

# Social Media for Restaurants: 4 Hurdles to Overcome





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# We Live Our Lives Online

When you think about it, it's amazing that social media platforms that drive consumers' news and advertising consumption are roughly a decade old or older. Facebook was founded in 2004, followed by Twitter in 2006, Pinterest in 2009, and Instagram in 2010. In comparison to when they were founded, these platforms not only look quite different today, but the algorithms governing the content users see have become increasingly elusive, thus turning social media management into a full-time job for many businesses.

If you're wondering how to harness the power of these platforms, you're not alone. According to a [2019 report](#) from digital marketing platform Hubspot, 61 percent of companies indicated generating traffic and leads as their top marketing challenge.

As consumers spend more time on social media platforms, the question you may ask yourself as a restaurateur is: how can I stop social media users' endless scrolling and get them in my restaurant IRL (in real life)? Finding the answer to this question might seem daunting at first, but it's not impossible.

So, as you begin your quest to convert online consumers into offline customers, we'll guide you through the technical aspects of social media marketing, including what platforms are most likely to work well for restaurants and how to use those platforms wisely. We'll also cover how to use social media to set your establishment apart from competitors.

Whether your restaurant is a place for family dinners, first dates, power lunches, or happy hours, here's how to use social media to attract new guests and keep them coming back for more.



## Chapter

# Mastering the Basics

There's a lot that goes into setting up your social media accounts before you even begin to post. Setting yourself up for success from the very start involves making some important decisions, starting with which platforms you want to utilize to promote your business.

## Your Platforms

Each social media platform has its unique quirks and benefits. Before setting up profiles on each of the major platforms, consider which ones will best reach your target audience. Planning your social media presence isn't unlike crafting your overall marketing strategy. Who's your ideal customer? Where do they live or travel from when arriving from out of town? And, most importantly, where do they hang out online?

So, what's the most popular social media platform among American adults? A [2019 Pew Research report](#) found that title goes to... YouTube, followed by Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest. That's important to know for restaurateurs who need to decide which platforms will be worth their investment.

A Facebook page is useful for businesses, because it allows you to post your restaurant's business hours, contact information, and other visual content. But beyond Facebook, you can also try out more visual-friendly platforms like Instagram, Pinterest, or YouTube that will allow you to showcase your beautiful space and delicious dishes to potential guests.

## Your Handle

What to use for your social media handle (or username) is one of the most important decisions you will make when it comes to your social media presence. Try to choose a handle that closely mirrors your restaurant's name, or name and location if you own more than one location. Once you've decided on your handle, make sure you include it on your business card, email signature, and other marketing materials.



Instagram Post

No matter what you choose, commit to it. Changing your social media handle is sometimes difficult, often not possible, and always a bad idea if you want to continue building momentum with social followers.

Given that multiple channels exist for social media/online presence, it is crucial to align your Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and any other social media account handles as closely as possible, which will allow you to cross-promote seamlessly.

## Your Bio

When writing your bio, try to strike a balance between being concise enough to fit within the parameters of each social media site, some of which have tight character restrictions, while also providing visitors with as much information as you can about your restaurant.

In addition, make sure you are adhering to your brand's existing tone and voice in order to maintain consistency across social media, your website, and any other marketing materials.

## Hashtags

Hashtags enable users to easily find topics they're interested in, but using them differs from one platform to the next. When used correctly, hashtags can drive traffic to your post — and consequently, to your profile. The more people who visit your profile, the greater the potential for customers to discover your restaurant.

Keep each social media platform's limits in mind when determining which hashtags and how many to use per post. Twitter recommends using **no more than two hashtags per tweet**. Using more than that devalues the tweet and could cost you in followers and brand reputation. However, Hubspot recommends that businesses use anywhere from **one to four hashtags** in an Instagram post.

Beyond using the appropriate number of hashtags, you also need to research how they're being used. Doing so can prevent

your content from being mixed in with less-desirable or off-topic content. Type the hashtag into your search bar and briefly take a look at the kinds of posts that are using it. Make sure you understand the context in which a particular hashtag is used and that it is relevant to your post, your profile, and your goals.

## Profile Photo

Show visitors to your profile who you really are. Nothing screams “untrustworthy” more to social media users than a generic profile image, whether it’s an egg or a silhouette of a person. Replace each platform’s default image with a professional image. Avoid drawings, no pictures of your dog, no plates of spaghetti. Instead, use a photo of yourself, your restaurant, or a group image of you and your restaurant staff. Hire a professional photographer to take the photos and, please, don’t use a selfie.

## Keeping It Short and Sweet

Keep in mind that some platforms don’t allow brands to share lengthy posts. Twitter, for example, has a **280-character limit**. Save lengthy press releases or restaurant news announcements for your restaurant’s blog. Instead, use your social media to entice readers to visit your site. Write a brief, intriguing post and include a link to your company website or blog. You can also use platforms like Hootsuite, Sprout Social, or Linktree for managing the links within your social media posts.

## Reach

Once you’ve shared your posts across your social media channels, you can start monitoring how well your posts are doing. On Twitter, for instance, you can access this information quickly by clicking on the little icon at the bottom of each tweet marked “Tweet Activity,” which will tell you statistics such as how many users have viewed, liked, or retweeted your tweet.

Social media management tools also allow you to view stats on how your social media posts are performing. But unlike simply checking the platform itself for “likes” or shares, using a social media management platform also enables you to see how many users have clicked on your link, which can help you assess which social media strategies are working for you across various platforms.

## Limit Self-Promotion

Social media is about just that — being social. Try to follow the “80/20” rule. That means that only 20 percent of your posts should be self-promotional. The rest should include posts that share your insights on the restaurant world, relevant industry news, and other people’s posts. One clever way to promote your restaurant is by re-sharing guests’ posts about how great their dining experience was.

## Integrating Posts to Multiple Platforms

Instagram and Facebook are easily integrated with Twitter (and vice versa). With the click of a single button, you can share your posts across all three platforms simultaneously. You should absolutely take advantage of this feature if you have a Facebook page and post regularly on Instagram as well, to engage in cross-platform posting/sharing. Just be careful that all your posts are short enough, so your message doesn't get clipped as you repurpose it from Facebook or Instagram to Twitter.

Using social media scheduling tools can help you manage cross-platform marketing/posting. These programs typically have a dashboard set-up where you can see all of your social media accounts together, schedule posts, and share simultaneously across multiple platforms.

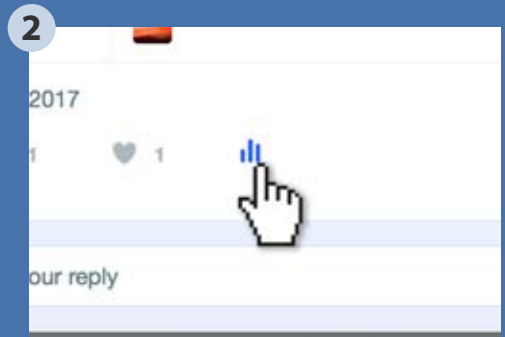
## Consistency and Discipline

Like anything else in life, if you want to see results from your social media, then you need to be disciplined and consistent. Treat this as work, because that's what it is. Establish a social media posting calendar just as you would set up a weekly "to-do" or "goals" list. Be intentional and systematic in your posting and plan out quality content in advance.

Use your social media management platforms to schedule all planned posts pertaining to your restaurant, such as new menu additions, specials, hiring a new chef, etc. That way, you or whomever you hire to manage your social media are free to focus on engaging with your followers and sharing industry news of the day.

However, with all that said, when you post can be critical to your success or failure. In our next chapter, we break down some of the common do's and don'ts of social media posting regarding **timing**.

# How to Quickly Access Twitter analytics





## Chapter

# Getting the Timing Right

You know your restaurant needs to be active on social media. Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and Instagram are great (and free) platforms for marketing restaurants, allowing you to promote your business to an engaged consumer audience.

For consumers looking for new businesses to patronize, online reviews have become increasingly important. According to Hootsuite's ["130 Social Media Statistics that Matter to Marketers in 2019"](#) report, more than 40 percent of digital consumers use social networks to research brands or products.

But just as more people than ever are using social media, the tolerance for an online faux pas is at an all-time low. You don't want your restaurant to be on the receiving

end of the wrath of angry internet users or negative press attention because of a silly, insensitive, or misguided post. Here are a few guidelines to follow for optimal posting.

## When to Use Social Media

### If You're Running a Holiday-Themed or Seasonal Special

Does your menu include some seasonal favorites during the winter months? How about squash or pumpkin soup around Thanksgiving? Does your restaurant welcome single customers in an anti-Valentine's Day celebration? Are you offering guests a decadent peppermint dessert in the days leading up to Christmas? Let the people know!



Sending out a friendly “Happy Holidays” message on Facebook or Twitter and mentioning your seasonal special is a great way to connect with your community while also promoting your menu. If your seasonal menu is online, include a link!

### **If You’re Going to Be at a Food Event**

If your restaurant is scheduled to attend an industry convention, local food festival, or community event — or hosting one yourself — spread the word to your social media followers. Posting about it a few days before, the day before, and then the morning of the event should suffice. If the event has a website where guests can find directions or check out an FAQ, make sure to include that link.

And when the event is over? Use Instagram, Pinterest, or Snapchat to post your photos from the day and include links to your restaurant’s blog post about the event. Uploading a few choice photos while thanking the folks that came out can be effective, especially if you can include photos of your food from the day!

### **If You Have Uploaded a New Blog Post**

If your restaurant’s website publishes a blog, promote it on your social media accounts. Sharing your blog post won’t just encourage customers to visit that page, but also to visit your website as a whole.

If it makes sense for the topic, include a link in your blog post that goes to another part of the website. For instance, if you’re writing about your chef’s focus on Italian cuisine,

you can link to your menu page. If you’re writing about preparing for an upcoming event, link to your event calendar page.

### **Any Other Specials or Discounts for the Day**

Whether it’s Happy Hour specials or just the soup of the day, using social media to get the word out for day-of discounts can be the difference between hungry followers choosing you, or your competitors.

It’s helpful to think of your social media posts as calling your customers to action (i.e., visiting your restaurant), but also as a service you’re providing to the public. After all, you’re letting them know about ways to save them money or letting them in on a great experience. Make sure whatever you post on social media is something guests will see as a benefit to them.

### **Address Customers’ Concerns**

While we would love it if customers only interacted with us via social media for positive reasons, it’s also true that users reach out to brands via social media with complaints, too. While many consumers research brands on social networks, 53 percent of customers expect businesses to respond to negative reviews within a week, and 94 percent say negative online reviews have convinced them to avoid a business, a [2018 Review Trackers report](#) pointed out.

Be careful about getting defensive; hassling people who criticize your restaurant online could make you look even worse than the original negative review. Guests deciding

whether to visit your restaurant don't want to eat at restaurants whose managers will go after them if they post even mild criticism online about the meal.

## **When Not to Use Social Media**

### **Anniversaries of Tragic Events**

You don't want to be the brand that shares an inappropriate pre-scheduled post during a tragic event anniversary. Be mindful of upcoming dates, such as September 11 or Pearl Harbor, and schedule thoughtful posts accordingly, so that you don't rub customers the wrong way.

### **During Current Tragic Events**

When it comes to natural disasters, shootings, and other tragic events happening in real-time, tweeting, or posting on Facebook about the event as it happens is a bad idea for businesses. In fact, it might be a good idea to avoid promoting on social media for that day altogether, depending on the severity of the situation.

There are exceptions to this rule: if the tragedy is happening in your restaurant's community, a short and respectful message of condolences is appropriate. If you are participating in a disaster relief effort and are reaching out for donations, using social media to get the word out could also be appropriate. The important thing to keep in mind is to be tactful and make it about the people affected by the disaster, not about your restaurant.

### **If You've Been Posting Too Much as It Is**

How often do you promote your business on social media? While staying current and consistent with online engagement is key for business owners, there is such a thing as too much Facebooking. You don't want to turn customers off by clogging up their feeds. They might even end up unfollowing your account in frustration!





Consider using a social media scheduling app that will allow you to set up all your posts at the same time, but schedule them to post online exactly when you need them to.

If you're unsure how much social media is too much, check out your competitors' social media accounts. Do they have more followers than you? Do they have more followers engaging positively with them? If so, what's their average time in between their posts? Copying your competitor's social media schedule beat for beat isn't a good idea, but seeing where they've succeeded can give you a better idea of how you can appeal to your audience.

If you have several posts to make but only one time during the day to post them, don't post them all at once. Instead, consider using a social media scheduling app that will allow you to set up all your posts at the same time, but schedule them to post online exactly when you need them to.

As important as knowing when to post is having a good sense of for whom you are posting. Who is your audience? And if your current audience isn't who you need to grow your business, how do you find the people you want to reach? In our next chapter, we break down the process of developing online ambassadors, i.e., finding the **right audience** that will help build your business!



## Chapter

# Finding the Right Audience

One of the trickier elements of developing a solid social media presence is developing a following with online foodies. Many of these influencers and writers run their own blogs, write freelance food reviews, or just have a strong following on different social media platforms. Beyond these trendsetters are larger online foodie communities that are quick to share enthusiastic recommendations to each other.

These are people who love to gab about food. Tapping into these communities could bring a great deal of exposure to your restaurant, but paying to access them could be costly. Generally speaking, influencers don't come cheap. Influencer tech research firm Hypr found that influencers with 500,000 or more followers **charge between \$5,000 to \$10,000 per post**, but marketers

are all over the place when it comes to monitoring the right metrics.

Thankfully, there are ways for restaurateurs to access online communities without spending too much money on influencers or online ads.

### Set the Tone

You've worked hard to set a specific atmosphere you convey at your restaurant, in terms of both ambiance and service. Extend that same tone through your social media engagement. If your restaurant is a little quirky and fun, consider adding tongue-in-cheek humor to your online posts and tweets. If you're more of a family restaurant, create posts that are warm and friendly.

## Encourage Photography

A subtle, effective way to get your tech-savvy guests to promote your food? Make your food look gorgeous. Online foodies are known for posting pictures of meals they're excited to bite into.

Really focus on the plating choices for your menu, so it looks fresh, colorful, and pretty — in other words, worthy of your guests getting their phones out to take a photo before they even take their first bite. Foodies want to share opportunities for special dining experiences with their friends, and making your food look special can be a great way to encourage posting and tweeting about that experience.

Make sure you're following the major foodie bloggers in your area. In major cities, you'll likely see groups of "instafamous foodies" that you should keep an eye on if you want to get noticed. Follow them, and "like" their stuff from time to time (unless it's about a direct competitor). If they share content about your restaurant, you're welcome to thank them or post a nice comment.

But again, you don't want to like/comment on everything they post. The bigger bloggers (foodie or otherwise) worry about readers crossing the line with their interaction, so you want to make sure your dealings with them are professional and appropriate. It needs to be relevant, just like you'd expect from anyone posting on your own feed.

While Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram are still popular resources for restaurants, consider also creating a presence on Snapchat. Snapchat is an image-focused social media platform where the images sent out by users disappear after one to 10 seconds.

There are lots of ways to use Snapchat to market your restaurant. While you want to stay away from discount codes, consider sending out passwords for secret specials; it can make engaging with your social media followers into a sneaky game and tap into the secret menu trend. You can also use Snapchat just like Instagram to feature your food, this time adding in a FOMO (fear of missing out) element.

While Snapchat posts disappear, you could beef up your restaurant's Pinterest presence by sharing not only photos of your food but beautiful shots of your restaurant before it opens. Have a rooftop bar or gorgeous wall art? Great visuals are key on the platform, as [Hootsuite points out](#).

And again, no matter what social media platform you're using to share your food photos, making sure they're good shots of beautiful plating is key.



The image shows a screenshot of a Facebook post from the 'Rewards Network' page. The post is dated December 15, 2016, and was published by Matt Santori. The text of the post asks, 'Is your restaurant (and your staff) ready for what New Year's Eve might bring?' and includes a link to a blog post: <https://goo.gl/WKsS9z>. Below the text is a photograph of a bartender in a white shirt and brown apron garnishing two glasses of yellow cocktails with green leaves. The caption for the photo reads: 'Planning Your Restaurant's New Year's Eve (and When Enough is Enough)'. Below the caption, there is a short paragraph: 'While a big event can reap great rewards, there are some major hurdles to consider when executing New Year's Eve events at your restaurant.' At the bottom of the post, the website 'REWARDSNETWORK.COM' is listed.

Facebook Post

## Make It Easy

One reason we suggested creating a Twitter handle that is as close as possible to your restaurant name is to make it easy for Twitter users to @ you. That way, when your guests mention your business in their tweets, your handle should pop up, making it simple and fast for them to get in touch.

Consider keeping track of when your restaurant is “tagged” in posts so that you can like or comment on those posts.

Having your Twitter handle referenced in your guests’ tweets is important since other Twitter users can then click through to your restaurant’s account. Your goal should be to make it as easy as possible for your guests to give you credit online for a delicious meal, and to encourage other social media users to stop in to try your food for themselves.

Consider keeping track of when your restaurant is “tagged” in posts so that you can like or comment on those posts. That lets online foodies know you saw their shout-out and shows that you’re paying attention to social media. If keeping track of tagged posts starts to feel time consuming, there are apps and sites out there that help you manage it.

You also should be looking for the geo-tag of your restaurant on Instagram. Food influencers and everyday guests might not tag you in a post, but they could be tagging the post with your restaurant’s location. This means taking a little extra time to check it manually, but this is something you should try to do at least every few days.

## Use Google Alerts

Another way to stay on top of what people are saying about your restaurant is by setting up a Google Alert. This way, if a blog or other website writes about your business, you’ll receive an email alert with a link to the mention.

If the mention is a positive review of a diner’s experience at your restaurant, you can then share it on your social media pages. Reviewers often enjoy seeing their positive reviews shared by the restaurant they’re writing about, and it tells the foodie community at large that you’re paying attention.

In our next chapter, we take a look at how to fine-tune your social media message to get the best results. How you handle your posts — and **your own expectations** — will make the difference between a positive experience or a frustrating one.

# Fine-tuning Your Expectations

Social media started off as a budding online community of a few like-minded internet enthusiasts and has since exploded into billions of users around the world sharing their thoughts and experiences every day.

As a result, it's hard to find and speak directly to the users who will be interested in your restaurant. But when using social media, your goal shouldn't be trying to reach as many people as possible. It's about cutting through the cacophony of voices and talking directly to your audience — potential diners in your area.

With that in mind, here are five key social media takeaways for your restaurant that will position you for success while navigating today's social media landscape.

## Post (and Follow) Locally

It doesn't matter how many people see your post if the majority are people who can't actually visit your restaurant. Make cultivating local followers your primary social media focus. It's better to have fewer followers that live or work near your establishment than larger numbers of followers that live halfway across the world, are bots (fake, computer-automated accounts), or are just not your target demographic.

Following people in your area who are popular on social media in the restaurant realm can be helpful, too. Connecting with them and other local restaurants with substantial social media followings could lead to cross-promotional opportunities.

You'd be surprised how much traction you can get from partnering with other accounts that could use a similar boost.

## **Don't Worry If People "Like" You**

For years, Facebook has trained its users that the "like" button is the best indicator of how people feel about their brand. I mean, who doesn't want to be liked?

But if you're in the business of tracking social media performance, "likes" aren't the only metric you need to monitor. Instead of focusing on likes, pay closer attention to how many people clicked on the links directing them to your site.

With every visit to your website (not just your social media profile), you are pulling a potential customer closer to the heart of your business. If you use social media management platforms, you'll be able to assess how many people clicked on the links within your posts. With Twitter and Facebook, you can also see how many impressions (meaning how many users scrolled by or saw your post) you received.

## **Always Include a Photo and Link**

In a seemingly endless feed of content, a stunning image can stop someone from scrolling right past your post. The sharper, brighter, more attractive the photo, the more likely it is to make a reader pay attention and want to know more.

Your food should be the primary subject for social media posts. In fact, platforms like Instagram, Pinterest, or Snapchat have made their mark as perfect places for users

to find awe-inspiring interiors or delectable dishes. Plus, photos of food are a lot more interesting for a social media user than a shot of your empty dining room.

If you have interesting and useful information for users, make sure you include a link to your blog posts or other company website information. While Twitter and Facebook lend themselves more towards text and links, Snapchat users can post hyperlinks, and Instagram accounts can use Linktree or link services that enable you to attach a link to your individual photos.

## **Be Real (and True to Your Brand)**

Nobody likes to be sold to all the time. If users see you solely posting about your restaurant and nothing that's truly of use or entertaining to them, they may be turned off from following you.

To attract and maintain followers, speak in a friendly, real voice. Avoid buzzwords. Share useful information, from you or another resource. Be part of the online community. Thank people for their comments on your social media pages and posts. People will respect you as a useful source for information and ultimately reward you with business. Today, social media for restaurants simply takes patience, consistency, and above all else, authenticity.





## Conclusion

# Word of mouth still talks.

As we mentioned in Chapter 2, online reviews can be your restaurant's best friend or worst enemy. Just like you're watching how the online community is responding to your restaurant, potential diners are, too.

"Technology plays a huge role," says Arezou Hooshianejad, marketing manager and event coordinator of Rewards Network program restaurant Darya Restaurant in Santa Ana, Calif. "That's how people get connected, how they find out about things that are happening in their area, the restaurants, and what specials they have. Before, it was just word of mouth. Now it's on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Social media has expanded that word of mouth."

Maintaining a positive online presence can be as important as providing exceptional customer service inside your restaurant. Because for your guests, the experience doesn't end when they pay the check and walk out anymore. In fact, if you are doing a good job of managing your online social media presence, it may even begin long before they've ever set foot in your establishment.



**“Rewards Network’s integrity has definitely helped improve the quality of clients that we get. These customers tend to spend more and are more engaged.”**

— Raveen Arora, Owner  
*The Dhaba, Tempe, AZ*

Want to learn more about how Rewards Network can help your restaurant grow?

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