

Restaurant Marketing Calendar and Campaign Playbook

A year of demand generation - twelve months of campaigns, eight playbooks, and the templates to run them

What this is: a working marketing system for an independent restaurant. It starts with the stack that actually matters - findability, your own storefront, reputation and a guest list you own - then gives you a month-by-month campaign calendar built for Canadian and American realities, with prep lead times and channel mixes. Then eight playbooks: Google Business Profile, review generation and response with four adaptable templates, email and SMS segmentation and campaigns, loyalty design, a sustainable social content system, local partnerships, promotions ranked by margin impact, and honest measurement. It ends with a printable campaign brief and a monthly rhythm. Who it is for: owners and general managers who do their own marketing between services.

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Holiday dates, consent and anti-spam rules (including CASL in Canada), promotion and alcohol advertising rules, and licensing requirements vary by province, state and municipality. Confirm the specifics for your jurisdiction with a qualified adviser. This is operational guidance, not legal advice.

The marketing stack a restaurant actually needs

Most restaurant marketing advice starts with the fun part - the campaign - and skips the infrastructure that makes campaigns work. The order below is deliberate. Each layer is close to worthless without the one above it, and each layer costs less than the one below it.

Layer	What it is	Why it comes first	Cost
1. Findability	Google Business Profile, accurate hours, phone, address, menu link, photos, map pin	More people decide where to eat inside a map app than anywhere else. If your hours are wrong you lose the guest before any message reaches them.	Free
2. Your own storefront	Your website and your own ordering and reservation page	It is the only channel where you control the margin, the data and the relationship. Every guest sent to a marketplace instead is rented back to you at a commission.	Low
3. Reputation	Reviews, ratings, and how you respond to them	Reviews are the last thing read before a booking. A steady flow of recent reviews outperforms a high average that stopped two years ago.	Free
4. Your guest list	Email and SMS subscribers with real consent	The only audience you own outright. It is the one asset that does not get taken away by an algorithm change or a price increase.	Low
5. Organic social	Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, Google Posts	Reach and personality. Useful, but rented - and reach for any single post is outside your control.	Time
6. Partnerships	Local businesses, hotels, offices, teams, charities	Access to somebody else's trusted audience without buying attention.	Low
7. Paid	Search, social and marketplace advertising	It works, and it amplifies whatever is already there. Amplifying a broken layer above just makes the leak faster.	Variable

COMMON MISTAKE

Buying advertising before fixing hours, photos and reviews. If your profile says you close at 9 and you close at 10, you are paying to send people to a listing that talks them out of coming. Spend the first month on layers 1 to 4 - all of which are free or nearly free - and only then consider paid.

Owned, earned and rented

Owned is anything you can still reach if a platform changes its rules tomorrow: your guest list, your storefront, your phone number, your door. **Earned** is what other people say about you: reviews, word of mouth, press. **Rented** is everything else - social followers, marketplace placement, ad impressions. Rented channels are not bad; they are simply conditional, and a restaurant whose entire demand comes from rented channels has no marketing, it has a subscription.

First-party data, and building a guest list ethically

A first-party guest list - people who gave you their contact details, knowingly, because they want to hear from you - is the most durable marketing asset an independent restaurant can build. It does not depend on a platform, it does not get more expensive as competitors bid, and it is the only audience you can reach on a slow Tuesday with no notice.

Where the list actually comes from

Source	How it works	Quality
Your own online ordering	Every direct order captures an email at checkout with a clear opt-in tick that is not pre-ticked.	Highest - a proven buyer with a known order history.
Reservations	The booking flow captures contact details; the opt-in is separate from the booking confirmation.	High - dated visits, party sizes, occasions.
Wi-Fi sign-in	Guest connects, opts in, receives the password.	Medium - high volume, lower intent; keep the ask to one field.
In-restaurant sign-up	A card on the table or at the till, or a QR code with a single-field form.	Medium to high if a person asks; low if it is only a sign on the wall.
Events and catering enquiries	Every enquiry, quoted or not, becomes a lead record with a follow-up date.	Highest value per record - these are your largest cheques.
Gift card purchases	Buyer and recipient are both potential guests.	High - and the recipient is often a first-time visitor.
Loyalty enrolment	Sign-up captures identity and links it to spend.	Highest - identity plus behaviour in one record.

What to capture, and what never to

Capture	Why	Never capture or store
First name	Personalisation, and it is what staff need at the door.	Full card numbers, or any card data outside your payment provider's system.
Email address	The lowest-cost, highest-control channel you have.	Government identification numbers of any kind.
Mobile number, only with a separate consent	SMS is powerful and intrusive; it needs its own explicit permission.	Health information, including allergy notes tied to a marketing record.
Birthday - month and day only	Runs the single best-performing recurring campaign most restaurants have.	Full date of birth including year, which is identity data you do not need.
Visit and order history	Segmentation, and it is data you already hold.	Anything a guest told a server in confidence.
Preferences volunteered by the guest	Dietary style, favourite table, wine preference - given freely, used visibly.	Inferred sensitive attributes, or anything you would be embarrassed to show the guest.

OPERATOR TIP

The consent rules differ by country and province - Canada's anti-spam legislation (CASL) sets specific requirements for express and implied consent, identification and unsubscribe, and other jurisdictions have their own. Whatever applies to you, the operational version is the same three habits: never pre-tick a box, always identify yourself in the message, and make unsubscribe one click that works immediately. Confirm the details for your jurisdiction with a qualified adviser.

The twelve-month calendar

Built for a North American independent. Two structural notes before you use it. First, **Thanksgiving falls in October in Canada and in November in the United States** - if you serve both markets or advertise across the border, run the campaign twice on the correct dates rather than once. Second, dates for Family Day, March break, Victoria Day, Labour Day and civic holidays vary by province and state; check your own calendar before you commit to print.

The lead times are the part operators most often get wrong. Almost every campaign in this calendar fails for the same reason - it was started the week it was supposed to run.

Month	Seasonal hooks	Campaign to run	Prep lead time	Channel mix
January	Post-holiday quiet, value-seeking, dry January, resolutions, cold weather	A value or comfort offer that does not cut your headline price: a set lunch, a warming dish, a weekday-only prix fixe. Run a serious alcohol-free drinks list and talk about it - it protects cover counts from guests taking a month off drinking, and the margin on a good non-alcoholic drink is usually excellent.	Start mid-December; the list and pricing set before the holidays	Email to the full list, Google Posts, social, in-restaurant signage
February	Valentine's Day, Family Day in several provinces, the shortest and often slowest month	Valentine's is a capacity and pacing exercise, not a discount exercise: a fixed menu at a fixed price with fixed seating times, taken as bookings with a deposit or a card hold. Follow it in the last week with a February anti-slump offer aimed at regulars.	Menu and bookings live by 20 January; final push 7-10 days out	Email, reservations page, Google Posts, social, review-site profiles
March	March break, St Patrick's Day, first mild days, tax season for business lunches	A family-friendly March break campaign - kids' offer, earlier seatings, activity on the table - plus a St Patrick's day-part push if it suits your concept. Start teasing the patio before it opens.	Three weeks; confirm your province's break dates first	Email segmented to families, social, local parent groups, Google Posts
April	Easter, spring produce, patio anticipation, Ramadan and Eid in some years and communities	Easter brunch, sold as bookings with seating times. A spring menu launch built around genuinely new produce. Take patio bookings before the patio opens - demand for the first warm weekend is enormous and entirely predictable.	Four weeks for brunch bookings; menu photography two weeks ahead	Email, reservations, social, Google Posts, local press for the menu launch

The twelve-month calendar (continued)

Month	Seasonal hooks	Campaign to run	Prep lead time	Channel mix
May	Mother's Day, Victoria Day, patio season opens, graduations begin	Mother's Day is the single biggest service of the year for most full-service restaurants - see the mechanics on the next page. Open the patio with an event rather than a shrug. Start taking graduation and end-of-year group bookings.	Mother's Day live by mid-April; patio comms ready to fire on the forecast	Email, reservations, social, Google Posts, patio photography
June	Patio in full swing, graduations, Father's Day, wedding season, festivals begin	Father's Day, positioned differently from Mother's Day - it skews later in the day and toward walk-ins, so hold capacity rather than filling it with a fixed menu. Push group and celebration bookings hard while calendars are still open.	Three weeks; group-booking page live from May	Email, social, partnerships with local venues, Google Posts
July	Peak patio, tourism and visitors, festivals, long weekend, holidays thin out weekday business	Tourist and visitor capture: make sure your profile, photos and hours are immaculate because most of this demand arrives through a map app. Run a weekday campaign to your local list, since regulars travel in July.	Two weeks; profile and photo work done in June	Google Business Profile, review sites, hotel and tourism partnerships, email
August	Late summer, festival season, last patio weeks, staff holidays	A late-summer feature that celebrates peak local produce and can be photographed well. Begin the autumn and holiday planning that September will be too busy for.	Two weeks for the feature; holiday planning starts now	Social, email, local producer cross-promotion
September	Back to school, routines resume, business lunches return, Labour Day, autumn menu	A 'welcome back' campaign to lapsed guests - September is the best re-engagement month of the year because habits are being rebuilt. Launch the autumn menu. Open holiday party enquiries: corporate planners book earlier than you think.	Autumn menu three weeks; holiday page live by the first week of September	Email to lapsed and high-spend segments, social, corporate outreach, Google Posts

The twelve-month calendar (concluded)

Month	Seasonal hooks	Campaign to run	Prep lead time	Channel mix
October	Canadian Thanksgiving, Halloween, cooler weather, holiday enquiries peak	Canadian Thanksgiving: a set menu with fixed seatings, plus a take-home option for guests cooking at home. Halloween only if it fits your concept - a half-hearted Halloween is worse than none. This is the month holiday bookings are won or lost.	Thanksgiving four weeks; holiday follow-up runs all month	Email, reservations, social, Google Posts, direct corporate follow-up
November	US Thanksgiving, holiday party season begins, Remembrance Day, gift-card season starts	Holiday parties and catering, chased actively rather than waited for. Launch gift cards early with a reason to buy now. If you serve US guests, run US Thanksgiving as a separate campaign on the correct date.	Gift cards live by 1 November; party capacity published in October	Email, corporate outreach, social, in-restaurant signage, Google Posts
December	Peak party and catering season, gift cards, family gatherings, the last two weeks go quiet mid-week	Execute rather than plan: parties, catering, gift cards, family bookings. Add a New Year's Eve offer with a deposit. Keep a plan for the quiet stretch between the parties and New Year, which catches operators out every year.	All of it should already be sold; December is delivery	Email, reservations, social, gift-card display, Google Posts
Boxing Day / New Year	Boxing Day traffic, New Year's Eve and Day, gift-card redemption, resolutions	Capture gift-card redemption deliberately - a card sold is a liability until it is redeemed, and redemption visits usually spend above the card value. Set up January's value campaign now, while you still have staff attention.	Two weeks; NYE sold by early December	Email, social, in-restaurant, Google Posts

OPERATOR TIP

Print this calendar and write your own dates on it in January - your province's or state's holiday dates, your local school break, your festival weekends, your anniversary, the day your patio realistically opens. A generic calendar is a reference; a calendar with your dates on the wall is a plan.

The two services that decide your year

Mother's Day - the mechanics

For most full-service restaurants Mother's Day is the highest-volume single service of the year, and it is the one most likely to be executed badly, because volume arrives all at once in a compressed window with large parties, multiple generations and high expectations. Treat it as an operations project with a marketing component, not the other way round.

1. **Decide the format first, by early April.** À la carte at full volume is the hardest possible way to run it. A limited menu with two or three price points is faster, more accurate and easier to cost.
2. **Sell fixed seating times, not open bookings.** Publish the times, take bookings against them, and state the table duration in the confirmation so nobody is surprised when it is enforced.
3. **Take a deposit or a card hold on large parties.** No-shows on Mother's Day cost more than on any other day of the year because that table could have been sold four times.
4. **Cap the menu and prep it.** Every item should be substantially preppable the day before. If it cannot be, it does not belong on the menu that day.
5. **Over-staff deliberately, especially the dish pit, the host stand and expo.** The bottleneck is almost never the cooking.
6. **Plan the wait.** Somebody must own the door, the queue and the communication. A twenty-minute wait handled well is fine; a twenty-minute wait with nobody talking is a review.
7. **Market it in three waves:** announce four to five weeks out, remind two weeks out with remaining times named, and post a last-availability push in the final week. Close bookings before you are full, not after.
8. **Capture the guests.** Most of them visit once a year. A follow-up email two days later with a genuine thank-you and a reason to return in June is the highest-value message you will send all month.

Holiday party and catering season - the lead-time warning

The most expensive mistake in the restaurant marketing year is starting the holiday campaign in December. Corporate holiday bookings are typically researched and decided well before the season - often in September and October - by an office administrator with a list, a budget and a deadline. By the time your December email lands, that person booked six weeks ago.

- **Have a holiday page live in early September** with capacity, menus, minimum spends, deposit terms and a booking form. Planners compare in writing.
- **Email your list in September and again in early October**, then follow up individually. Group business responds to direct contact far more than to broadcast.
- **Mine last year's book.** Every group that booked last December gets a personal message in September offering first refusal on their date. This single habit fills more of the season than any advertisement.
- **Publish deposit and cancellation terms in writing** and apply them consistently. December cancellations are unrecoverable.
- **Sell the quiet days.** Everyone wants the second and third Friday. Price and promote Mondays, Tuesdays and lunchtimes, which are where your real incremental revenue is.

Google Business Profile - the highest-return free asset

For a very large share of restaurants, the map listing is where the decision actually happens: someone searches, sees three options, looks at photos, checks the hours, glances at recent reviews, and taps directions. Your website is often never opened. Treat the profile as a storefront, because that is what it is.

What to fill in, and how

Field	What good looks like
Name	Your actual trading name. No keyword stuffing - it risks suspension and it reads as spam to humans too.
Categories	One precise primary category, then secondary categories that are genuinely true. The primary category drives which searches you appear in, so choose it carefully.
Hours	Exact, including holiday hours entered in advance. Wrong hours are the single most damaging error on the whole profile: a guest who arrives at a closed door usually leaves a review about it.
Special hours	Set every statutory holiday for the year in one sitting in January. It takes twenty minutes and prevents twelve problems.
Phone	A number a human answers during service. A ringing phone nobody picks up is worse than no number.
Website and ordering links	Point ordering and reservation links at your own storefront wherever the platform allows it, not at a marketplace that charges commission on a guest who already chose you.
Menu	A real, current menu with prices. Menu accuracy is a trust signal and a stale menu with old prices generates complaints at the table.
Attributes	Patio, accessibility, parking, dog-friendly, takeout, reservations, dietary options. These feed filtered searches and are frequently left blank.
Description	Two or three plain sentences about what you actually are. Write it for a person deciding where to eat, not for a search engine.
Products / services	Use it for signature dishes, catering and gift cards - it is under-used and it renders prominently on mobile.

Photos - the cadence that matters

- **Add photos monthly, not once.** Recency is visible to guests and a profile whose newest photo is three years old reads as a restaurant that may not exist.
- **Cover the full set:** exterior with signage (people use it to find the door), interior at the lighting level guests will actually see, the patio, the bar, five to ten hero dishes, and the team.
- **Shoot dishes in daylight near a window**, from the angle a seated guest sees. A modern phone in good light beats a bad photo taken with a good camera.
- **Replace seasonally.** Patio photos in July, warm interior shots in November. It costs an hour a month.
- **Watch guest-submitted photos.** They often outnumber yours. You cannot control them, which is a reason to post enough good ones that yours set the tone.

Posts and questions

Post weekly - a special, an event, a menu change, a holiday hour. Posts are short-lived and that is fine; the point is a profile that shows activity. Then seed the questions section yourself: post the eight questions you are asked

every day (parking, patio, reservations, dietary options, kids, groups, accessibility, takeout) and answer them from the business account. If you do not answer them, strangers will, and they will sometimes be wrong.

Review generation and response

Reviews are the last thing a guest reads before deciding, and the pattern they read is more informative than the average. A 4.4 with fifteen reviews this month beats a 4.7 whose last review is from two years ago, because recency reads as 'still good' and silence reads as 'possibly closed'.

Generating them without being awkward

1. **Ask at the moment of expressed pleasure, not at the door.** When a guest says the meal was great, that is the ask: "That means a lot - if you have a minute, a quick review really helps us." Asking a departing guest who said nothing produces nothing.
2. **Make the path one tap.** A QR code on the bill folder or a short link in the receipt email. Every extra step loses most of the people.
3. **Ask consistently, not in bursts.** Twenty reviews in one week looks manufactured; two a week for a year builds an unassailable profile.
4. **Never incentivise a review.** Offering anything in exchange breaches most platforms' terms, risks removal of your reviews, and is dishonest to the next guest reading them. Incentivise *feedback* if you like - a survey - but never a public rating.
5. **Never filter or gate.** Asking happy guests privately and routing only them to the public form is against platform policy and, more practically, it means you never hear the thing that is actually broken.
6. **Give the team the credit.** Read good reviews out at pre-shift and name the person mentioned. Staff who see reviews being read start earning them.

The one rule of public response

Never argue in public. You are not writing to the reviewer; you are writing to the next hundred people who read the exchange. They cannot verify who was right, but they can tell instantly who was gracious. A defensive, point-by-point rebuttal loses you more bookings than the original review ever would - and it is often the reason a mediocre review gets read at all.

MANAGER CHECK

Set a rule that nothing gets posted within an hour of reading it, and that anything below three stars is drafted by one person and read by a second before it goes up. The response you want to write at 11 p.m. after a bad night is never the one you want on your profile permanently.

Four review responses you can adapt

Sign every response with a real first name and a role. "Management" is not a person and reads like a form letter.

1. Glowing

Short, specific, human. Do not paste the same paragraph under every five-star review - people scroll.

TEMPLATE

"Thank you, [name] - this made our week. I'll pass this on to [chef / server name], who will be delighted you mentioned the [specific dish]. We'd love to see you again; ask for me when you're in. - [Your name], [role]"

2. Mixed - liked the food, something let it down

Thank, acknowledge the specific failure without excuses, state what changes, invite them back. Do not offer compensation publicly.

TEMPLATE

"Thank you for taking the time, [name], and I'm glad the [dish] landed well. You're right about the wait between courses - that's on us, and we've changed how we pace [specific thing] on busy Saturdays. I'd like the chance to get it right; if you email me at [address] I'll look after your next visit personally. - [Your name], [role]"

3. Negative and, in your view, unfair

Stay warm, stay short, correct facts once and gently, do not litigate. If the review breaches platform policy - it is not about a real visit, it names a staff member abusively, it is an extortion attempt - report it through the platform and still respond calmly in the meantime.

TEMPLATE

"Thank you for the feedback. I'm sorry your visit didn't meet expectations. Our records show the table was seated at [time] and served at [time], so I think we may have a different recollection of the evening - but I'd genuinely rather understand it than debate it. Please contact me directly at [address]. - [Your name], [role]"

4. A real operational failure

Own it completely. No 'however', no context, no explanation of how busy you were. The audience is the next reader, and unqualified accountability is extraordinarily persuasive.

TEMPLATE

"[Name], I'm sorry. You waited too long, the food came out cold, and nobody checked on you - none of that is acceptable and it's my responsibility. I've spoken with the team about [specific change], and from this week [specific change] is in place. I'd like to make it right in person: please email me at [address]. - [Your name], [role]"

COMMON MISTAKE

Responding to every review with the same sentence. A profile with forty identical "Thanks for your feedback!" replies signals that nobody is actually reading. Three specific responses a week beat thirty generic ones.

Email and SMS - the channel you own

Segments worth maintaining

Segment	Definition (adjust to your volume)	What to send	Cadence
New	Joined in the last 30 days, one visit or none	A welcome sequence: who you are, what to order first, how to book. This is the highest-engagement message you will ever send them.	2-3 messages over 30 days
Regular	Three or more visits in the last 90 days	Menu changes, events, first access to bookings. Treat access as the reward rather than discount.	Monthly, plus events
Lapsed	No visit in 90-180 days	A genuine 'we've missed you' with a reason to return - a new menu, a new chef, a new patio. A reactivation offer is defensible here in a way it is not for regulars.	Quarterly, in a 2-message sequence
High spend	Top decile by average cheque or total spend	Wine dinners, chef's table, private hire, early access. Invite them to things; do not discount to them.	Monthly, personal in tone
Catering and events leads	Anyone who enquired, quoted or booked a group	Seasonal capacity announcements, menus, and a personal follow-up before their anniversary date.	Quarterly plus dated follow-ups
Birthday	Month and day captured	A dated invitation in the birthday month with a clear window and a modest gesture - a dessert or a glass, not a discount.	Annual, sent 7-10 days before

Cadence and restraint

- **Two to four emails a month is a workable range** for most independents. Below one a month people forget who you are; above weekly, unsubscribes climb faster than covers.
- **SMS is different in kind, not degree.** It interrupts. Reserve it for genuinely time-sensitive, high-value messages - tonight's cancellation table, a last-call event, a weather-driven patio message - and keep it to roughly one to two a month.
- **Send when the decision is being made**, not when it is convenient to write. For weekend bookings, Wednesday and Thursday tend to beat Monday.
- **Watch unsubscribes as a quality signal.** A spike is a message problem, not a list problem, and the fix is content, not a bigger list.

OPERATOR TIP

Consent for email and consent for SMS are separate permissions and should be collected separately. In Canada, CASL governs commercial electronic messages and sets requirements for consent, sender identification and unsubscribe handling; other jurisdictions have their own regimes. Whatever applies, honour unsubscribes immediately and keep a record of when and how each consent was obtained. Confirm the specifics with a qualified adviser.

Six campaigns and the subject lines that carry them

Subject-line patterns, not scripts. The pattern is what transfers; the specifics have to be yours, because the reason your email gets opened is that it sounds like your restaurant.

Campaign	When and to whom	Subject-line patterns	The one thing that makes it work
Welcome	Immediately after sign-up, to New	"Thanks for joining us - here's what to order first" · "Welcome. A few things worth knowing" · "You're on the list. Here's what's coming"	Send it within an hour. Interest decays fast, and this is the message people actually read.
New menu launch	3-5 days before it goes live, to Regular and High spend	"The autumn menu lands Thursday" · "Six new dishes, one you'll argue about" · "What we've been cooking since August"	One photograph and one dish described properly beats a list of twelve names.
Event or ticketed dinner	3-4 weeks out, then 10 days, then last call	"[Date]: [event] - 24 seats" · "Two tables left for [event]" · "Last call: [event] closes Friday"	Name the scarcity honestly. If there are twenty-four seats, say twenty-four.
Holiday or occasion booking	4-6 weeks out, to everyone, then reminders	"[Occasion] bookings are open" · "Seatings for [occasion] - here's what's left" · "Booking [occasion] closes [date]"	State the seating times in the email. Most people decide on the time before the menu.
Reactivation	To Lapsed, twice, a fortnight apart	"It's been a while - a lot has changed" · "We saved you a seat" · "New chef, new menu, same corner table"	Give a reason to return that is not just money. Money reactivates the price-sensitive and nobody else.
Catering and groups	September and January, to the leads segment	"Holiday bookings for [year] are open" · "Feeding 30 people this December?" · "Your date from last year is still free"	Attach the actual menu and the actual minimum spend. Planners need to compare in writing, today.

Four rules for the body of the message

1. **One message, one action.** Every additional link reduces the chance of the first one being clicked.
2. **Put the action above the fold and repeat it at the end.** Most people read on a phone, standing up, half-distracted.
3. **Write like a person who owns a restaurant,** not like a brand. "We got the first good tomatoes on Tuesday and I've put them on the menu" beats any amount of polished copy.
4. **Always answer 'so what do I do now?'** - book, order, reply, come in on Thursday. An email with no clear next step is a newsletter, and newsletters fill nothing.

Loyalty programs - the maths before the mechanics

Most restaurant loyalty programs are a discount with extra administration. The question to answer before you launch one is simple and uncomfortable: **am I paying for behaviour that would have happened anyway?**

The earn-and-burn arithmetic

Work it through with your own numbers before you choose a rate. If you give back 5 percent of spend as reward value, that is 5 percent off the top line on every enrolled visit. Against a typical independent restaurant's net margin, giving away 5 percent of revenue is a very large share of the profit on those covers - so the program has to generate genuinely incremental visits to pay for itself, not merely reward loyal guests who were already coming.

Question	How to answer it honestly
What does the reward actually cost me?	Cost the reward at food cost, not menu price. A free dessert with a menu price of nine may cost you two - and a nine-dollar-looking gift for a two-dollar cost is far better economics than a percentage discount.
What proportion of enrolled visits would have happened anyway?	Usually most of them, especially among your regulars. That share is pure margin given away.
What is the incremental behaviour I want?	Be specific: one more visit a quarter, a visit on a slow weekday, a larger party, a dessert attached. Design the reward to trigger that, not to reward everything equally.
What is my breakage assumption?	Unredeemed points are a liability that flatters the program's economics until someone redeems. Never plan around breakage - plan around redemption.
Can the team explain it in one sentence at the table?	If they cannot, guests will not enrol and staff will stop mentioning it inside a month. Complexity is the most common cause of death.

Alternatives that usually work better than discounting

Mechanic	What it is	Why it beats a discount
Access	First refusal on bookings for busy nights, patio priority, early access to event tickets.	Costs nothing, feels significant, and is most valuable exactly when you are most constrained.
Surprise	An unannounced dessert, a glass of something, a snack from the kitchen, delivered by name.	An unexpected gift produces far more goodwill than an expected discount of the same value - and it does not train the guest to wait for a deal.
Tiers	Recognition levels earned through visits, with non-monetary privileges at each level.	Status is renewable and inexpensive. Guests will work for it in a way they will not for points.
Experiences	Kitchen table, a tasting with the chef, a cellar visit, first seat at a new menu.	Low marginal cost, unbuyable elsewhere, and it produces the story that generates word of mouth.
Charge accounts / house accounts	Regulars and local businesses billed monthly.	Friction removal beats reward. Making it easier to come is more powerful than making it cheaper.
Points	Classic earn and burn.	Still fine - if the rate is costed at food cost, the reward is a product rather than a percentage, and enrolment is genuinely simple.

COMMON MISTAKE

Launching loyalty as a percentage discount to your best guests. Your regulars are the least price-sensitive people on your list; they are coming because they like it. Discounting to them converts margin into nothing at all. Spend that same budget on the lapsed and the undecided, and give the regulars access, recognition and surprise instead.

A social content system you can actually sustain

The reason restaurant social media fails is never creativity. It is that it depends on somebody feeling inspired, and nobody feels inspired in week eleven. Replace inspiration with a rhythm: fixed slots, fixed types, batched production.

The weekly rhythm - five slots, roughly thirty minutes a week

Slot	Type	What it is	Where it comes from
Mon	The week ahead	What is on, what is new, what is closing. Practical and short.	Written by the manager during Monday's admin block.
Wed	Food	One dish, well lit, described in one sentence a person would actually say.	Shot in the Sunday batch session.
Fri	People	A face and a name: a cook, a server, a supplier, a regular who consented.	One photo a week taken at family meal.
Sat/Sun	Live and unpolished	Stories only: the pass at 8 p.m., a delivery arriving, a full patio. Never over-produced.	Filmed in the moment by whoever is on.
Any	Guest content	Re-share a guest's post, with credit and permission.	Free, and it consistently outperforms your own polished work.

The four-week template grid

Fill it in once a month in a single sitting. Batch the photography on one quiet afternoon and you will be ahead for four weeks.

Week	Mon - week ahead	Wed - food	Fri - people	Weekend - live
Week 1				
Week 2				
Week 3				
Week 4				

Six rules that keep it going

- **Batch or it dies.** One two-hour session a month produces a month of photographs. Posting daily from scratch produces three weeks and then silence.
- **Good light beats good gear.** Shoot near a window, turn off the overhead warm lights, shoot from the guest's seated angle.
- **Faces outperform food.** People engage with people. Most restaurants post only plates.

- **Caption like a person.** Say what it is, why it is on, and what to do next. Skip the emoji-and-hashtag wall.
- **Reply to every comment and message.** Unanswered direct messages asking about a booking are lost covers, and they are extremely common.
- **Post about what is on this week,** not the abstract idea of your restaurant. Specific and timely converts; generic and evergreen does not.

Local partnerships and community

Partnerships are the cheapest way to reach a warm audience, because you are borrowing somebody else's trust rather than buying a stranger's attention. They also compound: the same five relationships, maintained, will out-produce twenty one-off collaborations.

Partner	The offer that works	What you get
Hotels and short-term rentals	A card at the desk or in the unit with a genuine welcome, plus a briefing so staff can recommend you by name.	Visitor traffic at exactly the moment the decision is being made, with no commission.
Nearby offices	A lunch deal with a standing pre-order, a catering menu, and a named contact for the office administrator.	Weekday lunch volume and, later, holiday party bookings from the same contact.
Local producers and roasters	Name them on the menu and post about them; ask them to do the same.	Their audience is local, engaged and predisposed to care about food.
Breweries, wineries and distilleries	A collaboration dinner, a tap takeover, a pairing night, promoted by both sides.	An event with two audiences and shared production cost.
Theatres, venues, cinemas	A pre-show menu with a guaranteed time, promoted in their programme and confirmation emails.	A reliable early seating on nights you would otherwise open half empty.
Sports teams, clubs, schools	Team dinners, fundraiser nights with a share of sales, a home-and-away booking arrangement.	Large parties on quiet nights and a great deal of local goodwill.
Charities	A recurring night with a real donation, run properly and reported publicly.	Genuine community standing - but only if it is consistent. A single charity night reads as marketing.
Other restaurants	Cross-recommendation when you are full, shared staff leads, joint street events.	The most under-used relationship in the industry. Your neighbour turns away people who wanted a table tonight.

OPERATOR TIP

Make every partnership someone's named job with a date attached, or it will quietly die. "We should talk to the hotel" has been on more restaurant whiteboards than any other sentence in the industry. Put the walk down the street in the calendar for a specific Tuesday afternoon and take a menu with you.

Promotions that do not destroy your margin

Every promotion costs something. The question is only what it costs and what it buys. The table below ranks the common mechanics by how much margin they give up per incremental cover - and, more importantly, by what each one teaches your guests to do.

Mechanic	Margin impact	What it teaches guests	Use it when
Percentage off the bill	Highest. It discounts your highest-margin items alongside your lowest, and it scales with cheque size - the biggest spenders get the largest gift.	To wait for the discount, and to see your menu price as negotiable.	Rarely. If you must, cap it, time-box it, and never repeat it on a schedule.
Fixed dollar amount off	High, but bounded and predictable, and it is proportionally larger for small cheques - which pushes cheque size up rather than down.	That there is a threshold worth reaching.	Reactivating lapsed guests, where you need an unmistakable reason to return.
Bundle or prix fixe	Moderate and controllable. You choose the items, so you can build the bundle from high-margin and high-yield components.	That you offer good value at a known price.	Occasions, quiet day-parts, and any service where speed and predictability matter more than choice.
Free add-on with purchase	Low. Costed at food cost, a dessert or a side may cost a fraction of its menu price while feeling like a real gift.	That there is a reason to order the main item.	Almost always the best first choice. It lifts attach rate without touching your headline price.
Loyalty points	Deferred and diluted, and only paid on repeat behaviour - but it is a real liability on the books until redeemed.	To come back to earn, then to come back to spend.	When you have the systems to run it properly and the reward is a product, not a percentage.
Access and experience	Near zero marginal cost.	That being a regular here is worth something that money does not buy.	With your best guests, always, instead of a discount.
Marketplace-funded promotion	Varies, and it is stacked on top of commission - check the combined effect on a real order before agreeing.	To order through the marketplace rather than from you directly.	Sparingly, and never as a substitute for building your own ordering channel.

MANAGER CHECK

Before any promotion, work out the incremental covers it must produce simply to break even - the margin you give up divided by the margin on one additional cover. Do the arithmetic on paper first. Operators are routinely surprised by how much extra volume a headline discount has to generate before it stops losing money.

Measuring it - and being honest about attribution

You do not need a marketing dashboard. You need four numbers per campaign and the discipline to write them down within a week of the campaign ending, while you still remember what happened.

Metric	How to capture it	What it tells you	The trap
Redemptions	A unique code, a named POS discount, or a booking source tag - decided before the campaign launches.	How many people acted on the specific offer.	Untracked offers are unmeasurable forever. If you cannot count it, do not run it.
Incremental covers	Covers in the campaign window compared with the same window in recent comparable weeks.	Whether the campaign moved volume at all.	Weather, holidays, competitor closures and events move covers more than most campaigns do.
Average cheque effect	Average cheque of redeeming guests versus non-redeeming guests in the same period.	Whether you bought volume at the cost of value.	A discount that lifts covers and drops cheque size can leave you busier and poorer.
Repeat rate	The proportion of campaign-acquired guests who return within 60-90 days.	Whether you bought guests or bought transactions. This is the number that actually decides whether it was worth it.	It takes 60-90 days to know, which is why almost nobody measures it - and why measuring it is an advantage.

Three honest caveats about attribution

1. **You will never fully know.** A guest sees a post on Tuesday, walks past on Thursday, hears a friend mention you on Friday and books on Saturday. Every attribution model assigns that booking to one touch, and every one of them is wrong. Use the numbers to compare campaigns to each other, not to prove causation.
2. **Correlation in a restaurant is weak.** Sunshine, a road closure, a competitor's bad week, a local event and payday all move your covers. Compare against several comparable periods, not against last week.
3. **The best marketing is the hardest to measure.** Consistent food, a warm greeting, a server who remembers a name and a restaurant that is open when it says it is - these produce most of your repeat business and none of them will ever appear in a campaign report. Do not let measurability decide where you spend your effort.

OPERATOR TIP

Keep one page per campaign in a single binder: the brief on one side, the four numbers and three sentences of what you learned on the other. After a year you will have something far more valuable than any benchmark - a record of what works in your restaurant, in your market, with your guests.

Campaign brief - printable template

One page, filled in before anything is designed, posted or printed. If you cannot complete it, the campaign is not ready. Fifteen minutes here prevents the two most common failures: a campaign nobody owns, and a campaign nobody can measure.

Field	Answer
Campaign name	
Objective - one sentence, one outcome	
Audience - which segment, and roughly how many people	
Offer - exactly what the guest gets, and exactly what they must do	
Channels - and the specific message for each	
Dates - build, launch, reminders, close	
Budget - spend, plus the margin being given up	
Success metric - the number, and the threshold that counts as success	
Owner - one named person, not a department	

Operational readiness - before it goes live

- ☐ The kitchen and bar know it is running, and have the product to deliver it.
- ☐ Every staff member can explain the offer in one sentence.
- ☐ The POS button, discount or code exists and has been tested on a real check.
- ☐ Staffing matches the volume you are asking for.
- ☐ The booking system reflects any special seating times or capacity limits.
- ☐ Google Business Profile, website and social all say the same thing.
- ☐ Terms are written down: dates, exclusions, limits, and what happens if it sells out.
- ☐ Somebody is responsible for answering messages and calls about it.
- ☐ The measurement is set up before launch, not reconstructed afterwards.

After it ends - the two-week review

Results (the four numbers):

What worked, what did not, and what we would change:

The monthly marketing rhythm

Marketing fails in restaurants for the same reason line checks do: it is important and never urgent, so it loses every day to something on fire. The fix is the same - a fixed time, a fixed list, a named owner. Roughly four hours a month, in three blocks, will out-perform an occasional burst of enthusiasm every time.

When	Block	What happens	Time
First Monday	The plan	Review last month's four numbers. Confirm this month's campaign from the calendar. Write the campaign brief. Book the photography session.	60 min
First Monday	The profile	Update Google Business Profile: hours including any holiday, new photos, one post, answer new questions. Check that every listing shows the same hours.	20 min
A quiet afternoon	The batch	Photograph six to eight dishes, one team photo, one room photo. Fill in the four-week content grid and schedule what can be scheduled.	90 min
Weekly, 15 min	Reviews and messages	Respond to every new review and every unanswered direct message. Read the good ones out at pre-shift.	15 min x 4
Mid-month	The email	Send the month's main campaign email. Check the previous send's opens, clicks and unsubscribes before writing the next one.	45 min
Last week	The look-ahead	Look 60-90 days out. What needs prep time that starts now? This is the block that prevents every late-campaign panic in the calendar.	30 min
Quarterly	The audit	Check every listing, link, menu and phone number. Walk your own booking and ordering flow on a phone as a stranger would. Fix what you find.	60 min

If you only do five things

1. Fix your hours, photos and links everywhere they appear, and keep them right.
2. Ask for a review at the moment a guest tells you they enjoyed it, every shift.
3. Capture email addresses on every direct order, booking and enquiry, with genuine consent.
4. Send one good email a month that sounds like a person and asks for one action.
5. Start the holiday and Mother's Day campaigns two months before you think you need to.

MANAGER CHECK

Put the first Monday block in the calendar as a recurring appointment with a name against it, and treat it exactly like a supplier meeting: it does not get moved because service was busy. Almost every restaurant that markets itself well is doing something this ordinary.