HappyChef

E-BOOK · A HAPPYCHEF GUIDE

The Ultimate Guide to Restaurant Marketing

Attract and keep more guests without burning your margin — a six-chapter system that turns strangers into regulars.

Thibault Van de Sompele Founder of HappyChef
built with and for restaurant owners

E-BOOK

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A HAPPYCHEF GUIDE

The Ultimate Guide to Restaurant Marketing

Tonight, ten minutes from your kitchen, someone is deciding where to eat. They have an appetite, a budget and no plans yet. They will type three words into their phone, scroll for less than a minute and book a table. The question that decides your week: will they ever see your name?

This guide is built on an uncomfortable truth: the best kitchen rarely wins — the most findable, most desirable, most bookable one does. Six chapters follow the full route from search box to regular. Along the way you'll see why your Google profile gets eight times more visitors than your website, why beautiful posts collect likes but no bookings, and why one extra half-star is worth around 9% in revenue. We start where every guest starts: with a search.

TV

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THE SHORT VERSION

The short version

01 **Your Google Business Profile is your busiest storefront** most local diners decide there, before your website ever loads.

02 **Social media sells the feeling of being there** three seconds of honest craft beats thirty seconds of polish.

03 **Own your audience** email returns ~€38 per €1, and WhatsApp reaches 95%+ open rates that no algorithm can throttle.

04 **Reviews are marketing you don't write** reply to every one within 48 hours; future guests read the reply, not the review.

05 **Retention beats acquisition** a returning guest costs roughly five times less than a new one. Shift one marketing hour a week to existing guests.

1

FINDABILITY

Win the moment they search: your Google profile is the new front door

KEY INSIGHT

Most guests choose a restaurant on Google Maps and Search, not on your website. An optimised Google Business Profile — fresh photos weekly, complete attributes, fast review replies, accurate hours — decides whether the searcher at 17:40 books your table or your neighbour's.

FINDABILITY FIG. 01

Where guests discover you

88% of diners choose a restaurant from Google Maps & Search — aim for the top 3

Type "restaurant near me" where your restaurant stands. What appears in the map pack — those top three listings — captures the overwhelming majority of taps, and a large share of those people are at a table **within 24 hours**. This is the highest-intent audience you will ever reach, and reaching them costs nothing but discipline.

The weekly fifteen minutes that outrank ad budgets

Google's local ranking rewards activity and completeness, and your guests reward proof of life. The routine, every week:

- **One new photo** — a dish from this week's menu, shot in daylight. Profiles with regular photo updates get dramatically more direction requests and clicks than dormant ones.
- **Every review answered** within 48 hours (chapter 4 covers how).

- **Hours verified** — including holidays. One wrong "open" on a closed Monday earns the angriest one-star review there is.
- **Attributes complete:** price range, cuisine, terrace, vegetarian options, reservation link. Each empty field is a filter you fail.

The complete setup — categories, services, posts, Q&A — is in **optimising your Google Business Profile**.

Make the profile bookable

A profile that ends in a phone number leaks guests at 22:00 — link your **online booking** directly so the searcher converts in the same minute. The shorter the path from craving to confirmation, the more often you win it.

◉ DO THIS TONIGHT

Search your own restaurant in an incognito window. Check three things: do the photos look like your current menu, are tonight's hours right, and can a stranger book in two taps? Fix whichever fails before you open tomorrow.

CHEF'S SECRET

The photo angle that wins the map pack

Google rotates your profile photos, but the cover image earns most first impressions — and interiors outperform exteriors for fine dining. The winning frame, used by rooms that dominate their map pack: shot from a guest's seated eye-level at golden hour, candles lit, two tables visibly occupied. It answers the only question the searcher is really asking: what will it feel like to sit there?

GOING DEEPER

When potential guests search for "restaurant near me" or "book online [your city]", you want to be at the top.

Google Business Profile is the key to local visibility for your **hospitality** business. But simply creating a profile isn't enough - you need to actively optimize it to become truly visible and convert potential guests into bookings.

In this comprehensive guide you'll learn step by step how to optimize your Google Business Profile for maximum visibility. From the basics to advanced strategies - everything you need to be found by hungry guests in your region.

What is Google Business Profile?

Google Business Profile (officially now called "Google Business Profile", but still often referred to as GMB) is a free tool that lets you control how your business appears in Google Search and Google Maps. For **restaurants** this is absolutely essential because:

- 46% of all Google searches have local intent
- 78% of local mobile searches lead to an offline purchase within 24 hours
- Guests can immediately see your opening hours, photos, menu and reviews
- You can add a direct booking link - ideal in combination with **online ordering**
- It's completely free - no advertising budget required

The "Local Pack" - the three businesses that appear prominently at the top of the search results with a map - receives more than 40% of all clicks on local searches. This is prime real estate on Google. If you're not there, you lose potential guests to optimized competitors every single day.

Think about it: when did you last search for "restaurant near me" yourself? Those exact search results determine where people ultimately go to eat. And with an optimized profile, you can influence that choice.

How Google determines local ranking

Before you start optimizing, it's important to understand how Google decides which restaurants come out on top. There are three main factors:

1. Relevance

How well does your profile match the search query? If someone searches for "Italian restaurant with terrace", your profile should contain this information. This is why completing your profile in full is so crucial.

2. Distance

How far is your restaurant from the person searching or the specified location? You have little influence over this, other than making sure your address is correct.

3. Prominence

How well-known or popular is your restaurant? Google looks at:

- The number and quality of reviews
- Activity on your profile (posts, updates)
- Mentions on other websites
- Your **website SEO**

Step 1: Claim and verify your profile

Go to google.com/business and claim your **restaurant**. If your restaurant already exists in Google Maps (often added by customers), you can claim it. If it doesn't exist yet, create a new profile.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How do I optimise my Google Business Profile as a restaurant?

Complete all fields: name, address, opening hours, phone number, website, and category. Add at least 10 current photos, activate the messaging system, and respond to every review.

How do I collect more Google reviews for my restaurant?

Ask guests actively at checkout via a QR code on the receipt or a card at the table. Send an automatic review reminder via WhatsApp or email after each visit.

Does my Google Business Profile affect my position in search results?

Yes, strongly. A complete profile with many recent reviews, regular updates, and accurate information improves your position in local Google search results. This is the most impactful free SEO action for a restaurant.

2

DESIRE

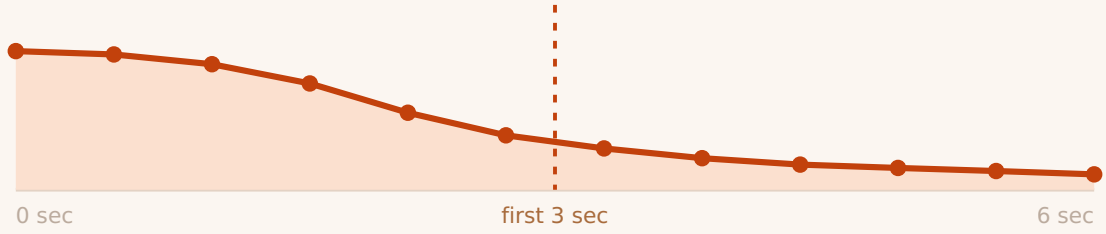
Build desire on social media: sell the evening, not the dish

KEY INSIGHT

Social media works for restaurants when it sells the feeling of being there — craft, fire, faces — in the first three seconds. One platform done consistently beats four done occasionally: pick where your guests scroll, post three honest moments a week, and route every profile to your booking link.

DESIRE FIG. 02

The first 3 seconds of a scroll



3 sec you have about three seconds to stop the scroll before interest drops away

Nobody books a table because they saw a brochure. They book because a fifteen-second clip — gloved hands brushing a sauce, steam rising at the pass, a maître d' laughing — made an ordinary Tuesday feel insufficient. That feeling is manufacturable, and the raw material is lying around your kitchen every single service.

The 3-second rule and the honesty advantage

Feeds grant you about three seconds before the thumb moves. Polish doesn't stop the thumb; **tension** does — a knife mid-cut, fire flaring, a sauce about to split. Fine-dining

kitchens hold an unfair advantage here: your everyday work looks like cinema to civilians. The strategy, platform by platform, lives in **social media for restaurants**; the craft of making plates look like they taste is in **food photography**; and the platform that turns unknown rooms into destination bookings fastest is covered in **TikTok for restaurants**.

A posting system that survives a busy week

THE MINIMUM EFFECTIVE POSTING WEEK

Slot	Format	Example	Time cost
Monday	Process clip (15–30s)	Breaking down the turbot for this week's menu	10 min
Thursday	One dish, one story	"The last week of asparagus — here's how we send it off"	10 min
Saturday	Room at golden hour	Candles lit, first guests seated, one line of anticipation	5 min

Film everything on a phone during normal prep — batch three clips in one session. Consistency at this modest level compounds; sporadic brilliance does not.

◉ DO THIS TONIGHT

During tomorrow's prep, film one 20-second clip of the most hypnotic thing your kitchen does daily. No caption strategy, no hashtag research — post it with one honest sentence. You are building the habit, not the masterpiece.

GOING DEEPER

Social media has become indispensable for restaurants in today's digital age.

It's where potential guests discover you, admire your dishes, read reviews, and ultimately decide to book. According to recent research, more than 70% of millennials and Gen Z look up restaurants on social media before making a decision. But with so many platforms and possibilities, the question arises: which platform do you choose and what exactly do you post? In this comprehensive guide, we walk you step by step through the world of social media marketing for restaurants.

Which platform fits your restaurant?

Not every social media platform is suited to every restaurant. Your choice depends on your target audience, your concept, and the time you have available. Let's take a closer look at the main platforms.

Instagram - Your restaurant's visual storefront

Instagram is the most important platform for most restaurants, and for good reason. Food is inherently visual, and Instagram is all about imagery. The platform offers various ways to showcase your restaurant:

- **Feed posts:** Photos of dishes, atmospheric shots of your interior, and team photos for a professional image
- **Stories:** Ideal for behind-the-scenes content, daily updates, and interactive polls or questions
- **Reels:** Short, engaging videos that the algorithm rewards with more reach. Show preparation processes, the plating of dishes, or funny moments
- **User-generated content:** Repost photos from guests with permission to build social proof
- **Instagram Shopping:** Ideal if you sell gift vouchers or products

Instagram works best for restaurants with a visually appealing concept, photogenic dishes, and an audience between 20 and 45 years old. Invest in good photography and a consistent visual style to stand out.

Facebook - The community builder for local connection

Facebook is often underestimated, but it remains a powerful platform, especially for local reach and building a community. The platform is particularly effective for:

- **Promoting events:** Facebook Events are perfect for special evenings, tastings, or live music
- **Older audiences:** Guests over 40 are still active on Facebook
- **Local communities:** Facebook Groups in your area can be valuable for word-of-mouth
- **Collecting reviews:** Facebook Reviews are visible in search results and build trust
- **Paid advertising:** The advertising options are extensive and you can target locally with great precision

Don't forget to fully complete your Facebook page with opening hours, location, menu, and a link to your reservation system. This also improves your visibility in Google.

TikTok - The discovery engine with viral potential

TikTok is growing explosively and offers unprecedented opportunities for organic reach. A single video can rack up millions of views, even without followers. The platform works excellently for:

- **Young audiences:** Guests between 18 and 35 are especially active on TikTok
- **Creative, authentic content:** Perfection isn't needed, but authenticity is. Smartphone videos work just fine
- **Trends and challenges:** Tap into popular trends for extra reach
- **Showing personality:** Show the people behind the restaurant, from chef to dishwasher
- **Preparation processes:** ASMR-style videos of dishes being prepared score well

TikTok requires a different approach than Instagram: less polished, more spontaneous, and posting regularly. The algorithm rewards consistency and engagement.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Which social media platform should my restaurant be on?

Focus on Instagram and Facebook as a base. Choose a maximum of two platforms and do them well, rather than being present everywhere but posting too infrequently.

How do I create content for social media as a restaurant owner without much time?

Batch it: spend 1–2 hours per week taking photos and videos, then schedule them for the whole week. Use your kitchen, team, and dishes as natural content. Authenticity beats perfection on social media.

Should my restaurant pay for social media advertising?

A small budget (€5–€10/day) targeted at a specific area around your restaurant can be very effective, especially for events or promotions.

3

OWNERSHIP

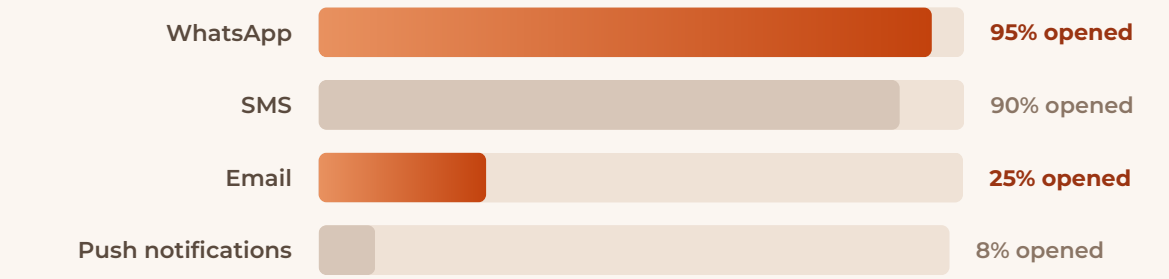
Own your audience: email and WhatsApp beat every algorithm

KEY INSIGHT

Followers are rented; lists are owned. Email marketing returns around €38 per €1 spent, and WhatsApp messages reach open rates above 95% — but only when used for service and genuinely valuable news. Collect contacts at booking, send monthly with substance, never spam.

OWNERSHIP FIG. 03

Channels you own beat rented reach



€38 email returns about €38 for every €1 spent — the best return in marketing

Every platform in chapter 2 sits between you and your guests, and charges rent in reach. The antidote is the oldest asset in marketing: a list you own. When the algorithm changes — and it always changes — your email list and WhatsApp contacts remain exactly as valuable as the day before.

Collection happens at the booking, not at the door

Your reservation flow already captures name, email and phone with consent — this is the quiet superpower of running your own **booking system**. A modest fine-dining room doing

150 covers a week collects 4,000+ contactable guests a year without a single clipboard. Segment by what their bookings already tell you: regulars, special-occasion guests, the wine-pairing crowd, the lapsed.

What to send (and what never to send)

- **Monthly email with substance:** the new menu and the story behind it, one event with limited seats, one behind-the-scenes note from the chef. Written like a letter, not a leaflet. The full rhythm is in **email marketing for restaurants**.
- **WhatsApp for service and rare gold:** confirmations, reminders, "a table just opened this Saturday" to the waitlist. Open rates above 95% exist precisely because the channel isn't abused — guard that. The playbook is in **WhatsApp marketing**.
- **Never:** weekly promotions, generic holiday greetings, anything you wouldn't send a friend who happens to love your restaurant.

One well-written October email announcing the truffle menu to 4,000 owned contacts routinely outsells a month of social posting — and costs an evening of writing.

◉ DO THIS TONIGHT

Count the guest contacts sitting in your reservation system right now. If you have never emailed them, draft three sentences about what changes on next month's menu and why. That draft is worth more than your next ten posts.

CHEF'S SECRET

The two-line WhatsApp that fills a Tuesday

Restaurants with a warm waitlist send one message on slow weeks: "We had a table for two open up this Thursday at 19:30 — first to reply gets it." Scarcity is real (it is genuinely one table), the channel is intimate, and the reply rate is extraordinary. Used more than once or twice a month it dies; used sparingly it is the highest-converting sentence in this entire guide.

GOING DEEPER

Email marketing is one of the most underrated yet powerful marketing channels for restaurants.

While many restaurant owners focus all their attention on **social media**, they forget that email is a direct line to their guests' inbox, with no algorithms deciding who sees your message. With the right strategy, you build a loyal community that returns regularly and

recommends your restaurant to friends and family. In this article, you'll discover how to use email marketing effectively for your hospitality business.

The statistics don't lie: email marketing has an average ROI of 3,600%, or €36 for every euro you invest. For restaurants, this figure is often even higher, because a single email can lead to a booking for several people. What's more, your mailing list is an asset you own, unlike social media followers who depend on the whims of the platforms.

Why email marketing works for restaurants

Email offers unique advantages that fit hospitality perfectly:

- **Direct contact:** You reach guests straight in their inbox, with no algorithm in between
- **Personalization:** With **guest profiles**, you can tailor messages to individual preferences and dining habits
- **Timing:** Send messages exactly when guests are most receptive
- **Measurable:** Every click and conversion is trackable, so you know what works
- **Cost-effective:** Compared to advertising, the cost per person reached is minimal
- **Ownership:** Your mailing list is yours, independent of external platforms

Unlike an Instagram post that disappears into the feed after 24 hours, an email stays in the inbox until the recipient takes action. This gives your message a longer lifespan and a greater chance of conversion.

Building your mailing list

A successful email strategy starts with a quality list of interested recipients. Focus on quality over quantity; 500 engaged subscribers are worth more than 5,000 people who never open your emails.

Collection methods that work

There are various ways to collect email addresses, each with its own pros and cons:

- **Reservation system:** The most valuable source. Guests who book have already shown interest. Make sure your **reservation system** includes a newsletter opt-in.
- **Wi-Fi sign-in:** Offer free Wi-Fi in exchange for an email address. Guests who accept are often returning visitors.
- **Website pop-up:** A subtle pop-up on your **website** with an attractive incentive, such as 10% off the next booking.
- **Receipt:** At checkout, ask whether guests would like to sign up for updates about special menus and events.
- **Social media:** Promote your newsletter on your social channels with a clear call to action.
- **Events:** With **group bookings** and events, you often collect contact details for several guests at once.

Incentives to encourage sign-ups

People don't give away their email address for nothing. Offer something valuable in return:

- A welcome discount on the first booking via the newsletter

- Exclusive access to new menus before they go public
- A free aperitif on the next visit
- The chance to enter prize draws for dinners or cooking classes
- A free e-book with recipes from the chef

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How do I build an email list as a restaurant owner?

Via your reservation system: ask for marketing consent at every booking. Add a sign-up widget to your website. Offer a small benefit, such as news about special menus or exclusive events.

Which email delivers the most value for a restaurant?

The birthday email with a personal invitation and small incentive. It has an open rate of 50–70% and a very high conversion to reservations. Automate this via your reservation system.

How often should I email my restaurant guests?

A maximum of twice a month for regular newsletters. If you email too frequently, the unsubscribe rate rises quickly.

4

PROOF

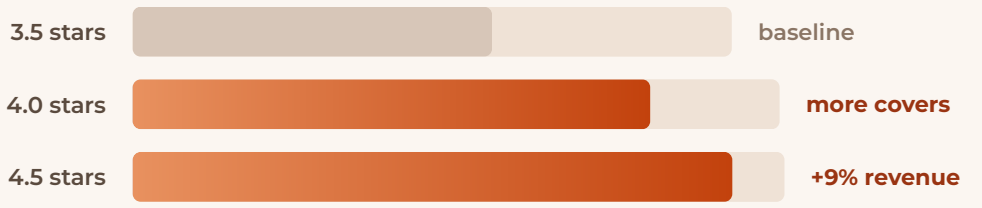
Turn reviews into your best salesperson

KEY INSIGHT

Reviews are read by hundreds of future guests, and your replies are read just as closely. Reply to every review within 48 hours — gracious on praise, factual and composed on criticism — and ask for reviews at the peak moment: the table that just told you the evening was wonderful.

PROOF FIG. 04

Half a star is worth real revenue



+9% each extra half-star lifts revenue by roughly 9%

A one-star review feels like an insult to your craft. Reframe it: the review is not written for you, and your reply is not written for its author. Both are theatre performed for the hundred strangers who will read the exchange next month while deciding where to spend their anniversary. Composure converts.

The reply system

REVIEW RESPONSES THAT WIN THE SILENT AUDIENCE

Review	Reply within	The move
5 stars, detailed	48 h	Thank specifically ("the turbot you mention…"), invite back by name of season: "the game menu lands in October."
3 stars, mixed	24 h	Thank for the fair points, fix what's fixable, name the fix. Future readers see a kitchen that listens.
1 star, harsh	24 h, never instantly	Acknowledge, state facts calmly once, take it offline. No defensiveness — the audience scores tone, not the argument.
Fake or abusive	—	Report it, reply once neutrally for the record, move on.

Templates for every scenario are in **reviews and reputation management**.

Volume is a strategy, not an accident

Ratings stabilise with volume — a 4.7 with 600 reviews outsells a 4.9 with 40, because it is believable. Build the ask into service: when a table glows at the end of the night, the maître d's "that means a lot — if you felt like sharing that on Google, it genuinely helps a small house like ours" converts remarkably often. Research consistently links rating improvements to revenue: even half a star moves peak-hour bookings measurably.

◉ DO THIS TONIGHT

Open your three most recent unanswered reviews. Reply to all three using the table above — specific, composed, future-reader-first. Then put a recurring 15-minute "reviews" block in your Monday calendar.

GOING DEEPER

Online reviews can make or break your restaurant.

Research shows that 93% of consumers read reviews before choosing a restaurant, and 84% trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations from friends and family. In this comprehensive guide you'll learn how to actively manage reviews, respond professionally to both positive and negative feedback, and build a strong online reputation that brings more guests to your restaurant.

Why reviews are so crucial for your restaurant

Reviews influence your restaurant on several levels, from direct bookings to long-term brand perception.

The direct impact on guests and bookings

- **93%** of consumers read reviews before choosing a restaurant. Without good reviews you simply miss out on a large share of potential guests.
- Restaurants with higher ratings are chosen **3x more often** than comparable restaurants with lower ratings.
- A single star difference can mean a **5-9%** difference in annual revenue. That's significant for your bottom line.
- Guests are willing to pay **31% more** at restaurants with excellent reviews. The perception of quality justifies higher prices.
- Negative reviews have a stronger impact than positive ones: on average you need 12 positive reviews to offset one negative review in the perception of potential guests.

The impact on online discoverability

- Google uses reviews as an important ranking factor for local search results. More and better reviews mean higher positions.
- More reviews lead to greater visibility in **Google Maps and local search results**.
- Recent reviews count for more than old ones. A steady stream of new reviews matters more than a one-off spike.
- Restaurants that actively respond to reviews are ranked higher by Google than those that don't.

Where do reviews come from? The main platforms

The main platforms for **restaurant** reviews, ranked by impact and relevance for the Benelux:

1. Google Reviews: the most important platform

Google Reviews is by far the most important platform for restaurant reviews:

- Appears directly in search results and Google Maps, where most people look for restaurants.
- Significantly influences your local ranking. Restaurants with more and better reviews appear higher.
- The largest reach of all platforms. Almost everyone uses Google.
- **Priority:** Focus at least 60% of your review efforts on Google.

Claim and fully optimize your Google Business Profile. Add photos, respond to reviews, and keep your information up to date.

2. TripAdvisor: essential for tourist areas

- Especially relevant for restaurants in tourist areas or city centers.
- International travelers rely heavily on TripAdvisor for restaurant choices.
- Rankings within your city or region determine your visibility to tourists.
- A Certificate of Excellence can be used as a marketing tool.

3. Facebook: recommendations within networks

- Recommendations from friends have a particularly strong influence on restaurant choices.
- Integrates seamlessly with your **social media strategy**.
- Reviews are easily shared within personal networks.
- Especially important for the local clientele that follows you on social media.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How do I respond professionally to a negative Google review?

Thank the guest for the feedback, acknowledge the specific problem, apologise sincerely, and invite them to get in touch for a resolution. Never respond defensively, even if the complaint seems unfair.

How do I systematically collect more positive reviews?

Make asking for a review a standard step in your farewell moments. Use a QR code on the receipt or a card at the exit. Send a friendly reminder via email or WhatsApp the day after the visit.

Which review platforms should my restaurant be on?

Google Business Profile is the most important for visibility. Tripadvisor is relevant for tourists. Facebook reviews also influence your social credibility.

5

RHYTHM

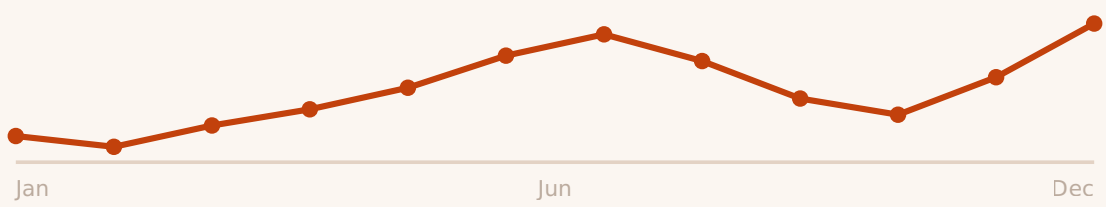
Market with the seasons: campaigns that plan themselves

KEY INSIGHT

A seasonal marketing calendar removes the weekly "what do we post?" panic: four menu-change campaigns, the gift moments (December, Valentine's, Mother's Day), and two self-invented traditions, each planned six weeks ahead across profile, social, email and WhatsApp.

RHYTHM FIG. 05

A reason to post in every season



plan the year once: every month gets a campaign tied to its season

The restaurants that seem effortlessly everywhere are not improvising; they are running last year's calendar with new photography. Seasonality is the restaurateur's native marketing advantage — your product genuinely changes four times a year, which is four honest reasons to make noise that retail brands would kill for.

The year at a glance

A FINE-DINING MARKETING YEAR (PLAN EACH 6 WEEKS OUT)

Moment	Campaign	Channels
Each menu change (×4)	"The new menu" — story of one ingredient, chef's note, booking push	Email + social + profile post
December	Gift cards + festive menus — the highest-margin month	Email + WhatsApp to regulars first
Valentine's / Mother's Day	Prepaid set menus (zero no-shows by design)	Profile + email + paid boost if needed
Two invented traditions	Asparagus opening night, game-season dinner, oyster week	Waitlist + email — let scarcity work

The mechanics of riding each season — timing, pricing, the prep checklist — are in **seasonal marketing**, and **10 marketing tips that work now** covers the evergreen layer underneath.

Why six weeks ahead

Six weeks gives photography time to happen in daylight, email time to land twice, and the kitchen time to cost the menu properly. Campaigns planned the same week they launch always borrow urgency from quality. One rule keeps the calendar honest: **every campaign ends in a bookable moment** — a date, a menu, a button. Awareness without a booking path is applause without revenue; gift cards (see **gift vouchers**) are the December exception that proves the rule, converting goodwill into January cash flow.

◉ DO THIS TONIGHT

Open a blank page and write the next 12 months as twelve lines. Mark your four menu changes, December, the two gift holidays — then invent one tradition that belongs only to your house. You just wrote next year's marketing plan.

GOING DEEPER

Every restaurant has its busy and quiet periods.

December is bursting at the seams, while January feels empty. The summer months attract tourists, but August sees regular guests heading off to holiday destinations. With smart **seasonal marketing** you can turn those quiet periods into opportunities and make the most of the busy ones. In this in-depth article you'll find your complete guide to effective marketing all year round.

Why seasonal marketing works

People look for seasonal experiences. A sunny terrace in summer, a cozy winter evening with a stew by candlelight, fresh asparagus in spring. By aligning your **marketing** and menu with this, you tap into what guests want and are looking for at that moment.

Seasonal marketing works for several reasons. First, it creates urgency: seasonal dishes are only available temporarily, which motivates guests to come now. Second, it matches natural eating patterns: people want light salads in summer and hearty stews in winter. Third, it provides content for your communication: every season gives you something new to talk about.

Restaurants that actively apply seasonal marketing see, on average, 15-25% less fluctuation in their revenue throughout the year. The peaks are used better and the dips are filled with targeted campaigns.

Spring: a fresh start

After the dark winter months, people are ready for renewal, lightness and the first rays of sun. Spring is the season of hope and new energy:

- **Launch a seasonal menu:** Asparagus, rhubarb, spring onion, young spinach - fresh ingredients in the spotlight. Make an event of the launch with a tasting evening for regulars.
- **Terrace opening:** Turn it into an event with special spring cocktails, maybe a DJ or live music. Announce it weeks in advance on social media.
- **Easter:** Easter brunch is hugely popular with families. Offer a special Easter menu with activities for children. Think of an Easter egg hunt in your garden or on the terrace.
- **Mother's Day:** This is one of the busiest days of the year. Schedule your **promotion** at least six weeks ahead. Offer special menus and consider a small gift for mothers.
- **King's Day:** Orange snacks and drinks, perhaps a special King's Day brunch or BBQ. Especially relevant if you're in an area with plenty of festivities.

Marketing tip for spring: focus on renewal and freshness. Use light, cheerful imagery on your social media. Photograph your new dishes in natural daylight. Communicate the origin of your fresh seasonal ingredients.

Summer: terrace and tourism

Summer brings unique opportunities and challenges. Your terrace becomes your most important asset, but your regular guests head off to holiday destinations:

- **Reaching tourists:** Make sure you're easy to find on **Google**, TripAdvisor and other platforms. Update photos with summery terrace imagery. Respond actively to reviews.
- **Light dishes:** Salads, grilled fish, ceviche, cold soups and refreshing desserts. People don't want heavy food when it's hot.
- **Summer events:** BBQ evenings, open-air wine tastings, cocktail workshops, summery themed evenings (Mediterranean, Asian, seafood).
- **Tackling the August dip:** Many regulars are on holiday. Focus on tourists with multilingual menus and on locals who stay home with special staycation deals.

- **Extending terrace life:** Invest in blankets, heaters and ambient lighting to stretch the terrace season well into September.
- **Father's Day:** Often underestimated, but a great opportunity for a Sunday brunch or BBQ theme.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How do I plan my marketing calendar as a restaurant owner for the whole year?

Identify your busy and quiet periods based on last year. Plan marketing actions 4–6 weeks before peak periods (Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, Christmas) and incentive actions during quiet periods (January, mid-August).

Which seasonal campaigns deliver the most for a restaurant?

Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, Christmas and New Year, and local fairs or festivals. Focus on the 3–4 moments that generate the most revenue.

How far in advance should I start promoting a seasonal event?

At least 4–6 weeks before popular dates like Valentine's Day or Mother's Day, 8–10 weeks for Christmas and New Year. Open reservations early: guests who are actively looking plan well in advance.

6

RETENTION

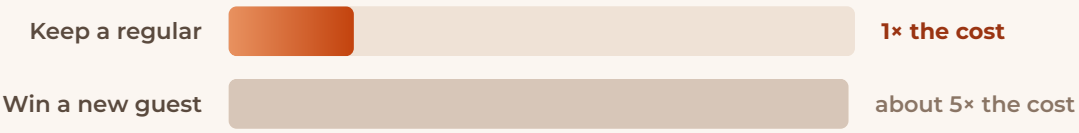
Shift from chasing strangers to keeping friends

KEY INSIGHT

Acquiring a new guest costs roughly five times more than reactivating an existing one. The compounding move in restaurant marketing is retention: recognise returning guests, remember their preferences, reactivate the lapsed with one personal message, and measure repeat-visit share monthly.

RETENTION FIG. 06

Keeping a guest vs. winning a new one



5× winning a new guest costs roughly five times more than keeping one

Run the thought experiment: if your marketing budget could buy either 100 first-time guests or 60 second visits from people who already loved the evening, which builds the restaurant? First-timers are expensive sceptics; returners arrive pre-sold, order the wine pairing, and bring friends. Yet almost all restaurant marketing energy chases the expensive sceptics.

The retention machine

- **Recognition:** guest profiles turn "table 6" into "Mr Verhoeven, window seat, allergic to shellfish, anniversary in May." Recognition is the cheapest luxury you can serve.
- **Reactivation:** a monthly list of guests not seen in 90+ days, each getting one personal note — new menu, their favourite returning. Reactivation emails routinely outperform every acquisition campaign a restaurant runs.

- **Rituals:** regulars' previews of new menus, a glass on the house at visit five. Loyalty in fine dining is built on feeling like family, not on stamp cards — the full architecture is in **building guest loyalty**.

Measure the only marketing number that compounds

Repeat-visit share — what fraction of tonight's covers have eaten here before — is the health metric of your entire marketing system. Below 30%, you are refilling a leaky bucket; above 50%, your dining room markets itself. Your **analytics** can compute it automatically, and tools like **AI-assisted marketing** can draft the reactivation notes — but the warmth has to be yours. How the experience itself creates the desire to return is the subject of **the ultimate guide to guest experience**.

◉ DO THIS TONIGHT

Pull ten guests you haven't seen in three months. Send each one personal sentence — "the new winter menu just landed and the venison made me think of your table." Count the bookings this single email batch produces.

CHEF'S SECRET

The 5% that decides your restaurant's future

Classic service-profit research found that a 5-percentage-point improvement in customer retention lifts long-term profits by 25–95% — the compounding is that violent. For a restaurant, moving repeat share from 35% to 40% means roughly two extra returning tables a night. Two tables, every night, who already trust the kitchen, spend more, and bring friends. No acquisition campaign on earth competes with that arithmetic.

GOING DEEPER

Acquiring a new guest costs 5 to 7 times more than retaining an existing one.

Yet many **restaurant**s focus mainly on new customers, while the real value lies in repeat visitors. Building **customer loyalty** isn't difficult, but it does require a consistent, well-considered approach. In this comprehensive guide you'll learn how to transform one-time visitors into loyal regulars who keep your business running and act as ambassadors.

The most successful restaurants in the world have one thing in common: a core of loyal guests who come back time and again. These guests are not only a stable source of income, but also your best marketing channel. They tell friends and family about your

place, they leave positive reviews, and they forgive you a mistake. In short: investing in loyalty is the smartest investment you can make as a **hospitality** entrepreneur.

The economic value of loyal guests

Returning guests are the foundation of a healthy restaurant business. Here are the figures that back this up:

- **Higher spend:** Loyal guests spend an average of 67% more per visit
- **No acquisition costs:** They come back without expensive **marketing**
- **Word of mouth:** They bring in an average of 2-3 new guests per year
- **Forgiveness:** A mistake? Regular guests give you a second chance
- **Valuable feedback:** They tell you honestly what could be better
- **Predictability:** You know what to expect in terms of occupancy

A restaurant with 40% returning guests performs significantly better than one with 20%. Investing in loyalty is investing in stability.

What makes guests loyal?

Loyalty doesn't come from one great experience, but from consistent positive experiences. Research points to these factors:

- **Quality:** The food has to be good, every single time
- **Service:** Guests want to feel seen and valued
- **Recognition:** Being remembered is a powerful loyalty factor
- **Convenience:** Booking and paying should be effortless
- **Value:** Not necessarily cheap, but worth their money
- **Emotional connection:** A bond with the team or the atmosphere

8 strategies for customer loyalty

1. Know your guests personally

Nothing is more powerful than being recognised. With a good **guest profiles system** you can personalise every visit:

- **Preferences:** Favourite table, drink, dishes
- **Allergies and dietary requirements:** Communicated proactively to the kitchen
- **Special occasions:** Birthdays, anniversaries, important dates
- **Visit history:** When were they last here? What did they order?

"Welcome back, Mrs Janssen, your favourite table by the window is ready. The Sauvignon Blanc again?" - this creates a bond that no marketing budget can buy.

2. Deliver consistent quality

Loyalty starts with reliability. Guests come back because they know what to expect. This means:

- **Standardised recipes:** Every dish tastes the same every time

- **Trained staff:** Consistent service from everyone - see **our tips for staff training**
- **Atmosphere:** Lighting, music, temperature - the details are always right
- **Timing:** Waiting times are predictable and acceptable

Excellent **customer service** is the foundation on which everything rests.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How do I build a loyalty programme for my restaurant?

Start simple: a digital points system via your reservation system. Reward not only visits but also online reviews and referrals. Make sure the reward feels genuinely valuable and is not too hard to reach.

How do I win back lapsed regulars?

Identify guests who have not visited for more than 3 months via your reservation system. Send a personal message — not a mass mail — with a warm invitation and possibly a small incentive.

How do I measure customer loyalty in my restaurant?

Track the percentage of returning guests (aim for 40–60% of monthly covers), average visit frequency per guest, and your Net Promoter Score via short post-visit surveys.

E-BOOK

How strong is your marketing system?

- [ ] Our Google profile gets a new photo and checked hours weekly
- [ ] Guests can book directly from Google in under two taps
- [ ] We post three honest moments a week on one chosen platform
- [ ] We collect email + phone with consent at every booking
- [ ] A monthly email with real substance goes to our list
- [ ] Every review gets a composed reply within 48 hours

READY TO BEGIN

Marketing that runs while you cook?

HappyChef automates the machinery in this guide — bookings from Google, WhatsApp campaigns, guest profiles and AI marketing — so the signal carries even on your busiest nights.

Book a demo

Free, 30 minutes, no strings attached

HappyChef