

How Can You Make The Most Out of Restaurant Week?



Megan Nixon | December 15, 2017



To Restaurant Week or not to Restaurant Week, that is the question. The promotion that finds itself popping up in cities around the country offering guests discounted multi-course prix fixe meals can be a great way to come together as a community and drive traffic to your restaurant in a time that is usually lacking in guests for the town. If you have the right menu, Restaurant Week can be a huge hit.

But does offering guests a discounted multi-course meal really make good business sense for your restaurant? You're likely paying staff to work more hours, and you're putting stress on kitchen staff by serving more courses per guest than usual. At the end of the day, is it worth it?

The answer is...kind of. Few things with restaurants are "one size fits all," so it really depends on how you approach it. We rounded up some restaurant marketing strategies from the pros on how to make Restaurant Week worth your time, and, how, if you can't swing it this year, you can compete with those restaurants that are participating.



Participate and Make It Worth It

No matter the reason you chose to participate in your area's Restaurant Week, it can be a lot of pressure to make sure every guest has an [amazing experience](#). Jon Baumgartner, general manager of [Biga on the Banks](#), a restaurant in San Antonio, Texas, serving new American cuisine, has some tips on how to make a great first-and second-impression.

"For Restaurant Week, the most important thing to do is to make sure your menu represents the restaurant, not just the discounted price. We used to be very careful not to include items that were too costly because we had a fixed rate to charge," Baumgartner says. "Now, we try to be a lot more inventive with our menu so people can be exposed to the talent in the kitchen. Hopefully, that impression will bring them back before the next Restaurant Week."

Jennifer Cantin, director of marketing and development for Long Island's [Lessing's, Inc.](#) hospitality group, which includes [Sandbar](#), [View](#), and [Mirabelle Restaurant & Tavern](#), also stresses the importance of a killer first impression.

"Many of our guests during Long Island Restaurant Week are visiting us for the first time. Our goal is to provide them with a memorable experience and wow them," she says.

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Cantin also has a unique approach for making sure the guests' Restaurant Week experience at the restaurant is not their last: "To encourage our Restaurant Week diners to visit us again, every table is presented with a \$25 gift certificate, as a gift, when they are presented their check. The gift card expires six weeks later, and is an incentive for the diners to visit again at a later date."

Not interested in dealing out a gift certificate for each table? There are other ways to drive guests back to your restaurant after Restaurant Week.

Baumgartner says they use the [reservations system](#) to make a note of each customer who came in for Restaurant Week.

"This tells us two things about the guest," he says. "One, they are local. Two, they are possibly interested in other specials we run. If we retain their email, we can target our marketing for certain email blasts that contain similar offers, [like] discounted three-course meals and events that support the culinary arts in San Antonio."

Restaurant Week can be a lot of work, but depending on your team and your ability to bring those guests back in again and again, it can be worth it to participate.



Don't Participate, But Still Compete

While Restaurant Week can be beneficial to some restaurants, that's not the case for everyone. But even if you aren't participating, and you need to figure out a way to still compete for guest attention with the restaurants that are.

Vladimir Borodin, CEO of Burger & Lobster Group USA, says that while his restaurant doesn't participate, the marketing around Restaurant Week provides a boost for existing menu offerings.

"New York City's Restaurant Week gives us a natural platform to tout our terrific value, essentially reminding people every week at Burger & Lobster is 'Restaurant Week,'" he says. "Diners can enjoy a four dish meal, which is what the special Restaurant Week menus translate to, for less than Restaurant Week pricing, in a stylish full-service establishment."

At the Burger & Lobster Group instead of offering a restaurant week menu, instead, they keep their own deals during this time since it is a similar deal. For lunch, they have six options that come in under the \$29 price point of January 2018's NYC Restaurant Week, and for dinner, everything on the menu, except combos and big boy lobsters, can be paired with their desserts for less – and in some cases much less – than the \$42 Restaurant Week price. This way they can show the value of the deals they always have to their guests who want to keep coming back at the same price point.



Don't get so caught up in the hype of Restaurant Week that you lose sight of the specials and menu items that you already offer.

"We're very aware of NYC Restaurant Week and how it affects our business," says Mirso Lekic, principal of Sylvan Hospitality Group which includes Manhattan's Tudor City Steakhouse. "To counteract the drop-off in covers when people are bargain hunting, at Tudor City Steakhouse we will offer a prix fixe menu at the Restaurant Week price. Since we already have a lunch prix fixe at \$29.95, we don't have to do anything different. So while we may not be part of the official restaurant week, we can compete and when people ask if we have restaurant week menus, we can tell them, 'yes.'"

Whether you're participating in Restaurant Week or not, there is no reason to be unaware and unprepared. What is your restaurant doing for Restaurant Week?