

Ask and you shall succeed

As winter gives way to spring, your customers' dining interests and palates may begin to shift with the seasons. Do you know what dining trends are developing among your customers? Are you prepared to serve up a new menu in keeping with your customers' changing tastes? Would you be interested in learning their attitudes and opinions of your establishment's atmosphere, staff, or value? Most business owners would be interested in this type of insight. To get this information, survey your customers on a regular basis to find out what they're thinking, stay in the know, and be one step ahead of your competition.

A little drip can make a big splash

Hearty comfort food or light spring greens? Kobe beef or baked sole? What are your customers looking for? Don't wait to do one survey per year. You need to know what's on your customers' minds now and you need to be able to check back with them frequently. A comprehensive annual survey is great for determining overall satisfaction and customer sentiment, but when you need to know what customers are thinking right now, your best bet is to implement brief, but frequent, and regular surveys. In marketing, this is called "drip intelligence" and it yields smaller bites of customer feedback on a more regular basis.

This effort works in your favor for several reasons. Not only do you have more reasons to stay in touch with your customers, they appreciate the opportunity to give feedback. Customers feel empowered and tend to feel more loyal to businesses that involve them in business decisions.

It's remarkably easy to incorporate drip intelligence survey questions – questions aimed at soliciting immediate feedback on specific topics – into your

existing email marketing strategy. Simply include one or two customer feedback questions in every email newsletter you send. This can be easily accomplished using **Constant Contact's Online Survey**.

Questions can be geared toward a specific topic such as your menu or more broadly focused on general feedback about your business. For each question, be sure to also include a comment box so people can explain why they rated you as they did. Here are some sample question and answer options:

Q: How likely are you to recommend us to friends and colleagues?

Answer Option: Rating scale – Very likely, somewhat likely, neutral, somewhat unlikely, very unlikely.

Q: Do you think our current menu is representative of diners' tastes?

Answer Option: Single select multiple choice answer options – definitely agree, somewhat agree, neutral, do not agree.



Q: Do the seasons affect your dining-out choices? If yes, how?

Answer Option: Rating scale – Always, occasionally, neutral, sometimes, never. Also include a comment box for customers to elaborate.

Q: Please provide suggestions for improving our products/services.

Answer Option: Open-ended text box.

To get the most from your drip intelligence campaign, consider asking certain questions repeatedly throughout the year. This allows you to compare the responses to learn how your customers' attitudes may change over time.

Follow up: What's dinner without dessert?

As you receive your customers' feedback, it's critical that you follow up to let them know their input is appreciated. More importantly, let them know how their input can affect change in your business. There are several ways to communicate the results of your surveys:

- **Thank respondents for their participation**
Send a special email to all of the people who answered the survey. Thank them for taking the time to share their feedback and, perhaps, offer them a reward or incentive for their ongoing participation.
- **Share your survey results**
Once you've analyzed the results of your latest survey question, share them to let respondents know you are listening and actively considering their input.

■ **Take action**

What better way to show that you value your customers' input than to take action on their suggestions? It's not feasible or advisable to make every change your customers suggest, but by acting on those that make the most sense for your business, you show them that you truly care about their patronage and want to make the changes that will keep them invested in your success.

■ **Write more relevant newsletter content**

Armed with your drip intelligence survey results, you will know what topics are of greatest interest to your customers and be able to tailor the content of your email newsletters accordingly.

Your customers' outlook and opinions will change throughout the course of a year and these changes can be driven by any number of influences, such as the economy, the seasons or new competition for their dining dollar. By surveying your customers regularly, you can track these changes and make adjustments that help your business stay vital, current, in touch with customers, and ahead of the competition.

For more great marketing tips and success stories, please visit <http://sysco.ConstantContact.com>.

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