



Recipes

for Restaurant Marketing Success

Driving Diners From Smartphone to Fork



About the Authors



Lee Zucker joined Yext as Head of Industry for Food Service with deep knowledge, passion, and years of experience in the food service technology space. In this role, he leads global Food Service strategy, including product and partnership development. Lee has presented on consumer search trends impacting the restaurant industry at conferences including Fast Casual Executive Summit, FSTEC, and VOICE Summit. He has authored articles for Fast Casual magazine and QSRweb, and has appeared on podcasts including The Restaurant Technology Guys.



David "Rev" Ciano is a Marketing, Branding and Digital Strategist with 20 years of experience in digital marketing and business development, specializing in hospitality marketing, content and local SEO. He has led many clients to new levels of local, national and international success in the hospitality, financial service and entertainment sectors. He is also former agency owner as well as a former New York City bar owner. Rev is an "expert burger taster" and pens burgerconquest.com one of the world's top 3 Burger blogs where he provides marketing insight and tips.

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A Customer's Journey



Let's go on a journey — a quest for lunch, if you will — through your eyes as a hungry consumer.

It's 11:47 a.m. You've already been in meetings for three straight hours. That Greek yogurt you had for breakfast is doing little to quiet down the grumble coming from your stomach — and it's getting louder by the minute.

You catch a glimpse from your co-worker across the table, signaling that you should look at your phone. A message on your home screen reads "WFL?" (That's internet slang asking, "What's for lunch?") You reply, "Need pizza."

They reply asking, "Where?" and that's when you remember your coworker is gluten-free. Being that you are a bit of a food snob, no mediocre pie is going to work for you. Plus, it's lunch and that report is due, so you need a place that isn't going to have you standing in line for the majority of your half hour.

You open a browser on your phone and enter the search, "best pizza near me open now gluten-free quick service." Three options pop up: the first has 4.4 stars and 25 reviews, the second has 4.1 stars and 78 reviews and the third has a 4.8 rating with only three reviews. You choose the second, copy the link, and send it to your co-worker.

73% of high intent search happens off your website.¹

By 12:05 p.m. you are on your way to eat the best gluten-free pizza near your office at a place where customers have claimed they have, "quick service."

Or here's another scenario: you're a parent at your fifth grader's soccer match. After they score a big goal, you offer to take them out to a celebration

lunch. "Chicken fingers and ice cream!" is the order. Their younger sister, a toddler still in diapers, is with you.

"Hey Siri, chicken fingers and ice cream, kid-friendly, near me."

76% of diners are more likely to choose a restaurant that provided information about price range, dress code, and meals served in the search results.²

68% of searches for restaurants today are unbranded — meaning customers are searching by cuisine type or food item, not by a restaurant name. And 83% of consumers read a restaurant menu online before dining out.³

How does the artificial intelligence (AI) that underlies search engines, voice assistants, apps, maps, and reviews sites choose which answers to serve? When a hungry searcher opens up a browser or asks Siri or Alexa to find, for example, "best eggs benedict takes reservations near me," the results are based on which business most closely matches the relevant search. If your brunch hours are different on Facebook and Yelp for example, you aren't just confusing your customers — you're sending mixed signals to AI-powered services. If your main competitor is in control of the digital facts about its brand, and all of its listings are accurate and consistent, then it's more likely your competitor will win that customer's business.

Read on for the ingredients and techniques you need for successful digital marketing recipes — so you can win customers no matter where or how they search.



Understand Your Ingredients

When people search for a business online, they often receive a single answer, known as a knowledge card, showcasing one business. That answer typically contains an image and all the digital knowledge they need to make a decision if they are going to patronize that restaurant — including name, address, hours of operation, products and services, ratings and reviews, and photos. Sometimes the answer that's returned has three options, known as the map pack.

But how do those answers get there? How does a search engine know what result to serve up? Search results come from a knowledge graph, a brain-like database that contains everything AI-powered services like Yelp, Bing, Siri, and Alexa know about the world — including what they know about your brand.

For a restaurant, one of the most important pieces of your digital knowledge is your menu.



Master Your Technique

Digital Knowledge Management (DKM) is the process by which you source, manage, and make your digital knowledge available to customers in the moments that matter. DKM puts you in control of your brand across all those new consumer services, which includes managing your reputation.

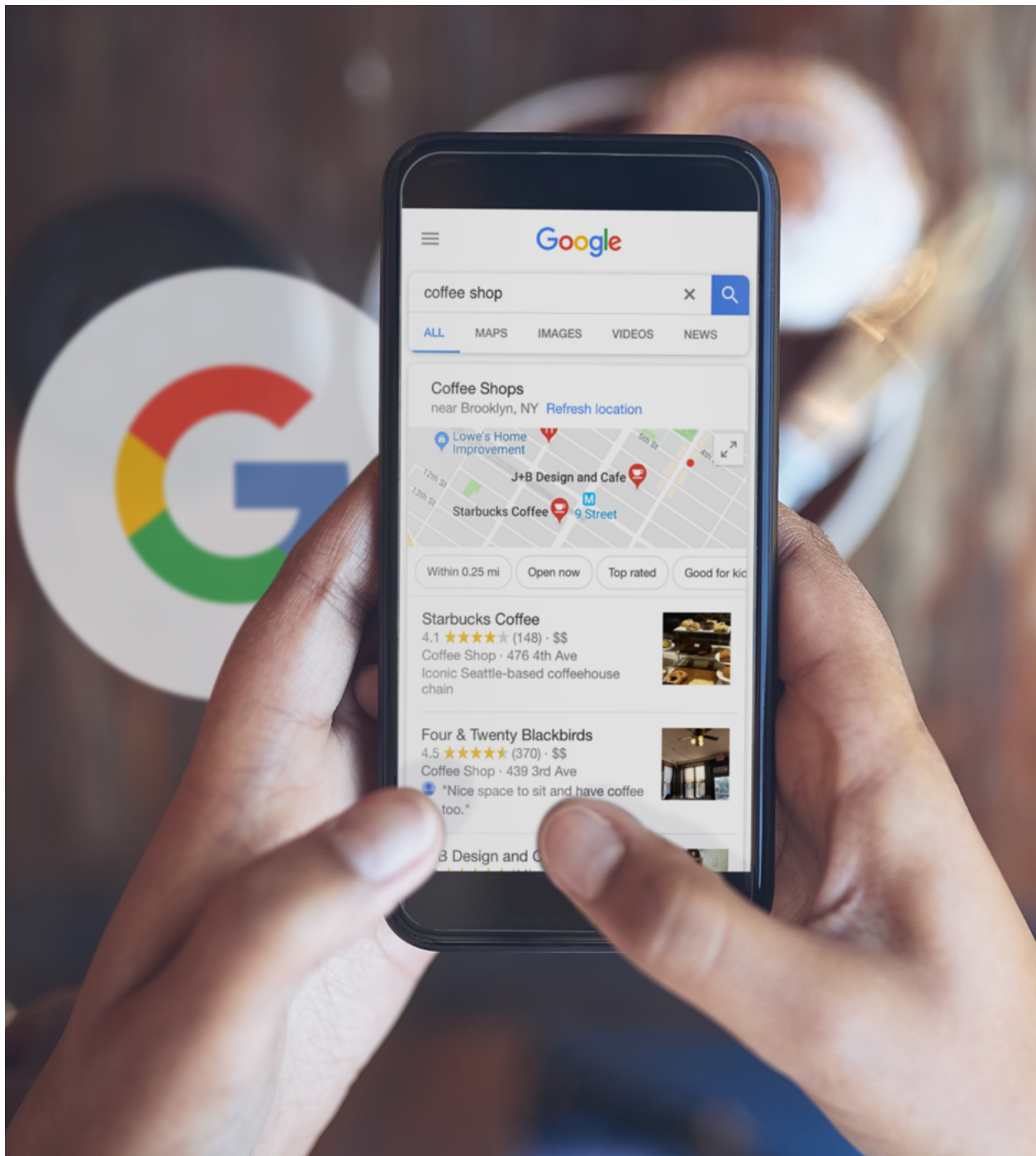
Search engines and AI-powered services are looking for a signal of confidence from businesses, and there is no better way to establish that confidence than making sure your digital knowledge is accurate, up-to-date, and consistent across the internet.

Restaurant brands who have added menus as elements of digital knowledge have seen a 28% increase in Google impressions year over year.⁴



1

Map Pack



1

Map Pack

AI-powered services rely on a system of relevance, distance, and prominence to decide which business to include in map pack search results. Restaurants that do not manage the public facts about their brand (like name, address, phone number, hours of operation, and especially their menu) are leaving it up to the internet to decide this information, and therefore they risk not coming up in the map pack and not meeting customers in their journey.

Ingredients:

Relevance

Distance

Prominence

According to Google, “near me” searches on mobile devices increased 146% year over year.⁵

Steps:

1. Put all the facts about your restaurant and menu online.

Relevance refers to how well a local listing matches what someone is searching for. When a customer searches, “best buffalo chicken salad near me,” it’s probably because it’s lunchtime and they’re hungry. They want buffalo chicken salad. That’s the relevant portion of the search.

To make sure you’re covering the “near me” part of the search, the first attributes you should focus on are your business name, address, and phone number (NAP).

The keys to appearing in local search results are accuracy, consistency, and specificity. Accurate, consistent information across the web sends a signal of confidence to search engines about your brand and its relevance in search results. Location attributes on your Google business listings let you identify specific searchable qualities reflecting the unique characteristics of each location — like “gluten-free options,” “kid friendly,” or “outdoor seating.” Managing these attributes will make your business relevant to searches that include these phrases.

2. Make sure your digital knowledge is correct everywhere it appears.

This one is pretty obvious, but Google defines distance as, “How far is each potential search result from the location term used in a search?” It could be a city, neighborhood, zip code, or a point-of-interest — like a hotel, office, or house.

If a user doesn't specify a location in their search, Google will calculate distance based on what's known about their location. That means if a customer doesn't type in a defined area, like Mississippi, Google will default to a "near me." By managing your digital knowledge, you can be certain your address is accurate, and help ensure that your business is appearing in relevant local searches.

3. Manage your reputation.

Prominence refers to recent positive ratings and reviews. Essentially, Google ranks your business in the local pack based on the quantity and the quality of your reviews. So if you don't manage your reviews, you risk not showing up in search at all.

Now that you know how answers get into the map pack, it's time to get tactical. What can you do to get that phone out of your customers' hands and replace it with your fork?

Opening a new store?

DKM is even more urgent when you open a new store. Hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of your dollars have been spent on building the perfect restaurant. Your marketing department is in full force dedicating time and effort to the new opening. Your PR and creative agency are helping you with marketing materials, media relations, and influencer marketing. Perhaps it's such a big opening that you've engaged with online and offline advertising like Facebook ads, Pay Per Click ads, and radio spots.

This is a big deal!

And then someone hears of that new sandwich shop in town that everyone is talking about. So what do they do? They hop over to their favorite search engine or voice assistant and ask, "new sandwich place open now with quinoa bowls." But the answer they get is not about your restaurant.

...How does all that spend feel now?

What could've prevented this? Digital Knowledge Management. If Siri, Alexa, Google, Yelp, TripAdvisor (and the hundreds of other search sites that people use when they are searching for places to eat) already had that information in their knowledge graph, then perhaps that customer would have picked you over your competitor.

2

Reviews



2 Reviews

Most hospitality marketers and restaurant owners don't understand the impact (positive or negative) that a review can have on their business. As a result, they deprioritize — or flat out ignore — reputation management.

Ingredients:

First-party reviews: those on your own website

Third-party reviews: those on other sites like Google, Yelp, Facebook, and TripAdvisor

Sentiment analysis: understanding your reviews

Steps:

1. Monitor and manage your third-party reviews.

Ratings and reviews inform customer decisions. 87% of consumers will not consider going to a local business with low ratings. This varies with things like geography and industry, but in general, a one-star improvement leads to a 5-9% revenue increase.⁶ Responding to your reviews encourages other people who want to share the positive experience they had with you as well, resulting in more positive reviews about your business. So when you do get a negative review, it will be balanced out by all the positive reviews you're receiving. Plus, those positive reviews of your pancakes will tell customers searching for the, "best pancakes," that they've made the right decision.

According to a Harvard Business School study, "a one-star increase in Yelp rating leads to a 5-9 percent increase in revenue."

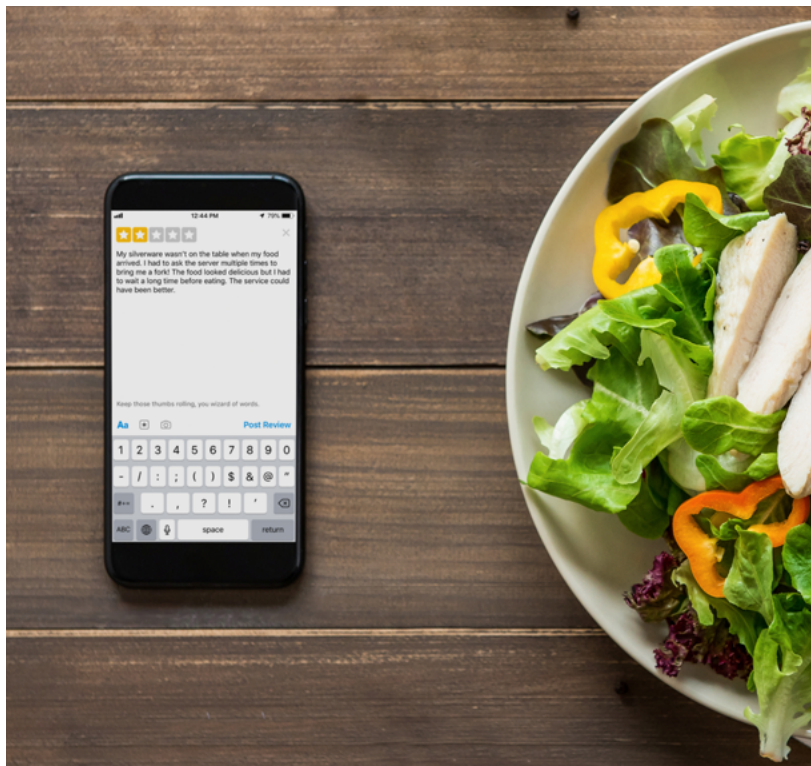
2. Use sentiment analysis to inform better business decisions.

Reviews contain a treasure trove of good information about what customers do (and don't) like about their experiences with your business. Harnessing knowledge about how customers feel about your restaurant will help you to improve the experience. That can lead to better reviews in the future, and possibly open up ideas for business innovation.

Many restaurateurs have long relied on customer surveys to evaluate the service and experience they're providing, often highlighted on receipts. The reviews people are leaving on third-party sites are more insightful, honest, and impactful than customer surveys accessed through links on the bottom of paper receipts, which most people throw away. New forms of electronic payments directly through a restaurants apps or Apple Pay, means customers are getting fewer receipts.

And because they are on a third-party site, customers do not see leading questions or receive an incentive, like a free doughnut, for leaving a review — so their answers are more direct and their reviews more accurately reflect their sentiment.

86% of restaurant locations receive reviews today compared to 33% in 2015, and the number of restaurant reviews has increased by 53% since 2015 — a more rapid rate than any other business vertical.⁷



The Case of the Missing Silverware

A restaurant chain knew that the term “silverware” was popping up in a lot of its negative online reviews. They assumed it must be a complaint that the silverware was dirty. But after reading through all their reviews, they discovered the most common issue about silverware was that it wasn't on the table when food arrived. That was a problem the restaurant could easily address!

Have you ever searched for “best sandwich near me?” Google interprets “best” as restaurants with 4.0 ratings and higher.

3. Make a plan to generate first-party reviews and publish them on your website.

First-party reviews live on the website for your business. They are a powerful tool in driving customer advocacy and SEO benefits. When customers see stars in search engine results, not only does it grab their eye, it helps them to make a quick decision when choosing where to dine.

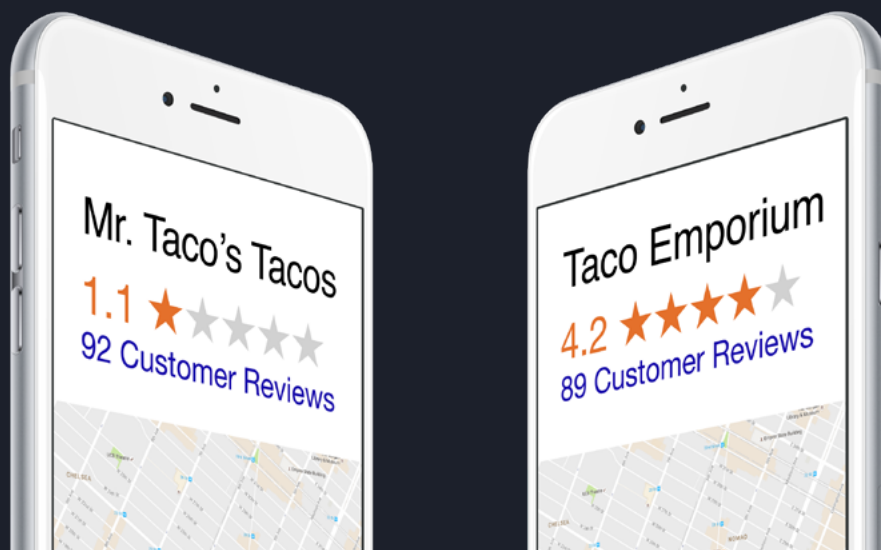
Reviews can help with your web traffic and conversion rates. Remember, the third factor that Google uses to determine what answers show up in the map pack is *prominence*. How well known and highly rated a location is will determine where it comes up when ranked against competitors in search results.

If managing ratings and reviews on third-party sites like Yelp, Facebook, and Google My Business is like having Captain America on your marketing team, having first-party reviews is like having the entire Avengers team powering your search engine results.

Imagine there are two taco spots, right across the street from each other:

Mr. Taco's Tacos and The Taco Emporium. The menus are nearly the same, the prices are similar, as are the hours. They are basically competing for the same customer.

Mr. Taco's Tacos has a 1.1 star rating and 92 customer reviews, while the Taco Emporium has a 4.2 star rating with 89 customers reviews. Which are you going to visit for the carne asada?



We'll see you at The Taco Emporium and save you a seat.

3

Schema



3 Schema

Google, Yahoo, and Bing have a standard vocabulary that webmasters can use to give signals back to search engines — letting them know what kind of content is on a web page. Most people have no idea this exists, what it does, or how to use it.

This vocabulary is more commonly known as Schema. It's formally defined as, "a collection of shared vocabularies webmasters can use to mark up their pages in ways that can be understood by the major search engines: Google, Microsoft, Yandex and Yahoo!" By adding Schema to your website you can "help search engines and other applications better understand your content and display it in a useful way."

Ingredients:

Digital knowledge

Schema markup

Steps:

1. Add Schema to your website.

Google, Yahoo, and Bing got together in 2011 and created a standard vocabulary that webmasters can use to give signals back to the search engines — letting them know what kind of content is on a web page. For instance, Google may recognize the presence of an image on your website, but it can't tell whether the image is your logo or a photo of your private event room. Yahoo can read a web page containing the keyword "tombstone," but how does Yahoo know whether "tombstone" is referencing the object, the movie, or the pizza brand? Schema markup consists of tags that help search engines match content to search intent. It helps search engines recognize your address, your menu items, or the start time of your chef's cooking class — and all the other digital knowledge that people can search online about your business.

Adding Schema markup to your site is not as simple as just putting some code in the back end. Schema is changing constantly and programming it can take a lot of time. Instead you'll want to use a tool that generates code for you and has engineers on the other side making sure the software is up to date.

4

Location Pages



4

Location Pages

Every restaurant has information that is specific to that location, especially their address, phone number, and hours of operation. When customers search for a restaurant, they only need the information that's relevant to them. By not having location pages or all the information a customer needs on the location page, you're adding friction to the process — and making it hard for search engines, maps, apps, voice assistants, and other intelligent services to get the information they need about your business.

Ingredients:

Digital knowledge

Schema markup

Location pages

First-party reviews

Steps:

1. Identify digital knowledge for each of your locations.

Each location has its own singular set of digital knowledge. This includes the obvious address, phone number, and hours of operation. But each store may also have its own menu variation, events that happen only in that store, or attributes unique to that location (e.g., a children's ball crawl, wheelchair accessible, or a private event area).

For those reasons, it's best practices that each store have its own location page on your website.

2. Create location pages using relevant digital knowledge and Schema markup.

A location page is a central area where a local customer can get all the information they need when deciding to transact with you at a specific store. A location page has its own unique URL and unique information about that store.

Search engines, and other AI-powered platforms like voice assistants, still see your website as the central point of truth about your business. But consistent information across the rest of the web validates your website and emphasizes your business's relevance to a search query.

Because location pages act as mini websites around stores, they have less information than the corporate site, and as a result, can often load faster — providing a better customer experience and sending more signals of confidence to search engines.

3. Use digital advertising for your location pages.

Once you have location-based pages with unique URLs, you can create pay-per-click, Facebook, and other targeted ads that deliver locals to that specific store or restaurant. Think of it this way — if you are testing out a limited-time offer in a certain geographic area, and putting ad spend against the success of the item, you could target the ad just around the physical location. When it drives people to the location page, you could have that featured item front and center. That's a great way to keep your business at the top of customers' minds, enhance stickiness (or user engagement and time spent on your site), and drive decisions to purchase.

Is catering important to your business or your locations? With location pages, you can target marketing and advertising around it (or corporate parties, kids' events, and just about anything else that is happening at the local level). Mark these pages up with perfect Schema, and now you're also optimized for search around the same events. In Las Vegas, this is known as “doubling down.”

4. Put first-party reviews of each location on the appropriate web pages.

In case you're not already convinced that it's time to dump that store locator and build out individual location pages, know that if you want to have the power of first party reviews, you have to have location pages. If someone visits your store in Minnesota and wants to leave a review, that's not exactly relevant to someone in Alabama. Each location page acts as another landing page and review site in search results.



5

Influencer Marketing



5

Influencer Marketing

According to Hubspot 71% of consumers are more likely to make a purchase based on social media referrals.⁸ The key factor here is that it has to come from an influencer, not the brand itself.

A study by MuseFind revealed that 92% of buyers trust an influencer more than they would an advertisement.⁹ And 40% (that's 2 out of 5) say they've purchased an item online after seeing it used by an influencer on Instagram, Twitter, Vine, or YouTube.¹⁰ 49% of people say they rely on recommendations from influencers when making purchase decisions.

Ingredients:

Marketing goal

Collaboration type

Influencers

Budget

Terms / agreement

Measurement

Steps:

1. Have a goal.

Start with a goal in mind. Don't just do this because it sounds cool. You're not going to be happy with the results, and if all you do is generate a few likes and follows, it won't have much value. Tie influencer marketing into a campaign, like launching a new menu or awareness around opening a new store. Actual revenue generated, traffic to a website, or a lift in sentiment are all great reasons to use influencer marketing.

92% of buyers trust an influencer more than they would an advertisement.¹¹

2. Determine your collaboration style.

There are six main types of influencer marketing collaborations. It's important that you know which one is going to best deliver against your goal.

Sponsored Social Media Content

Partnering with influencers in exchange for sponsored social media posts is the most common type of influencer collaboration. An influencer creates and posts content to promote your brand on their social media accounts.

Gifting

This works well for products. You give the influencer a sample with no expectation that they have to share something with their followers.

Sponsored Blog Posts

Similar to social media, but the content that's created is in the form of a blog post.

Guest Blogging

You would create a blog post that an influencer then publishes on their website.

Takeovers

An influencer takes control of your social media account, typically Instagram, and posts content they have curated, supporting the takeover by also posting on their own account.

Brand Ambassador Programs

The more you work with the same influencers, the stronger the relationship you build with their audience. Over time it feels even more normal and natural. They can grow to have a strong relationship with you. If you really want to take it to the next level, build a brand ambassador program to extend the relationship with influencers between campaigns. Invite them to be closely tied into different opportunities within the brand, like speaking on their behalf at events or being part of a focus group or beta test group.

3. Identify your influencers.

Define a set of criteria that helps you to vet if an influencer is the right person and has the right audience to represent your brand. Are they already passionate about your product or service or general type of business? If locality is important, do they have influence in your area?

Do they have some special skill or way of communicating that can help accentuate that something special about your brand? Once you have this list you can decide which influencers you want to approach (if you are working with an agency you can give them that list as a guideline).

Influencers can be found among followers you already have. You can also search for them in your competitor's followers. You can find influencers by using search engines, or on social media using hashtags relevant to your brand. There are also a number of marketing tools and software you can use to find relevant influencers.

4. Set your budget.

Many brands make the mistake of not offering adequate compensation to influencers. You need to offer a fair compensation to demonstrate how much you value their efforts. The compensation could depend on your influencer's follower count, overall reach, engagement, the number of posts, turnaround time, the complexity of the campaign, the sales they drive, and any number of factors. And if you are just looking for them to share a simple picture and some text to Instagram? There's a calculator for that — it's the Instagram Paid Partnership Money Calculator from influencer marketing hub.

5. Create an influencer collaboration agreement.

Once an influencer has indicated that they are interested in collaborating, it's important that you define how the relationship is going to work.

Be very specific about brand guidelines, and let the influencer know what you expect from them.

Create an influencer collaboration agreement. It should provide the answers to who owns content rights, what the expectations from the collaboration are, and so on.

Tell influencers how campaigns are measured and what data is expected for them to provide (e.g., editorial calendar, native social analytics, email open rates, website views). That way, they will think about it when they create their content. Now you are working for the same goals.

6. Measure the effectiveness of the campaign.

Don't expect an influencer collaboration to boost your sales overnight. Successful influencer collaborations take time to increase engagement and improve sales. Again, it goes back to having a goal. If you have that, you know how this will help you get to it.

So make sure you know how to measure the effectiveness of the campaign. You could look at:

- Audience breakdown (who actually saw the campaign content, and does that meet or exceed expectations?)
- Results of Stories and paid or "dark" social media (mostly on Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter)

- Story view counts, completion percentage, and average time spent
- Poll results and resulting private messages
- Post relevancy (how content is received and accepted by an influencer's own audience, as scored by Facebook, Instagram, etc.)
- Engagement rate on all content shared over a set period of time
- Video minutes viewed and percentage of video completed



Want to increase your impact?

Did you know that influencer campaigns deliver 11x higher ROI than traditional forms of digital marketing?¹²

Consider hosting an influencer dinner and invite a bunch of them at once. It isn't uncommon to request that they share a post with their audience within one week of dining. With 5, 10, or more influencers, you can increase impressions and share of mind really quickly.

6

Social Media



6 Social Media

It's been reported that the half-life of a tweet can be as fast as five minutes.¹³ Studies have shown that a post on Facebook has a life expectancy around five hours.¹⁴ On the other hand, ratings and reviews and digital knowledge — those are forever. Local search happens in real time. Prioritizing social media marketing over, or without, DKM creates a leaky budget.

Ingredients:

Digital Knowledge
Management solution

Social media budget

Influencer marketing plan

Steps:

1. Launch a new limited-time offer, menu, or special event.

Print your menus, prep your team, choose a date to close your location(s) to the public for an influencer event, assemble gift bags, and get ready to showcase that new triple decker grilled cheese with sriracha sauce and candied bacon.

2. Organize a list of relevant influencers and invite them in for your tasting event.

Everyone comes in, takes their photos, enjoys the food and then shares those pictures to their social networks.

3. Manage your digital knowledge.

When potential customers see those tasty posts and decide they need to eat that sandwich, they'll open up a search engine or ask a voice assistant, "new restaurant triple grilled cheese with sriracha and bacon." If that LTO was in your DKM solution and on your menu, everywhere it lives on line, those customers will find your restaurant and enjoy that sandwich. Without DKM? Those customers can easily end up finding your competition in search results — no matter how much effort you put into that influencer event.

Restaurants who are using social media to market but not practicing Digital Knowledge Management are creating leaky budgets. Best practices would suggest that you use DKM as the foundation of your marketing, and put efforts like social media on top.

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The customer journey starts with a question. And consumers expect answers. Yext puts businesses in control of their facts online with brand-verified answers in search. By serving accurate, consistent, brand-verified answers to consumer questions, Yext delivers authoritative information straight from the source – the business itself – no matter where or how customers are searching. Taco Bell, Denny's, Ben & Jerry's, and businesses around the globe use the Yext platform to capture consumer intent and drive digital discovery, engagement, and revenue – all from a single source of truth.

Yext's mission is to provide perfect answers everywhere.

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please contact food@yext.com