

A sports bar can offer trays of wings, nachos and other finger foods. A more upscale establishment might consider offering trays of shrimp cocktail, whole prime rib or signature dips. You might also include paper products and decorations. It's important you package and promote your holiday party items to take the burden off the party giver.

An added selling point is to provide delivery, setup, and even serving for those who request it.

For whole items, like sides of salmon, price by the piece. For entire meals or assorted appetizers, go with per-person pricing. This takes the burden of calculating quantities away from the customer and leaves them with a definite budget.

Your current customers are the best market to test this program. Use your customer mailing list, table tents, signs, banners and flyers with color photos to get the word out. After you've worked out the kinks the first holiday season, you can roll the program out to your entire community the next year.

Creating your own version of a "Holiday Party in a Box" will add extra profit dollars and make your Christmas very merry!

Excerpted from The Service That Sells!® Weekly Update, available online at www.sysco.com.

and Making It Last



Add One More Thing To Your Holiday Wish List: MAKE MORE SALES

With the holidays right around the corner, the only thing you wish you had more of is time. With bus trays crashing and servers selling, it's easy to focus on the moment and forget about the future. But with all the traffic your operation receives over this busy season, now is the perfect time to employ simple marketing techniques to increase your sales for next year. Remember, the slow time is just around the corner, and all the customers crowding your place this month are a captive audience for the message, "We're still here after the parties and crowds die down next month."

Here are some ways you can bump up sales this season (and the next one):

Sponsor holiday events. You may think you can't take even one more phone call asking you to chip in for a Christmas pageant program, but there are ways to maximize that sponsorship. Instead of the standard "Courtesy of ..." taglines, ask for marketing copy that brings in sales. For example, "Bring this program in after the show for a free appetizer" works just as well as "Save this program and bring it in for a free entrée in January."

Go coupon crazy. With every takeout order and every check, include a coupon for January or February. Printing is inexpensive and, if your offer is good enough, returns to your operation are a given.

Empower your servers. Even better than coupons are personal notes that offer discounts or free items. Allow your servers to reward life-of-the-party customers (those who order drinks, appetizers, dinner and dessert) by writing discounts or freebies on the back of checks. When the customers receive a check and the server thanks them saying, "I wanted to thank you for your business and welcome you back. Just bring in this check for an appetizer on me next time," you'll build repeat customers and boost profits next year.

Push the gift cards. It's been said before, but selling gift cards is a win-win situation. You get the money up front and you often bring in new customers who you can, hopefully, turn into repeat customers. Motivate your servers to increase these sales by offering cash and prize incentives, as well as running contests. Everyone can use more cash this season and when servers become more confident suggesting and selling items, their sales abilities will only continue to improve this season ... and next.

Excerpted from The Service That Sells!® Weekly Update, available online at www.sysco.com.