

Social Media MARKETING GUIDE

FOR FOOD TRUCK SUCCESS



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As social media platforms flourish, food trucks have an excellent opportunity to build relationships and engagement. That is a tricky aspect of social media. It's easy to get lost behind a screen and succumb to the temptation of blasting out a message or promotion. As the name implies, "social" media success is built on sharing, on conversation, on connection. That especially includes food trucks, which should be treated as an individual with a story, not a far-removed corporate entity that's simply a place to stop and grab a bite.

Social media marketing is a key to food truck success. However, Mark Baratelli, a social media expert and a food truck industry event planner, points out that a food truck's true marketing begins when people eat their food. The quality of the food is the most important aspect of food truck marketing.

This guide is designed to give food truck operators an understanding of social media marketing. Once you are finished reading this guide, you will wonder how you are supposed to find the time to do it in addition to running a food truck.

Many business owners choose to hire a social media professional.

"It's extremely detailed and needs to be done only by people with the skill sets and the training," Baratelli said. "The perception that professional marketing can be done by anyone is untrue. However, if you want to sit down and teach yourself

exactly what the professionals do and take the time to respect the craft and learn, there's the potential that your social media could be quality eventually."

One of the most exciting shifts in social media marketing, especially for small- to medium-sized businesses, is a leveling of the playing field in terms of using social media marketing to help accomplish business goals such as increased brand awareness and higher sales. Social media platforms are accessible; almost anyone can use them. And although large brands with dedicated social media teams and budgets might have bigger audiences, there's no reason that smaller businesses can't accomplish similar results, albeit on an adjusted scale.

Monitoring social media channels and online review sites is exactly how Andrew Gruel, founder and CEO of Slapfish Restaurant Group, started his online presence. The company began as a food truck and didn't have a budget for brand building and advertising.

"The only way I could engage with the guests for free was to communicate with them online," Gruel said during his keynote address at Networld Media's 2016 Restaurant Franchising & Innovation Summit.

Now that the company has grown, Gruel still opts to focus on monitoring online channels and responding to reviews, rather than more traditional marketing alternatives.

BUILDING A SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY

Thanks to a proliferation of platforms, an ever-growing user base and a robust wealth of data to prove efficacy and ROI, social media marketing has firmly established itself as a critical part of a larger marketing strategy. Yet a common stumbling block prohibits many businesses from seeing the full potential of these digital platforms: getting started or, in many cases, maintaining the consistent cadence that's a requirement of an effective social media presence.

5 STEPS TO CREATING A SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY

Set your goals

Take some time to think about a handful of goals to accomplish through social media marketing. Perhaps you want to grow your following to a certain number or percentage, or launch a promotion that results in “X” number of customers.

Whatever your goals, ensure they're achievable (and not too vague or unattainable) by making them SMART.

Pick your platforms

The sheer number of social media platforms can be overwhelming, but here's the good news: You don't need to be on all of them at once. Instead, select a few platforms that align with your brand, your message and the types of content you want to share. You also might want to create a brief mission statement for each social media platform — for example, converse with customers on Twitter, or use Snapchat to offer behind-the-scenes peeks at your food truck.

You also could do some competitive analysis by seeing which social platforms your competitors use and deciding if it makes sense to be there, too. One tip: It's better to focus on where your customers are, rather than your competitors, but it's always a good idea to keep an eye on the competition while you keep customer growth and engagement a top priority.

One of the most compelling attributes of social media is its scalability; it's easy to ramp up, whether that includes having a more in-depth focus on a particular platform or adding new sites and profiles to the mix.

Plan your social media content

An editorial calendar becomes an invaluable tool. Free, downloadable templates are available on the internet — just search for “editorial calendar template.” Decide the type of content you're



going to post — photos, videos, links, promotions, specials, etc. — and map it out on your calendar so, at a glance, you can see what type of content will be shared on each social site. Not only will this keep you organized and ensure that you're adequately posting to each social site, but it also helps you spot opportunities for easy content repurposing and platform cross posting.

For example, let's say you're unveiling a new menu item. On Snapchat, you could share short videos showing the food being made. Then you could tweet about the item, along with an appetizing photo. On Facebook, you could post an update and a photo, then direct Facebook followers to Snapchat to get a behind-the-scenes look. The topic is the same: the new menu item. But by slightly tweaking the message format and media, you've created posts that work for a variety of social platforms and extend the reach of the news about your addition.

Listen, converse and engage

The true power of social media is the ability to interact and converse with customers and prospects far and wide. Set aside a few minutes throughout the day to check in on your social media networks, respond to questions or comments and participate in other conversations.

Although online conversation is undeniably important, listening can be just as impactful. Monitor streams like Twitter for mentions of your food truck so that you can proactively respond, especially in the case of a customer issue or complaint.



Analyze, measure and refine

Circle back to those SMART goals you made when you started building your social media strategy and ensure you can track and measure them. Most social media platforms include some sort of built-in analytics, and later we'll suggest some additional tools to explore.

Promote your profiles

Once you've established your social media presence, let people know where to find you. Consider displaying social site logos and your username on signs in your food truck and/or on your menus. If you send out an email newsletter or direct mail pieces, include the information there, too.

If you've been using a particular platform for a while and add a new one to the mix, take advantage of some cross posting. You've probably seen other businesses use their Snapchat snapcodes as a profile photo on Instagram, Twitter or Facebook. It's common to have audience overlap among different social sites, so leverage the reach of your existing following to build a community elsewhere.

SOCIAL MEDIA SPECIFICS: PLATFORMS

FACEBOOK

The Facebook team is constantly innovating, adding new features that benefit both individual users and brands. One example: Facebook recently revamped page designs for desktop, including a more prominent call-to-action button and tabs, as well as the ability to view your page as a visitor so you can ensure all of the pertinent business information is easy to spot. Additionally, Facebook Live, a live streaming video service, is quickly gaining traction among brands that are tapping into the functionality to showcase events, interviews and other real-time content.

INSTAGRAM

The app is relatively simple: Snap a photo or take a short video, customize the media with one of several filters, add a caption (and hashtags) and, voila! You have an Instagram post. Given the ease of use, it's no wonder that, according to Instagram's press page, users share an average of 80 million photos per day.

The app has incorporated a video creation app, Boomerang, that helps users record and publish quick video clips. More recently, Instagram launched Instagram Stories, which lets users add photos and/or videos in a slideshow format, then embellish each clip with text and drawing tools. Photos and videos disappear after 24 hours.

SNAPCHAT

Snapchat is, according to DCFoodBuzz.com, "a messaging application that allows users to quickly share moments in the form of photo or video snaps." Once users take a photo or video, they can add a caption or lens, then send that media to an individual friend, a group of friends or all of their friends. Once a Snapchat user receives a message, the snap can be viewed for up to 10 seconds, then it disappears.

It makes content creation easy and gives users a firsthand glimpse into what's happening during a particular moment. Plus, the user experience of the app has facilitated an interesting shift in terms of post quality.

LINKEDIN

The focus of LinkedIn is clear: help professionals showcase their skills, career accomplishments and portfolios while giving them tools to grow their networks, make new connections and, in many cases, find new jobs. Like other social networks, LinkedIn has a specific space for brands and businesses: company pages. These most often are used for recruiting purposes, although B2B companies are having increasing success with brand awareness and lead generation through LinkedIn.

You might be thinking, "Is LinkedIn really the best fit for my truck?" It's certainly worth exploring. If you don't already have one, create a personal profile that details your expertise and experience in the food truck industry. Use it to share general industry content that others might find insightful, as well as updates and content about your own food truck.

Additionally, a LinkedIn company page can be a powerful recruiting tool for your business.

TWITTER

When it comes to conversation and interaction, few social media platforms have Twitter beat. By following specific hashtags, you can easily see what's being shared about a brand, event or topic.

Twitter is also increasingly becoming a customer service tool as customers take to the site to post positive or negative experiences. With an active Twitter presence, you can proactively address these customer comments, especially helpful in the event of a complaint or problem.

STREAMING VIDEO: PERISCOPE AND FACEBOOK LIVE

Video continues to grow in reach and impact, especially among younger demographics. Now, streaming video takes that rich media and gives users the ability to broadcast in the moment, showcasing everything from what they're eating to breaking news.

Two streaming video tools have become particularly popular: Periscope and Facebook Live. Let's take a brief look at both.

Periscope as a logical match with Twitter, users of which are immersed in sharing their real-time experiences.

On April 6, 2016, Facebook launched Facebook Live for all Facebook users. Anyone with a phone now has the power to broadcast to anyone in the world.

So what can you live stream? Offer a behind-the-scenes tour of your food truck. Show a new menu item being made by the chef. Feature a Q&A with a chef or a prominent brand ambassador.



CONCLUSION

Gone are the days when social media sites were a mere value-add for businesses, a place they could pop in occasionally while devoting the bulk of their focus to other marketing efforts. In today's digital-driven world, social media platforms are at the core of how we connect, converse and do business. If your food truck isn't leveraging the functionality and skyrocketing audience growth of today's proliferation of social media platforms, you risk losing out on not only potential sales and customer service interactions, but also market share to more social media-savvy competitors.

Your social media accounts are undoubtedly business tools, but they're also a place to have fun, experiment and show your brand's personality. The social media marketing landscape is rife with opportunities to take your food truck to the next level. Now's the perfect time to jump in to social media marketing and see what sort of success you can drive as a result.



For a more in-depth guide on social media marketing, check out the [2017 Social Media Marketing Guide for Restaurants](#). In this guide, learn how to improve efficiency with tools; understand how to advertise on social media networks and track success; and gain tips and stories from restaurants leading the way. If you're feeling overwhelmed, you're not alone. This guide is sure to put you at ease and back in the driver's seat on the road to success.