

7 social media tools for restaurants

How restaurants can use top social media sites to boost marketing efforts

July 11, 2012 | By [Ron Ruggless](#)

Social media has become the focal point in many restaurant marketing efforts, but the battlefield for consumer awareness has become clouded with a growing number of platforms and a limited amount of resources.

Foodservice companies remain intent on getting their message heard, however. In the NRN Restaurant Operators Survey released in January executives said they planned to increase marketing spending this year and that social media would get the lion's share of marketing efforts. About [47 percent of survey respondents](#) said social media was the most important part of their 2012 marketing campaigns.

And consumers are poised to accept marketing messages delivered via social media, according to the National Restaurant Association's 2012 Restaurant Industry Forecast. Released in February, the study revealed that nearly one third of consumers said they would be likely to sign up as a follower on Facebook or Twitter if a restaurant made its specials available on those platforms.

The NRA forecast also found that more than nine out of 10 operators said their restaurant will likely be using Facebook in the next year or two, with use of Twitter and smartphone applications expected to rise as well.

To make it easier to sort through the growing number of social media offerings, Nation's Restaurant News identifies some of the most useful social media sites for marketing and gives tips on how restaurants can use them.

Facebook

Facebook continues to be the platinum standard for social media, providing a platform for its 900 million users to share information about themselves and people and places they like. A few more women (58 percent) engage on Facebook than men (42 percent). Restaurateurs, big and small, can create a page to connect with fans of the brand and potential customers and even conduct polls and contests.



For restaurants:

- Include photographs to draw attention to the posts (250 million photos are uploaded daily to Facebook).
- Engage the brand community by asking questions or seeking input on new menu items.
- Offer promotions, and even ordering, through special tools.
- Learn more about your brand’s fans with Facebook Insights data.

More:

- [How restaurants can leverage the new Facebook Timeline format](#)
- [Take a look at Starbucks’ Facebook Timeline](#)

Twitter

This microblogging platform, with posted messages limited to 140 characters, has more than 470 million accounts registered and sees more than 175 million tweets a day. In June 2012, the service began to offer “expanded tweets,” which provide previews of content, images and videos from its partner sites. Search functions for the tool are also becoming more robust.



Users access Twitter through the Twitter.com website (64 percent), through smartphone applications (16 percent), and through a Twitter client (10 percent) like TweetDeck, HootSuite or Seesmic.

For restaurants:

- Interesting content gets retweeted, as does humor.
- By using a Twitter client that allows for monitoring a brand name or handle, restaurants can easily see compliments and complaints and either address the problem or show the user appreciation.

More:

- [Morton’s answers fan’s Twitter request](#)
- [Take a look at McDonald’s on Twitter](#)

Foursquare

The geolocation-based networking platform for smartphones was updated in June with more robust “Explore” functions that are based on the habits and sentiments of the user’s connected friends. The revised



app now allows and highlights user comments, tips and suggestions, and was redesigned with more emphasis on users' photographs. Foursquare passed 20 million users in April 2012.

For restaurants:

- Because users check-in when they are near a location, restaurants can use the app to provide special offers. Chili's Grill & Bar has offered free chips and salsa for check-ins, and Zoes Kitchen has offered 10-percent discounts.
- Operators can also devote special attention to frequent users, such as the most-checked-in "mayors," by offering discounts or free items.

Instagram

The social photo-sharing site, which gives smartphone users a variety of filters to make their pictures look even more professional, was purchased earlier this year for \$1 billion by Facebook. Introduced in 2010 for the iPhone and expanded in April 2012 to the Android platform, Instagram has about 40 million users who upload about 58 photos every second.



For restaurants:

- Restaurant operators can post photographs of daily specials.
- Photographs of in-store promotions based around special holidays and events can be posted and shared by both restaurants and customers as they are planned or happening.

More: [How restaurants can make the most of Instagram](#)

Pinterest

Appealing to ease and simplicity, Pinterest is akin to a bulletin board shared with friends and acquaintances. The site, which was introduced in 2010, skyrocketed to more than 12 million monthly unique visitors early this year.



The minimalism of posting photos and links to photos makes the interface simple to use both through a web browser toolbar or a mobile app. The demographics are heavily weighted toward women; about 97 percent of the site's "likes" from Facebook come from women.

Food is the No. 1 content category on Pinterest, according to a Citigroup Global Markets study released in July 2012, making it a logical platform for restaurants.

Taco Bell this summer has hired an intern for Pinterest, which the company calls a "Pintern," who is tasked with finding interesting photos from various Taco Bell units and posting them on Pinterest. And Pizza Hut debuted its Pinterest board in early July 2012.

For restaurants:

- Pinterest is an ideal way to highlight appealing photography from a restaurant's blog or website.
- Operators large and small can use Pinterest without much time invested.
- Restaurant brands with many units should hire a dedicated staff member. Taco Bell this summer has hired an intern for Pinterest, which the company calls a "Pintern," devoted to getting interesting photos from various units and posting them on Pinterest.

Google+

Search-engine giant Google launched the Google+ social network in June 2011, and it is expected to hit 400 million users by the end of 2012. The site has a much different user demographic than Pinterest; about 67 percent of its users are male.



The interface is similar to Facebook, but users (who must sign up for a Gmail account) organize contacts in "circles," allowing messages to go to specific groups of like-minded contacts rather than broadcasting to the entire following. And because Google owns the brand it provides opportunities for postings to increase search engine optimization.

For burger brands that have a large following among young men, Google+ is ideal. Savvy users of the platform include Hardee's and Carl's Jr., which are known for their attractive female spokesmodels and provide provocative imagery on the Google+ stream.

Google acquired Zagat late last year. This year, Google announced the roll out of Google+ Local, a location-based tool that combines previous Google+ features, such as sharing content with circles, along with Zagat scores and recommendations from fellow Google+ users.

For restaurants:

- Google Places is now Google+ Local. Check to make sure your restaurant is up-to-date on the new features and how they affect your restaurant.
- Independent restaurants should try to maximize the new localized search and reviews.
- [Learn more about Google+ Local](#) (Google)

YouTube

Restaurant chains have found YouTube as an important communication platform. YouTube is the third most-visited site after Google (No. 1) and Facebook (No. 2), according to Alexa, a web information company. And it's the world's second largest search engine after parent company Google, which bought the platform in 2006 for \$1.65 billion.



The viral nature of YouTube and its ability to embed videos across many platforms has led even foodservice chains to springboard off popular topics, such as Dallas-based Red Mango's recent introduction of a Honey Badger flavor that was marketed through social media.

YouTube draws more than two billion views a day, and about 44 percent of YouTube users are between ages 12 and 34.

For restaurants:

- Restaurant companies can post their television commercials to get more viewers.
- The site's search functions are used intensely, so brand names and celebrity spokespeople can be highlighted.
- Behind-the-scenes videos of new store construction or new design can be posted.
- Keep the videos brief. Average YouTube video duration is 2 minutes and 46.17 seconds.
- Executives can provide crisis communication videos, such as how Taco Bell responded to a lawsuit, later dropped, over its meat content.

Contact Ron Ruggless at Ronald.Ruggless@Penton.com

Follow him on Twitter: [@RonRuggless](https://twitter.com/RonRuggless)

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