



Chadi Chidiac, managing partner of PROTOCOL, breaks down the key elements of an effective restaurant marketing plan and provides an explanatory and reader-friendly roadmap that can be used to successfully design an action plan for the year ahead

The formulation of an effective marketing plan for any given restaurant is a tedious job, unless you do it with a pro or like a pro. There is no reason to conceive a 15-page plan with minimal font-size and no spacing document if you and your team won't be reading it. The more you write, the more you're likely to repeat yourself, or overanalyze your strategies. The key to a good annual marketing plan (yes, annual, since PROTOCOL strongly advises a mandatory revisit and revision of the plan on a yearly basis) is conciseness.

Marketing plan by definition

Think of your marketing plan as a milestone chart for the upcoming year

(12-month period). It should highlight each and every event and promotion that you intend to run before the end of December, and the outcome you are expecting to explore as a bottom line. By pinpointing your promotions ahead of time, you'll be far less likely to go over-budget on unforeseen or unexpected costs and expenses.

Structure and skeleton of a marketing plan

There are a few key things to consider in your plan, regardless of how you put it together. These considerations are:

- Goals set for the year
- Marketing budget (annual)
- Preset calendar of all intended events and promotions
- Strategies to use
- Expected outcomes to achieve

Your goals set for the year

Before the kick-off of any plan(s), it's important to visualize and define your overall marketing goals for the year. These should be objective-oriented and measurable, so you can gauge how far you've come over the plan's period (12 months).

A few goals to consider implementing

- Boosting your Yearly Gross Revenue (YGR) by [x] amount

- Increasing online reservations by [x]
- Increasing hits volume or clicks on your website by [x]
- Increasing your conversion rate (the ratio of web-visitors that converts into confirmed reservations or bookings) by [x]
- Increasing social media (Twitter/Facebook/Instagram) followers by [x]
- Increasing newsletter's subscribers by [x]
- Increasing mentioning of the brand in the media by [x]
- Raise positive reviews on major search, discovery and reviews service pages (TripAdvisor/Yelp/Zomato) by [x]

Annual budgeting

Setting an accurate annual marketing budget can be a daunting task, because there's no way to identify or to quantify how successful your promotions are going to be; they're simply a guess or a hunch. It's commonly accepted as an industry standard to spend between 1 and 10 percent of your sales on marketing, though this depends on several factors, like the type of concept and its operating profit margin.

When you propose an annual figure, bear in mind additional expenses, like subcontracting pro-consultancy, hiring freelancers, attending marketing seminars and conventions, as well as other training.



EFFECTIVE ACTION PLAN FOR RESTAURANTS

Then decide the rate and percentage point of your budget to be allocated to all different advertising mediums. Consider historic data (if available) and what's worked best for the entity in the past. If you're gaining traction through Below the Line Marketing (BTL) with social media like Facebook, for example, then drive more of your spending power and investment into that.

According to the latest study conducted by PROTOCOL in April, which covered 1050 F&B establishments in the MENA region and Europe, 68 percent of SMEs found email marketing and social media to be their most effective marketing strategies, closely followed by social media engagement (67 percent). In other words, a considerable number of small businesses have become strong believers in investing in social media as a cost-effective medium with a high reach factor and penetration ratio.

Calendar of promotions to consider

In order to successfully preplan which promotion you want to run, draft out a calendar breakdown of significant holidays and local events. Based on that, consider the events you would like to turn into promotions. Bearing in mind that any event or promotion should be compatible, so match your restaurant concept and customer profile. Aim for

slow months (e.g. the holy month of Ramadan) where an unusual promotion could boost revenue.

Strategies you plan to use

Once you've set your promotional days, break each one down so you can formulate a more detailed strategy. Your communication strategy should take into consideration the crowd which your advertising campaign will target, the advertising medium(s) you will use, and performance measure using metrics tools.

Example

Promotion: Valentine's Day dinner (4-course set menu) / USD 120 per person.

Audience: Social media followers. Purpose of promotion: to capture 75 confirmed bookings.

Marketing channel(s): Facebook and Instagram paid advertising.

Budget: Graphic design fees, Facebook boost, Instagram advertising = total budget.

Team assignments: Karen (marketing manager) – social media posting and measurement; Mireille (designer) – graphic design of ads; Sami, Jihad, Bassam (service staff) – in-house promotion to customers.

Note deadlines: Graphic design to be completed by [x] date.

Measurement metrics: Click through rate, cost per click, and/or number of bookings. Referrals, as well as testimonials and PR mentions are expected to ramp up significantly once systems are set (customer referral offers, survey or comments cards by order, in addition to press releases for every theme night).

PROTOCOL assumes from experience that the average customer will return every other month leading to a transaction rate of 0.5 month-on-month (m-o-m) on a monthly basis for a given turnover figure of USD 1.4 million ending first year. Expectations are for a slight increase over the next two years, along with a corresponding rise in the average transaction per customer.

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Sales projections

Sales projections are based on first-timer meals rising from 4 to 6 percent each month on the back of constantly remodeled and bolstered marketing efforts and regular meals increasing by 3 percent per month. First-timer meals are a huge contributor and have great potential to become regular meals, as many of these first-time customers will convert to regular meals. The top-line revenue is usually the same for both types. However, there are generally promotional factors with high discounts for first-timer meals which are accounted for as a direct cost of sales, bearing in mind that growth will also begin to slow starting in the third year or after 36 months. This occurs as restaurant sales reach their maximum and hit a capacity plateau.

Target outcome

It's imperative to set just one realistic goal for each promotion. Saying, "I want to attract more customers," isn't enough. Be pragmatic and objective about how many bookings you need to break even. "I want to attract 75 confirmed bookings," is better. It's also important to acknowledge any obstacles that could get in your way, so you can plan around them. For example, competing restaurants might be offering a similar event on the same day. Being aware of this gives you time to think what you can do to make your promotion stand out or what method of advertising you can use to reach a wider audience.

There are no shortcuts when it comes to writing a marketing plan for your restaurant, so map it out in a way that makes sense to you.