

# Social media for restaurants: four hurdles to overcome



## Introduction

Social media plays an important role in generating buzz and revenue for restaurants of all types and sizes. So, it's no surprise that **82%** of restaurants in the United States use social media as a part of their marketing strategies. To implement this marketing tool effectively, it's important to understand which platforms work best for restaurants and the fundamental building blocks needed for crafting a solid social presence. Beyond that, it's equally crucial to know what (and when) to post and how to engage with the right audience, all while staying true to your restaurant's brand. Here's how to overcome four common hurdles of social media and use it to attract new guests to your restaurant and keep them coming back for more.

# Mastering social media basics

First, the best place to start is understanding each of the platforms that are most adept at generating brand awareness for restaurants.

**Facebook** allows businesses to post their hours of operation, contact information, and other visual content on their business profile page. It also is an avenue in which you can promote events and customers can leave reviews about their dining experience. Plus, businesses can run ads that reach **62.6%** of all Americans aged 13+.

**Instagram** is fertile ground for sharing mouthwatering food images. In fact, **38%** of Instagram users look at food content and **27%** of users share that content. It's a great platform for connecting with influencers and your local community via specific hashtags and tagging your restaurant's location in posts.

Now that you have a lay of this digital landscape, it's time to choose your **handle**, which is basically a username. Choose something that closely mirrors your restaurant's name or name and location, so that you're easily discoverable by users. It's a best practice to keep your handle the same (or close to it) across all your social media platforms.

Once your handles are secured, you can craft your **bio**, which is simply a short description of your business that's typically displayed on

your profile page. Aim to be brief and only include pertinent information such as your restaurant's cuisine type, location, hours, specials, etc.

Finally, it's important to understand how **hashtags** work on social media and which ones will garner the most traction for your restaurant's posts. Hashtags enable users to easily find topics they're interested in and when used correctly, hashtags can drive traffic to your post—and consequently, to your profile. The more traffic you drive to your profile, the more potential customers can find out about your restaurant, especially with **32%** of people visiting a restaurant's website directly after seeing their content on social media.

## Knowing when and what to post

One of the keys to having a successful social media presence is being consistent with posting and sharing content on all your platforms. Creating a social media calendar is a great way to ensure you're being intentional with your content and systematic in your posting cadence. A quick tip—some of the **optimal days/times to post** are Mondays 10 a.m. to noon, Wednesdays 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., and Fridays 9 to 11 a.m. It's very important to keep your posts concise and engaging, while still featuring dynamic and interesting content. In fact, restaurants that use video content on social media see a **33%** boost in engagement.

## Updates

Regularly posting any updates, large or small, about your restaurant on your social platforms is an easy and effective way to keep your customers and the community in the loop about any important changes to your business. This may include menu updates, changes in your hours of operation, new takeout/delivery offerings, or maybe even a brand-new location opening. In addition to sharing this type of news, you can also post any current job positions that you're looking to fill with a link to where interested candidates can apply.

## Events and specials

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 is ideal. If the event has a website where guests can find directions or check out an FAQ page, make sure to include that link too. When the event is over, use Instagram, Facebook, and other platforms to post your photo and video recaps and thank everyone that attended. It's also a smart move to post any specials or discounts your restaurant may be offering.

## Holidays

Does your restaurant feature seasonal specials or host themed events around the holidays?

Social media is the perfect place to share this type of news with your customers. Build these types of updates into your social media calendar early so that you can seamlessly plan out the type of content you want to share each week. It can be as simple as crafting a heartfelt “happy holidays” message and showcasing your seasonal menu, specials, and events for the month in one concise post. A [survey](#) found that during the holidays, 57% of consumers plan to go out to eat at a restaurant, while 50% plan to order takeout or delivery. So, it's essential that you include any applicable links to your website, menu, or reservation booking system in your holiday posts. It's also a fun idea to lean into “micro holidays” or “social media holidays” that align with your restaurant's cuisine such as National Ice Cream Day or National Pizza Day.

Additional post ideas for restaurants and bars can include sharing:

- How your signature cocktails are made
- An in-depth look at your restaurant's esthetic
- High-resolution photos of your top-selling dishes and drinks
- Polls on which new dishes/drinks guests would enjoy most
- Favorite food and drink pairings
- Your outdoor space
- Employee highlights along with their favorite menu items

## Engaging with the right audience

One of the trickier elements of developing a solid social media presence is establishing a connection with prominent food and restaurant influencers. Many of the creators behind these accounts write their own blogs, do freelance food reviews, and have a strong following on various social platforms. Following local and national food industry accounts on social media is a savvy way to stay in the know about the latest trends and restaurant news. Tapping into these communities and influencers can bring immense exposure to your restaurant as 50% of diners claim that social media can influence their restaurant choices.

Equally as important as engaging with the big-name food accounts is interacting with your local community. By following and supporting nearby businesses, you can open your restaurant up to an array of cross-promotional opportunities and partnership possibilities. For instance, you can partner with a local bakery if you don't currently have a dessert menu to offer weekly specials. You can also team up with local artisans to offer their goods, such as candles and small homewares, for purchase at your restaurant and in turn negotiate receiving a portion of the sales. A larger initiative may be working with a local nonprofit, such as an animal shelter (if you have an animal friendly outdoor area at your restaurant), to host an adoption day event with themed food and drink

offerings. By embedding your establishment into the threads of your community and sharing these local initiatives on your social channels, you can not only bolster your restaurant's recognition, but also forge longstanding business partnerships and loyal customers.

Once you've solidified these key relationships, it's important to properly maintain them. Consider keeping track of when your restaurant is tagged in posts so that you can like or comment on those posts. This lets followers know you saw their shoutout and shows you're active on social media. Be sure to also check the geotag for your restaurant on each social platform—food influencers and everyday guests might not tag you in a post, but they may be tagging the post with your restaurant's location. This type of check-in work is a task you can add to your social media calendar so that it doesn't fall by the wayside.

## Staying true to your brand

You have cultivated a specific tone at your restaurant, in both ambiance and service. Extend that same tone to your social media voice. For example, if your restaurant is a little quirky and fun, you can have tongue-in-cheek humor to your posts. Or, if you're more of a family restaurant, create posts that are warm and friendly. This practice—ensuring your brand values, image, and messaging are consistent across all channels—is called



**brand consistency.** A **study** unearthed that 68% of businesses reported that brand consistency has contributed from 10% to more than 20% of their revenue growth.

Successful social media accounts make it a point to share information that their followers will find useful, while also remaining active in their communities. These days, authenticity and transparency can go a long way in establishing a solid reputation for any brand. Actually, **88%** of consumers say authenticity is important when deciding what brands they like and support. A core component of this sincerity is featuring high-quality and accurate **photos** of your restaurant's atmosphere, food, and drinks. In a seemingly endless feed of content, a stunning image can stop someone from scrolling right past you. The sharper, brighter, and more attractive the photo, while still remaining authentic, the more likely it is to make a viewer pay attention and want to know more.

With **63%** of consumers using social media to find new restaurants or explore new menu items, it's clever to focus on the plating choices for your menu, so it looks fresh, colorful, and appetizing—worthy of your guests getting their phones out to take a photo before they even take their first bite. By providing opportunities for esthetic photos and videos, you're prompting customers to share this special dining experience with their social network, thus garnering "free" social media marketing for your restaurant in the process.

## Conclusion

Harnessing the power of social media to foster a positive online presence can be as imperative as customer service inside your restaurant. For your guests, their experience may begin long before they've ever set foot in your establishment, and it doesn't end when they pay the check and walk out anymore. The prevalence of social media and review sites has significantly changed the landscape for restaurant-goers in recent years. Diners can make snap decisions about whether to give your restaurant a chance based on online reviews alone.

This is why it's crucial to make sure that current and potential customers are seeing only legitimate and **verified online customer reviews** of your restaurant. Rewards Network® understands that reviews are an essential brand building block for restaurants, which is why every Rewards Network review is tied to a specific visit to your restaurant. Only diners who have actually paid a check that results in rewards from one of our many loyalty dining programs can leave their feedback.



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

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