

Surprise! Birthdays Boost Business

by Jay Siff



At a time when many restaurants are resorting to special offers and reduced prices to get customers in the door, there is one engaging promotion that you can take advantage of every day of the year. Everyone has a birthday and research shows that no matter what the economy is doing, a lot of people choose to celebrate at a restaurant on their big day.

Even when times are tough, people believe they owe themselves an indulgence on their birthday and National Restaurant Association research shows that birthdays are the number one most popular occasion to dine out. So if people are planning to eat out for their celebration, it might as well be at your establishment. How do you ensure that they choose your restaurant over the competition? By making them a birthday offer they can't refuse.

To make a birthday promotion effective, you cannot skimp on the offer. Think of it as a gift rather than a discount. You wouldn't give a friend a discount coupon or a "one day only" special for her birthday, so don't do it for your customers. Make it something worth coming in for, such as a free appetizer or, even better, a free entree.

While giving away an appetizer or an entree may seem like a lot, chances are the recipient won't be celebrating alone. They likely will bring friends and family along who will be spending money at your establishment rather than eating at home or at another restaurant.

In addition, recent research has shown that the more people that are in a party, the more each person will spend. Think about it. If three people are dining and one suggests getting an appetizer, odds are the group will get an appetizer. Even if the other two hadn't planned to have an appetizer. This holds true for other menu items such as drinks and desserts. And the larger the group, the more money they spend.

There is also a social phenomenon that makes birthday promotions well worth the effort. The "reciprocity norm", proven in psychological research, states that when people receive an unexpected personal gift or favor, they often are compelled to give something in return. In other words, because you gave them something free for their birthday, they will usually more than make up for it by spending far more than the value of the gift.

Now that you see the benefits of sending out birthday greetings, you need to create a birthday database so that you can start taking advantage of this business generating promotion. Obtaining the necessary information can be as easy as asking your customers to fill out a card with their name, contact information and birthdate. Of course, it is not always easy to get them to complete the form, but if you explain that they will receive a free gift for their birthday, they are more likely to sign up.

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Once you have your database, you need to determine how you will send out the greetings. Mailing a birthday card with a gift certificate will stand out from the bills and junk mail and will put a smile on the face of the recipient. If you want to be more cost-effective, you can send the birthday offer via email. Either way, it is important to have the customer bring in the card or email so that you can track the response from the promotion. By measuring redemption rates, check totals and net profit, you can alter or expand your program to ensure that it is meeting and exceeding your expectations for generating business.

If you like the idea of implementing a birthday promotion, but do not want to be saddled with compiling the information and sending out the certificates, there are reliable direct mail marketers who can help. [Birthday Connections](#) is a Sysco iCare Partner who specializes in birthday greetings. Using parent company Moving Targets' proven database expertise, the company can create a pinpoint-accurate birthday list of consumers in your area.

By utilizing a direct mail marketer such as [Birthday Connections](#), you not only can offer birthday greetings to existing customers, but also can reach out to new customers. Who wouldn't take advantage of a free gift from a local restaurant around their birthday, even if they've never eaten there before?

Testing has shown that sending a customized birthday card with an enclosed gift certificate to unknown prospects in a given area will generate a response rate of 10 to 15 percent. These are outstanding numbers considering that a one to two percent response rate usually is viewed as a good return for a typical direct mail piece. More often times than not, the percentage is even lower.

[Birthday Connections](#) is a simple turn-key program. You determine the number of people who will receive the birthday greeting and select a specific audience that you want to reach. You choose the birthday gift you want to offer, then you select one of two formats for the birthday greeting. The first is a traditional card greeting with a gift certificate. The second option is a letter with a tear-off gift certificate. There are no set up charges, no minimum mailings and no contracts.

It should be no surprise that birthday promotions can boost your business, even in tough economic times. Whether you choose to do it yourself or you hire a direct mail marketer, implementing a birthday promotion is a proven way to increase traffic at your restaurant every day of the year.

JAY SIFF is a principal of Moving Targets and its subsidiary, Birthday Connections, which is a Sysco iCare partner. Birthday Connections (www.birthdayconnections.com) is a service that knows the birthdays of your neighbors and does the mailings for you. Jay can be reached at 800-926-2451, ext. 111 or jay@movingtargets.com.

