



# Asking the Right Questions?

This month I'm answering three questions that were submitted through our online question form. While the questions cover a range of issues in the industry, the common theme is to ensure you're asking the right question in the first place.

**I have recently opened my quick serve, and for the first two weeks, response was very good. Now suddenly my sales have gone down and I don't know what to do. Please give me some marketing ideas to reach more people.**

—Anil Patil, Mr. Hungry

Anil, thanks for your question, but I think you're asking for the wrong information. I bet you don't need marketing ideas; you need customer experience improvements. Of course, you must continue to increase awareness of your restaurant and convince people to try it. For this, I recommend creative local-store marketing tactics, including sampling at or catering community events, developing partnerships with other local businesses, and working with local media to get "free advertising" in terms of feature stories about you and your business.

But you should be just as focused, if not more, on making sure that people who try your restaurant come back and bring their friends. There is no more effective way to do this than to deliver an outstanding customer experience. At the most basic level, your customer experience is your marketing. What you do in person for your customers far outweighs what you say in advertising.

Your current experience probably isn't living up to expectations, or it's not compelling enough to prompt a return visit. Ask trusted friends and advisers for an honest assessment of your performance, and actively solicit feedback from customers. Make sure every aspect of your product, service, operations, facility, and pricing is executed excellently and delivers on your brand promise. Every detail of your customer experience influences perceptions of your restaurant and, if done well, increases the likelihood first-time customers will return.

**We are developing our catering department and are looking for the keys or an outline to build our foundation.**

—Carlos Silva, Director of Operations, Mac Shack

Carlos, catering holds a lot of promise for quick serves if you start in the right place. Before you jump to what you should do, consider *why*. Clarify the primary purpose of your catering business.

Your purpose might be to increase your brand awareness and acquire new customers for your existing units. When you cater in different locations and to different people groups, you increase the likelihood of being noticed and tried. And "bringing the mountain to Muhammad" enables you to reduce the barriers to brand trial and reach prospects that aren't easily attracted through your regular marketing channels (for example, business customers). If this is your purpose, then your catering

experience should emphasize visibility (use high-impact brand visuals) and conversion (prioritize catering customers and venues targeted to your most likely prospects).

Alternatively, you might be near the max capacity of your current operations, and your desire to offer catering might have more to do with growing your business without incurring real estate costs or commitments. In this case, your strategy should be based on utilizing existing labor and assets. Identify catering opportunities that can scale when you have excess capacity, like low-volume dayparts, days of the week, or even seasons, and design your experiences and target your marketing to these specific opportunities.

Catering might be an attractive means for testing new products, new customer segments, or even a new concept. For example, if you run a bakery-café concept and you're considering expanding into full entrées to grow your dinner daypart, a catering offering would allow you to test the waters first. If this is your purpose, design your catering business with the flexibility to accommodate ongoing changes and do most of your marketing in-store. With a clear purpose in mind, you can design your desired catering customer experience and then align your operations and marketing to execute on that customer experience.

**Will digital take over traditional media?**

—Leesa Henderson, National Director, DBM

Lisa, instead of thinking about digital and traditional media as "either/or," consider them as "both/and," and focus on integrating the two. New media channels and technologies provide more options with targeting, location- and time-specific tactics, testing, and tracking. You can also change campaigns in them more easily and quickly. But traditional media—broadcast, newspapers, direct mail, etc.—remain the most effective ways to reach a mass audience quickly, so they're not going away.

The real opportunity is to use both digital and traditional media, tapping the strengths of each and integrating them into a cohesive communications program. Consider how a TV or radio campaign could generate the mass awareness needed for a new product introduction, and by including a hash tag or a drive-to-Facebook message in that mass campaign, you could generate word of mouth through social media. Or a mass advertisement might convey your brand personality and positioning at a high level, while you provide the specific "proof points" or product information through content marketing in digital channels.

Very few brands have the budgets to be in all media, so you must prioritize the channels that best reach your target customers and fit with your brand. But generally speaking, it's best not to separate traditional from digital media. 