

Food & Beverage - Local: How to Use this Magic Marketing Word to Drive Sales - By Ken Burgin

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Maybe you enjoy pizza from Italy, beer from Denmark and TV from Britain, but the L word - LOCAL - arouses special loyalty and emotion. Just like the Olympics.

Customers know most of the fish, the fruit, the juice and the wine come from far away, but when you promote a local connection, they see you as better than your bland, anonymous competitors. And it's another way to sidestep price competition.

There are many low-cost and no-cost ways to do it:

Mention local produce and suppliers. Feature at least two items on your menu & beverage list that are sourced locally or known for local connections. Eg: Our potatoes are the best from Kooweerup. Our icecream is churned by local producers Rocky & Co. Fish sourced daily from Sydney Fish Markets. The best Arizona Ginger Beer. There's a growing political debate on 'food miles' and being a 'locavore' - some customers don't care, but more and more are interested.

Talk about what local people love to eat or drink. Eg: This is the favourite beer with locals in Maryville. Local people love pumpkin served this way for a special dinner. Would you like to try one of our local wines? It's on the menu and in the server's recommendations.

Support local causes. Whether it's fundraising for a new gym or protecting a heritage area, take part in mainstream local issues. Mention it in your newsletter, on the noticeboard, or on the 'What's New' or blog section of your website.

Host local meetings. If there are times during the week when you've got empty space, this is when local meetings can take place on your premises. They may not buy more than a coffee or beer, but the appreciation will come back in many other ways. Hint: if you've got free WiFi available, you suddenly become a much more desirable location. Desirable is good.

List local events. An up-to-date local diary on your website is easy to organise and keep fresh, focused on your events and those that are important to customers. See how to do it easily using online calendar services. This is another excellent opportunity that most businesses ignore.

Show off the locals. Keep your photo gallery up to date with pictures of happy customers and local events - on the wall or the website. Encourage people to email or SMS photos when they go travelling.

Mention local employment. You hire local workers, and many staff live nearby - it's another way to show you're embedded into the community. Local senior schools are keen to place their hospitality students - are you friends?

List all the local areas on your website. It's very important for improving website ranking. Talk about the surrounding suburbs and towns specifically by name so an online search will connect your bar/restaurant/hotel with that location. Use common abbreviations if they're used eg Washington and DC. When you're deciding on the location keywords, think about how locals would search - what terms do they use? They would search for something like: 'Italian restaurant in Pillsbury' or 'pub in Glebe'. Hint: Have your full street address at the bottom of each page and on the side navigation bar. Include a phone number with the area code. This gives search engines the information they need to pinpoint your location.

Makes sure you're on local directory listings. No accident that it's called Google Local or Yahoo Local - if you beef up your free listing, all your details will come up when people search online. Here's a longer list of US Listing Sites and Australian Sites. Yes, we nag about this, but most businesses don't use these great services.

Profitable Hospitality offers management and cost-control systems (Manuals & CD-ROMs) for restaurants, cafes, hotels, bars and clubs. The systems are based on the extensive consulting and operating experience of CEO Ken Burgin, and enable busy owners and managers to set up complete operating and cost-control systems in minutes, not months. Profitable Hospitality also runs regular management training workshops in the areas of kitchen profit & efficiency, restaurant marketing and functions management. A free monthly e-newsletter keeps you up to date on the latest industry management issues. www.profitablehospitality.com.

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