

How to build a restaurant communications strategy





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Introduction

Communicate your brand story

As a business owner it's very important to communicate your restaurant's brand and value proposition to all of your constituents including your customers, employees, vendors, and partners/investors. A key resource that can help to disseminate your restaurant's news to all of these groups, along with potential new customers, is local media outlets. By establishing a relationship with your local news sources, you can keep your restaurant's name and story at the

forefront of peoples' minds. This practice of fostering a relationship between your establishment and the public is called public relations and it has the ability to positively impact your bottom line and growth as a business.

Below is a simple guide on how to approach media relations as a restaurant owner, with the goal of securing local news coverage and notoriety.



Chapter

Share your news

The first step in connecting with your local news outlets is to reach out to the most applicable editor/person at that company to introduce yourself, your restaurant, and your news. When searching through a publication's or news outlet's contact lists, look for editors that specialize in food, local news, local business, restaurants, or culture/travel. If you're ever stumped as to who may be the most appropriate contact to receive your news, look up similar articles from the publication and see which columnist typically covers this type of story and reach out to them. It also doesn't hurt to send your same communication to the outlet's general newsroom email address, which typically acts as a catchall.

Craft a pitch

Now that you've researched ideal publications and editors to contact, it's time to craft your message, or pitch, that shares your unique newsworthy information. The most important aspect of an effective pitch is to have a timely and original story angle that is hyper relevant to the publication's audience. A smart move is to even include a link to a recent article from the publication that ties nicely into the pitch you're proposing—making an even stronger connection between your restaurant's news, current state of the industry, and their readers.



Below are thought starters for the types of newsworthy developments and announcements that restaurants can share with the press.

- Have you done anything exceptional to maintain or take care of your staff during a challenging time?
- Do any of your staff members have a heartwarming or unique story about how they've navigated/persevered in difficult circumstances?
- Are you running any dine-in promotions that raise money for charity or are interesting in another way?
- Is your restaurant launching a new initiative or menu item that directly ties into a larger industry trend?
- Are you opening another location or offering something extremely unique to the area?

At the end of your pitch email be sure to always include your contact information and let the editor know that you are available to discuss any thoughts and questions further.

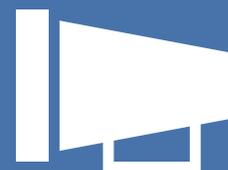
Send a press release

Another effective method for announcing your news is a press release. Typically reserved for large announcements and big news, a press release is a comprehensive writeup that allows the media to easily digest a large amount of information. These types of articles work well for big picture shifts such as expanding your restaurant to new locations, opening a completely new restaurant, or hiring a well-known chef. When drafting your release, it's important to feature a compelling headline and to put the most vital information in the first

paragraph. Bullet points or a list format works well in press releases too because it allows the media to quickly scan for relevant information. Showcasing quotes from industry professionals, your leadership team, or any other relevant party can add nice color and emotion to the article too. At the end of the release you can share your restaurant's website and social media links. Finally, every press release must include a media contact that has the name, email address, and phone number of the person the press should contact for more information.

Alert the media

The last type of public relations communication you may consider sending is a media alert. A media alert can be utilized for smaller announcements and events. This may include new menu items, new rules/procedures, or inviting the press to an event at your restaurant. When crafting your alert, be sure to blatantly call out "Media Alert" in large text at the top of your page in a bold font. Again, you'll want to also prominently include the appropriate media contact's information. Focus on who, what, where, when, why, and how, describing each in a sentence or two. Media alerts should be concise and to the point—think of it like a traditional invitation to any event/party—featuring only the most important information about the event's details.



A media alert can be utilized for smaller announcements and events.



Chapter

Stay engaged

Of course, it's important to stay on the pulse of your own industry and any current trends that may affect your business, but it's also equally crucial to be in the know about your local community happenings and events. The members of your nearby community and neighborhood are "low hanging fruit" in terms of potential new customers that can convert into long-time loyal guests and brand ambassadors. This means that discovering what's important to them and showing up at places you know they'll be, such as local farmers' markets, neighborhood street fests, etc., is a worthwhile investment in your brand. On the flipside, it's also a good idea to maintain a transparent and solid relationship with all of your vendors and partners to ensure that they're always aware of the latest endeavors

and innovations at your restaurant, so that they can share with their own networks.

Join the community

Becoming involved with your community's events is a great strategy for spurring brand awareness and connecting with neighboring business owners. Consider reaching out to the people that frequently run these events to inform them that you'd like to get involved. Your restaurant can supply food, drinks, extra hands, or an event space in exchange for co-hosting the event. This means that your restaurant's logo and name is cobranded onto any event announcements and merchandise. Like we mentioned before, sending out a media alert to your local press contacts about any events your restaurant is involved in is always a good best practice.

Host events

Broadcast outlets are often searching for pertinent pre-packaged content or remote live shots to feature on certain segments. Try filming a fun cooking demonstration that features one of your restaurant's most popular and well-known dishes. A clip like this can organically showcase your restaurant's unique menu offerings and your chef's skillset without coming across too salesy. It's a good idea to feature your restaurant's website, location, and any special promotions in this clip too for added brand exposure. Along with your short video clip, you can also provide high resolution food photography shots for the news channel to feature. The more local exposure and coverage your restaurant receives, the more apt local residents are to know and remember your spot as a dining option.



Update your vendors

It's also a smart idea to regularly update your vendors and partners on any important updates going on at your restaurant. Keep them in the loop about updated menu offerings, types of service, and news as they may want to feature your restaurant in their own marketing materials. For example, many companies release "Best of" lists that are usually powered by their public relations teams. By making a pointed effort to keep your third-party vendors up to date on any important changes or happenings at your establishment you can garner extra brand awareness and news coverage for your business at no extra cost.





Chapter

3

Get social

In the age of instant communication, social media plays a critical role in any business' ability to connect with its patrons, potential customers, and the press. Use your restaurant's social accounts as a way to disseminate essential information—hours of operation, website address, contact information, menu updates, and reviews—in real time to these groups. By keeping your accounts updated with relevant information and enacting a posting strategy and cadence, these outlets can help to validate your business in the eyes of consumers. Contrastingly, if your restaurant has social accounts that are very outdated and do not include correct information, this can actually hurt your legitimacy and frustrate customers, possibly losing you

sales. A business' social channels can also be used as a direct line of communication to its target audience(s).

Learn best practices

With **77%** of the U.S. population active on social media, it's important to learn the best practices for content and engagement on these platforms. First, establishing a consistent posting schedule and cadence of three to four posts per week across all of your social channels is ideal. This allows for a steady flow of content that regularly engages users and keeps them in the know about your restaurant's latest news, events, menu offerings, and more. If your schedule

does not allow for on-the-fly content creation and posting, try utilizing a cost-effective **social media management tool** that allows you to schedule posts in advance across multiple platforms. Be mindful of the **post lengths** that are recommended for each social platform, since when it comes to social media less can definitely be more.

Community management is a crucial part of any business' social media program and protocol. For example, customers may turn to social pages to ask questions or make comments regarding their experience at your restaurant. You or whomever is managing your social pages will need to be prepared to answer and reply to the questions/comments on all posts and direct messages. It's important to have predetermined guidelines established for answering typical questions such as "What are your hours today?" and "Do you offer delivery?" in addition to more serious comments like "I visited your restaurant and was charged incorrectly on my credit card."

Feature diverse content

Your social media pages will serve to further bolster your brand's already stellar voice and personality, so don't be scared to have a bit of fun with it. Get creative with the different types of posts you plan to feature each week. Perhaps you take a poll of your followers and ask an insightful question like, "Which of our desserts are you always craving?" or "Which of our appetizers is your go-to gameday favorite?". Other suggested types of content and posts can include:

- Have you done anything exceptional to maintain or take care of your staff during a challenging time?
- High-quality food shots
- Promotions
- Special events
- Updates on business hours, policies, etc.

No matter what type of content you post it's imperative to always include a call-to-action (CTA). Think of a CTA as the "thing" you want viewers to do—order now, learn more, visit your website, claim coupon, leave a review, etc. It's been **discovered** that 42% of U.S. diners interact with restaurants on at least one social media platform and, of



Get creative with the different types of posts you plan to feature each week.



that group, 66% say they are more likely to visit or order food from the restaurant. This highlights that a restaurant's CTA needs to be very clear to the viewer so that you don't run the risk of missing out on potential new business.

Connect with influencers

Social media influencers are people who have built a reputation for their knowledge and expertise on a specific industry or topic. To determine your specific target influencers, you'll first want to research who your target audience is following and engaging with on social media. For example, if you're a vegan restaurant that wants to target vegetarians, vegans, and flexitarians (low-meat diet) the first step will be unearthing where these people get their information from—review sites, popular veggie-forward blogs, specific food brands, etc. Then, once you have a clear picture of who your target audience is influenced by you can use a free tool like [Buzzsumo](#), [Followerwonk](#), [Hootsuite](#), or [TrendSpottr](#) to build a list of potential influencers to engage with. Of course, you can always use Google to manually search too.

Now that you've determined your target social media influencers, it's a good idea to follow these influencers on their social accounts as well as any local food editors/ bloggers you may have uncovered. This way, you can connect with them directly to encourage them to visit your restaurant, try the food/drinks, and ideally write a piece on it to share with their network. To maintain and incite this relationship further, leverage your restaurant's social presence to continue to regularly garner the attention of local food and dining influencers with engaging content.



Chapter

Develop a plan

Building an online arsenal of press materials is key for any restaurant seeking media attention and notoriety. Although this endeavor may take quite a bit of upfront effort, it can be well worth the investment if it prompts even a handful of press outlets to promote your brand on a local or national level. Featuring professional photography in all of your marketing pieces also goes a long way in validating a restaurant brand in consumers' minds. Finally, it's a smart idea to have a crisis management plan in place for any unforeseen negative press/media mentions that may arise, so that the entire company is on board with how to handle it.

Create a press kit

Having a comprehensive downloadable press kit on your website that accurately reflects your brand's mission, personality, and services, is a key component that influencers and members of the press evaluate when deciding which businesses to work with and feature on their platforms. Try to think of these pieces as your restaurant's "greatest hits" that showcase quickly and effectively (through words and imagery) what you're all about and what you can offer to your customers.

Typical pieces found in a restaurant's online press kit can include:

- One-pager fact sheet
- Leadership bios (including your chef)
- Past press coverage
- Restaurant backgrounder
- High-resolution images of restaurant and food/drinks
- List of any awards
- Menus



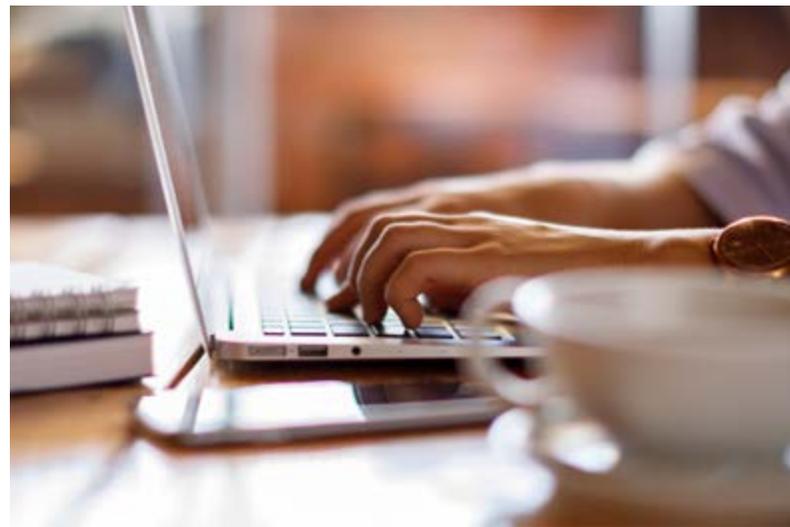
Showcase professional photos

Professional and high-resolution photos are a vital factor to any restaurant's marketing success. If it's within your budget, consider hiring a seasoned photographer and food stylist to curate mouthwatering photos of your restaurant's food and drink items. Then, utilize these photos in all of your communication pieces including your online press kit, social media pages, website, print collateral, and more. Of course, sometimes hiring these types of

professionals can put a large dent in your budget, which just may not be feasible. Fortunately, with today's sophisticated mobile phone cameras, restaurant owners have the ability to take professional-feeling photos without compromising their budget. To learn tips and tricks for taking top-notch photographs of your dishes, drinks, and restaurant space, check out our e-tool, "[20 tips for taking perfect restaurant photographs](#)." To further reinforce the importance of high-quality food shots for a restaurant, a [survey](#) found that 45% of people specifically look for food photos when visiting a restaurant's website and 36% have been discouraged from visiting a restaurant because of food photography. The types of food/drink photography shown can have the ability to garner or deter new business and revenue.

Establish a crisis strategy

Although the words "crisis management" may sound a bit extreme, for a restaurant it means ensuring that your business' image can be preserved and protected in the face





of any negative situations. Best case scenario is that your crisis plan will never need to be implemented, but it's an essential piece of the puzzle if a sticky situation does arise.

Your restaurant crisis management plan can include elements such as:

- Security procedures
- Hazardous material plans
- Health and safety program
- Employee manuals
- Media procedures
- Evacuation plans
- Insurance policies

After your plan is solidified, download your leadership team and key stakeholders on the guidelines and procedures you've put in place. Then, designate someone on your team as the official spokesperson for if a crisis does surface to guarantee your restaurant maintains a consistent message. It's also a good idea to have a crisis checklist ready to go in the case of an emergency. It's always a good rule of thumb to overcommunicate in the face of an adverse situation rather than to ignore the issues and/or under communicate. The more transparent you can be with the public and your constituents regarding the issues at hand and your plan for addressing them, the more long-term trust you'll maintain from each group.



Conclusion

Be proactive

Crafting a solid plan of action for getting your restaurant's name and brand out into the world can have significant benefits in terms of generating new customers, brand recognition, and increased revenue. By sharing your news with the press and your social media followers along with getting directly involved in local events, your restaurant can establish itself as a cornerstone of the community and a leader

in the industry. Couple these initiatives with an effective communication plan and strategy that can ensure your restaurant's image and mission remain uncompromised and have the ability to grow well into the future. Your restaurant's brand, offerings, and mission are worth celebrating and sharing, so it's a great idea to make establishing a restaurant communication guide a top priority for your business.

“Rewards Network has been a very strong partner for me. [They] help you grow your business at the same time as helping you financially.”

— Jeff Parrott
Farotto's, St. Louis, MO

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