



Food and Drink PR... The impact of Social Media

Promoting restaurants and food and drink products: what does it take to make a difference through public relations?

Public relations, known as PR, defines the art and social science of analyzing trends and implementing planned programs of action, which will serve both the organisation and the public interest and there are many elements involved with a restaurant or a food business' success.

The business success may not be directly related to the PR of the company, but it is certainly affected by positive or negative communications.

Building a brand through public relations comes down to utilising many different marketing tools:

- **Media relations:** To promote the news of your business when needed, but also to develop the angle to get your brand positive coverage. It is key to come up with a news hook to create interest from the press and secure coverage.
- **Customer relations:** To promote your brand, your menu or your events and encourage feedback. Organise contests, give-aways, samplings, offers to get your customers involved.
- **Internal communications:** It is essential for your staff to understand the key messages, and the essence of the brand and reflect it in their work. Develop and give each employee a brand book that states the brand values, the personality, the mission, the vision, etc.
- **Events to promote the brand:** To launch a new product, to support the opening of a new restaurant, to tell the story about the brand and to communicate directly with your audience through opinion formers with press events, to brief journalists about the new products or the messages you want to deliver or direct marketing activities such as newsletters, special offers in retails, tradeshows, etc.

AND

- **Online and social media marketing:** With the evolution of the internet and the need for people to interact with each other, another channel for communication should be considered: **Social media**. Social media defines any form of online publication or presence that allows end users to engage in multi-directional conversations in or around the content on the website.

The management of social media as a part of an overall PR strategy will enhance the presence of a food related service online and drive traffic to the website.

Why use social media?

Now more than ever, customers are running through online channels – online sales of food are growing at 15% a year and people are using the internet to connect with their favourite brand or restaurant.

Social media allows food businesses to talk directly with their audience – with Facebook, twitter, Flickr, YouTube and blogs you can speak with your market and create a unique customer dynamic. For a growing brand, social media allows the business to develop a brand personality and maintain the brand presence amongst online customers

Your social media presence should be a natural extension of your brand. If you don't have time for it – don't start it, or find someone who can do it for you such as PR or marketing companies with a strong social media expertise. It has a negative effect to start social media and end up ignoring it.



Social media should always be backed by traditional PR, just as social media should always support traditional PR campaigns. And it should be planned to be in line with your overall business strategy and goals for that year. One should not be separated from the other.

Benefits of being online:

- For restaurants, many diners do a search online before eating out. For food producers, more and more consumers now do their shopping online
- More cost effective than traditional marketing as it doesn't include any printing or web design costs
- You can capture data more easily from your customers and talk with them more frequently than in conventional interaction with them
- A strong website with online coverage to back it up helps build your brand
- The use of social media generates interest in your brand, and targets those who may not have even heard of it
- You can easily determine what works and what doesn't, what people like and don't like, etc by getting direct feedback from your customers and engage a conversation with them

What are the benefits of social media marketing?

- Increases website traffic
- Increases word of mouth
- Increase search engine optimisation (SEO) i.e. your Google rankings
- Provides honest feedback
- Fast and efficient way of speaking to your audience
- Effective brand building
- Targeting opinion formers

A sizable community of followers on Twitter in combination with an active blog can double average monthly leads by engaging potential customers and improving the company's presence on Google. When a company has reached enough content, on average between about 24 to 51 posts, they can begin to see a growth in leads due to both engagement with potential customers and more indexed pages on Google.

Getting involved in social media: the outlets to consider:

- **Twitter** – www.twitter.com - Twitter has become the most used social media tool worldwide, especially among foodies. Twitter is the best way to get in touch in 140 characters with opinion formers and customers, and it should reflect the personality of your brand.
 - How to make the most of it:
 - Engaging in conversation with people and interacting with them frequently.
 - Communicate your key messages and promotional offers, with a personal twist. Avoid marketing speech.
 - Talking about topics you know and you like.
 - Sharing information and personal points of view.
- **Facebook** – www.facebook.com - With 300 million users worldwide, setting up a fan page for your brand or business allows you to potentially connect with people from all over the world easily and quickly.



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- How to make the best of it:
 - Start by creating a fan page – where all information about your company is stored.
 - Update the fan page with news, information and photos as frequently as possible.
 - Be responsive: make sure to interact with your customers and answer all questions posted on the page in a timely manner.

- **Blogs:** A blog is the informal voice of the company. It gives the personality and tone the company wants to be perceived as by the masses, openly discussing and commenting on subjects of choice as well as receiving feedback from the readers through their comments. Tools like [Wordpress](#), [Blogspot](#), are very easy to set up and user friendly, no need to be an expert in IT.

Bloggers, as a target, are the new media. They are the new wave of journalists – many of them have well written blogs which are read by thousands of regular punters monthly. Many people rely now more on bloggers' point of view than the press.

- How to make the most of it:
 - A blog should be interactive and updated at least twice a week. If the company is not prepared to maintain an updated, interactive blog, then it should be set aside until resources are available.
 - Make it personal, leverage the story of the people behind the brand. A blog should reflect what happens in the company and develop a personality that consumers will endorse.
 - Targeting blogs to write about your brand or business is similar to targeting print journalists. Remember bloggers are not professional writers and are not paid to blog, they just have an interest in/passion for food.
 - With blogs there is an opportunity to link the content about your brand across other social media channels.



- **Newsletter:** A newsletter allows food producers or restaurants to promote their business, keep in touch with their consumers by providing fresh information and content on a regular basis, communicate about the latest news, offers, etc. The newsletter provides a constant reminder of your website every time they see the former in their inbox and therefore generates traffic. It is also a good way to develop your customer database. Software like [mailchimp](#), [iContact](#), [Dotmailer](#), [e-shot](#), provide you with everything you need to manage your email marketing.

- How to make the most of it:
 - A newsletter should be informative. Write it in a friendly way and get straight to the point of what you want to say. Make room for a special tip or secret that they won't find easily anywhere else - even on your site.
 - Engage with your customers by including a survey: customer satisfaction, industry related surveys, anything to get your readers active in your email.
 - Get interest by giving gifts away. Even if the readers are only interested in winning free stuff, it still keeps them around longer.





- Illustrate the newsletter with pictures, videos, etc. to peak interest and break-up all the words.
 - Send it on a regular basis, usually once a month.
- **Flickr** - <http://www.flickr.com> - Flickr is the visual mouthpiece of the company and a great asset for press and bloggers looking for images.
 - How to make the most of it:
 - By presenting images of corporate and client events, hero and lifestyle shots of all products and any advertising campaigns. Flickr offers a good visibility of what the company does for customers, showing its dynamism and its will to communicate visually with its public.



- **Youtube** - www.youtube.com - With 90-100 million online videos, YouTube is a great tool for brand development with an incredible high visibility and branding if a video goes viral. YouTube is still quite top-down in terms of company communication as video replies and comments are more frequently used on user generated content.
 - How to make the most of it:

The success of a video going viral depends on YouTube users .. distributing the video themselves, so it depends heavily on other social . media and traditional PR.

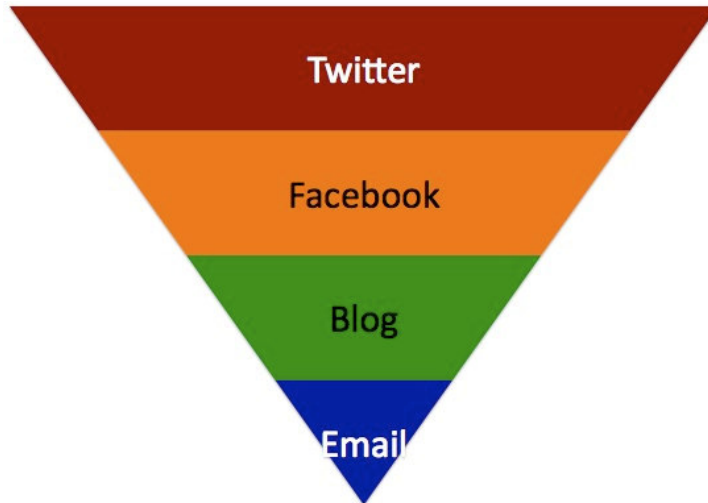


Twitter, Facebook, blog tools, Flickr and YouTube are all free to start and use and the account can be set up in a few minutes.

However, social networking strategies require much more than just spamming a Twitter account with promos for your business. They require regular content, attention to your community, and building a connection between your customers and your products. Twitter and a company blog, when used together, can help generate leads if they are used effectively.

It is also important to understand the comparative publishing schedules that you typically employ for each of these outposts. Depending on your objectives and the tools you have developed, your social media program should look like this:

- Twitter (5x/day)
- Facebook (2x/day)
- Blog (3x/week)
- Email/Newsletter (1x/month)



How can you monitor the success of communicating via social media channels?

In social media, ROI is not just about money. Even though some companies have proven that they can monetize social media, the main goal of social media is brand leadership, positioning, image, credibility and loyalty; giving customers a visible and evolving focus for your brand.

Tools like Web analytics, search rankings, news placements, link building and Buzz trends give an immediate idea of a brands online impact as well as a strong analysis tool on how to create further social media ROI.

- [Google analytics](#) – these social media channels will most likely be the top referring sites to your website
- Tools like [Klout](#) evaluates a twitter reputation and [Hootsuite](#), which tracks twitter activity
- Monitor your overall feedback from your customers – this is where the real, honest criticism and fabulous compliments will come out.

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