

# Get Your Guests TO *love* YOU



Imagine how successful your restaurant would be if your customers needed to come to you, instead of you spending money marketing to convince them to come to you.

Quality food, service and atmosphere will get you a decent return. Getting to a whole new level of sales and profitability happens when you create emotional connections with your guests that drive their need to come to you.

In the past two years, we have talked about focusing on your regulars, because they are your most profitable customers. We have also talked about spending your marketing and promotion dollars on “what works,” and getting rid of everything that does not clearly make you money.

Getting to the next level is all about tapping into your customers’ emotions. Big chains sometimes think of this as brand-building. It’s not just for chains, however; it works for independents too.

If you can deliver an experience to your guest in a way that really matters, you have an advantage that is very hard to beat. In fact, restaurants that tap into their guest’s most powerful emotions can become impossible to beat.

So what does a powerful emotional connection look like? Some examples include:

- That high end coffee shop that is a status symbol or “badge;” lets guests attach that “high end” feeling to themselves – creating loyalty to how they feel.
- That restaurant that creates sights, sounds, tastes and aromas that connect guests subconsciously to memories from



the happiest times of their childhood – creates loyalty to the way they feel, and

- That restaurant that makes mom feel pride because she is making good choices for her family and because her children eat with delight – creates loyalty to the way she feels.

When you help someone “feel,” in a deep visceral way, you are selling something more powerful than just food, beverage, service and atmosphere. You are selling emotional benefits that your guests don’t get from your competitors.

If you create fierce loyalty, you have a formula that cannot be beat. Fiercely loyal guests:

- Are repeat customers that often refuse to go anywhere else;
- Are advocates. They give you rave reviews year after year; and
- Give you permission to be imperfect, for those days when your restaurant is not at its best.

So how do you hit an emotional chord with your guests?

**Step 1:** Determine how you already “strike a chord” with your most loyal guests. If you are successful, you are already creating powerful emotions in your best customers.

**Step 2:** Determine what you are doing right and focus on doing more of what works. Understanding what drives emotions will help you stop doing things that work against you, for example: If your customers are buying the “badge” – degrading your badge by offering it “just anywhere.”

First you have to have the “table stakes” right: Quality food, beverage, service and atmosphere at a good price. After that, creating strong emotional connections with your guests is probably the most effective way you can spend your marketing time and effort, whether you are a big chain or an independent.

---

**Hugh Johnston, CA, CMC,** is a strategy consultant working with chain restaurants and foodservice leaders to unlock greater value in their business. For more information contact Johnston at 416.662.5670. Email [hjohnston@hjohnston.com](mailto:hjohnston@hjohnston.com) or visit [www.hughjohnston.com](http://www.hughjohnston.com)