



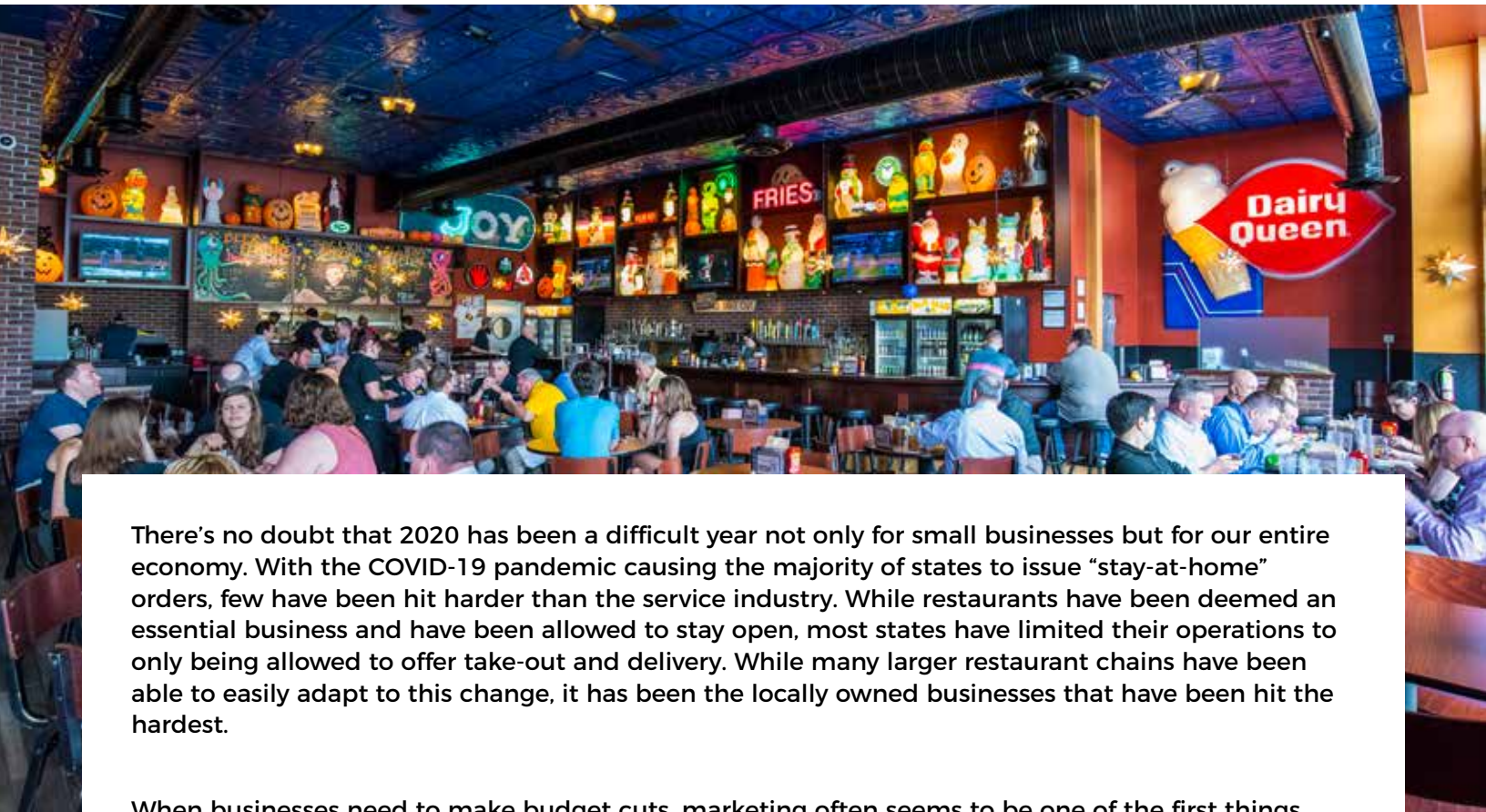
HOW RESTAURANTS CAN **STAND OUT** IN TIMES OF UNCERTAINTY



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There's no doubt that 2020 has been a difficult year not only for small businesses but for our entire economy. With the COVID-19 pandemic causing the majority of states to issue "stay-at-home" orders, few have been hit harder than the service industry. While restaurants have been deemed an essential business and have been allowed to stay open, most states have limited their operations to only being allowed to offer take-out and delivery. While many larger restaurant chains have been able to easily adapt to this change, it has been the locally owned businesses that have been hit the hardest.

When businesses need to make budget cuts, marketing often seems to be one of the first things on the chopping block. According to Forbes, brands that invested in advertising during adverse economic times were able to gain a significant market advantage when the economy recovered. Times of uncertainty are often when businesses need to innovate in order to survive. While we are operating in an unstable market right now, this is the perfect time to take a look at your current marketing strategy and see how it can be improved. Having worked with many different service industry brands over the years, the team at Dallas Riffle Media have some useful tips for how restaurants can navigate the waters of our current economic situation.

IMPROVING YOUR DIGITAL PRESENCE

With social distancing becoming our new [temporary] normal, communicating digitally has become more important than ever. While many 'Mom & Pop' restaurants can be slow to adopt modern technology, our current situation is showing why this can be a dangerous business practice. With the majority of restaurants being forced to offer carry-out and delivery-only business, maintaining a strong digital presence is a great way to make sure the orders keep coming to your kitchen.

The first place you should start when building a web presence is a modern website. With the majority of consumers searching for



restaurants on their smartphones, having a mobile-friendly design is step #1. According to GrubHub, 77% of online searches initiate from a mobile device. A mobile-friendly website will not only help to improve your overall user experience but will improve your organic rankings on search engines like Google and Bing. After all, if potential customers are not able to find you, they are very unlikely to patronize your business!

With the rise in popularity of delivery apps like Uber Eats and Door Dash, online ordering is certainly the way of the future for restaurants. While signing up with delivery apps is definitely a great way to get more eyeballs on your brand, these services take a percentage of each order. Implementing your own online ordering system is a great way to make sure that your business receives all of the profits for these orders. Popular point-of-sale systems like Aloha and Clover come with their own out-of-the-box online ordering systems. Alternatively, you can also build your own online ordering system into your website through ecommerce platforms such as WooCommerce. Mobile apps that integrate online ordering are also very commonly used by restaurants. Regardless of which service you choose, having some sort of online ordering is absolutely vital if you want to compete in today's marketplace.

CREATING UNIQUE MESSAGING

A large part of what makes advertising effective, especially in times such as these, is your messaging. While it's important that you are, in fact, advertising, it's also important to pay mind to how you're advertising. While it's always good practice to make sure your marketing message is resonating with your customers, the current situation requires a special level of nuance when it comes to communicating with your customers. You may have noticed that your inbox has been flooded recently with businesses communicating how they are handling the recent outbreak of COVID-19. While many of these emails are likely to get lost in the shuffle, keeping in constant communication with your customers can definitely be useful for keeping your customers engaged.

Something important to keep in mind when advertising during difficult times is to be tactful with how you are wording your marketing messages. The sad truth is that many consumers dislike ads and an overly aggressive sales message is likely to turn off your customers. Instead of focusing on a typical sales message, there are several key points that restaurants can use to bring in more business. In times such as these, it is good to foster a sense of community among your followers. With so many people going through hardship, you'll find that consumers are doing their best to support local businesses. Using messages such as "support the local economy by ordering now" and "we're here to help feed the hungry people in our community" are likely to resonate with your followers more now than ever.





SHOW OFF YOUR MENU

Have you ever been scrolling through Instagram and a photo of an appetizing-looking meal catches your eye? It may go without saying but one of the best ways to advertise your menu is to, well, show off your menu. With the restaurant industry being as crowded as it is, investing in professional food photography is one of the quickest ways to increase orders. While smartphones do have powerful cameras nowadays, it's hard to top a shoot handled by an experienced food photographer.

Along with allowing for the obviously higher photo resolution, having a professional photographer handle your shoots can produce images with a uniquely branded style. Well staged food photos will not only show off the food itself in the best way possible but will also bring forth important elements of your brand. Using shots involving your brand colors or unique aspects of your interior can really help push your photos to the next level.

Along with professional food photography, utilizing video can also be extremely beneficial when advertising your restaurant. According to POS Sector, "the average visitor will remain on the website two minutes longer if the site contains a video". Along with showing off your food, video can help to show off your operations and employees and communicate your marketing message visually. In a time when many people are losing their jobs, showing off your employees is a powerful way to show that your restaurant is run by real people. Video is also a very popular medium on both websites and social media.



KEEP CUSTOMERS ENGAGED

With so many people spending their time at home over the past few months, social media has become more important for small businesses than ever. After all, what better audience is there than a captive one? Posting to social media daily is a wonderful way to keep engaged with your customers and provide real-time updates on new menu items and specials. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat are the most popular social platforms used by restaurants for engaging with their customers. Since fostering a sense of community is so important right now for local businesses, social media is one of the fastest ways your brand can directly connect with customers.

Besides simply posting content to your social profiles, there are many other ways that you can utilize social media to keep your customers engaged. Responding to customer comments and messages helps to show customers that your brand is listening to feedback and encourages future social media engagement. This is especially true when responding to negative reviews or complaints. If a customer has had a negative experience, showing that their concerns are being taken seriously can often help mitigate the problem.

With many customers spending their time at home, seeking out creative ways to engage with your customers on social media is an excellent way to keep your brand top of mind. Running contests through social media is a common way that businesses with large social followings can take regular customers and turn them into brand advocates. Encouraging your customers to share user-generated content promoting your brand not only helps to drive engagement on your pages but also helps to attract new customers.

During a time when much of Ohio is in quarantine, DRM started running an Instagram contest for our client, Melt Bar and Grilled. With their business moving to take-out and delivery only, Melt started running the #ShowMeYourMelt campaign. We encouraged guests to post photos of them and their families enjoying their take-out orders. Followers could vote for their favorites via Melt's Instagram story and the winners would receive a gift card. This contest helps to foster a sense of community around the brand and to keep their customers engaged,

Besides using social media, email marketing is another powerful way to stay in communication with your customers. According to mKonnect, "Every dollar spent on email marketing can help you get an average ROI of \$38." One of the reasons why email marketing can be so powerful is that promotional emails typically will go to contacts that are already familiar with your brand. With customers being hungry at any given time during the day, sometimes it is as simple as a brief reminder of your brand that can trigger an online take-out order. Marketing emails are also a great way to send out limited time promotions or other incentives. Keeping your customers in the loop helps to ensure that operations keep moving as they normally would.



While times are tough for the restaurant industry, there's no doubt that the economy will bounce back. Taking this time to step back and work on your internal operations will help small businesses across the US weather this storm. The team here at Dallas Riffle Media are dedicated to help small and medium-sized businesses get through this time of hardship however we can. If you'd like to speak with our team about how we can help improve your company's marketing strategy, feel free to give us a call at **(216) 245-0835** or email us at **info@dallasriffle.com**. **We're all in this together!**