

What is **Marketing Strategy?**

One of the most common questions asked by clients is: "What is marketing strategy and how will it increase my profits?" Amongst independent restaurateurs, marketing strategy is usually perceived as placing adverts, distributing flyers or press publicity. Although these are useful tools, they are not the heart of strategic marketing.

Strategic marketing means becoming a marketing-orientated business, one where the customer is central and business success is based on satisfying customer needs. Competitive advantage is achieved by completely understanding the needs of the customer, and then meeting them. This can be achieved through a detailed Strategic Marketing Plan which, though time consuming, can be the best investment a business can make.

A good marketing plan consists of various parts. Start with the restaurant's Mission – are you providing convenience eating, the best place for a hot date or somewhere perfect for parties? Next, decide on the Objectives, both quantitative and qualitative, such as to run at an average of 80% capacity nightly, or to be perceived as the best high-quality restaurant in town. You must then carry out a Marketing Audit to analyse both your internal and external environment. Conduct a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) on your restaurant, ensuring you are being completely honest with yourself. Use the PEST format (Political, Environmental, Sociological, Technological) to

examine your external environment. Analyse your competitors; what do they sell, at what price, to whom? What are they not providing that customers may want?

With all this in mind, decide on your Competitive Strategy. Will you be providing something very different to your competitors, or will you be providing something similar, but at a lower price with the same or higher quality? What should your Brand say to people, what are its values – does your place say 'Fun' or 'Fine Dining'? You must then detail whom you wish to target. What ages, income brackets, and types of people, and what do they want from a restaurant, what are their needs?

The final section is the Marketing Mix (consisting of the 4 P's: Product, Price, Place and Promotion). You should know by now where the gaps are in the market, what your competitors are not providing, and what your target audience wants. Here you decide what Product to provide; a one-plate concept or six courses? A vast menu or small, select set

menus? What Prices should you charge for the product? If your target audience are young party people, you won't be able to charge £50 per head. Next look at your Place, is it right for what you want to do? You must ensure that the position of your restaurant works with everything you have determined in your marketing plan. Finally, you decide on your Promotions, or how you hope to communicate your message to your customers. If you are a new restaurant, advertising can be used to create awareness, and Sales Promotions can be run to encourage people to try you out.

Of course this is a highly simplified version of a Strategic Marketing Plan, but it should help you position yourself as a marketing conscious restaurant, lead you to more customers and, hopefully, higher profits. Next time you're thinking about your marketing, try the strategic approach, you never know what opportunities you may discover.

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