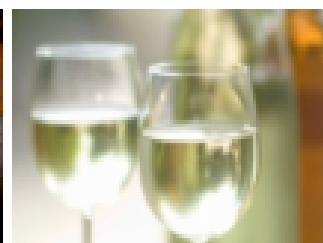
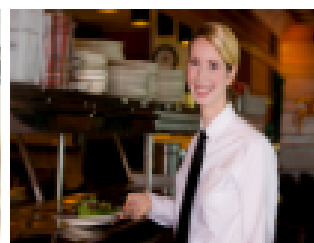


Practical ideas for restaurateurs to implement today to
drive up your spend per head and get your customers
back again

"How To Boost Sales & Get More Repeat Bookings For Your Restaurant"

**77 tips, tools and simple strategies
to apply today**

Caroline Cooper



Introduction

So, you want to learn the strategies and techniques you can apply on a day-to-day basis to drive up customers' spend per head and get them making repeat bookings. As you read through this report I'm certain you'll read of things that aren't new to you. And you'll read of things that you are already doing, or have tried in the past. The thing is that it's often little things that make a big difference, so unless you are doing everything listed here, there'll be some ideas you can implement. And even if you've tried them before, if it was a while ago, why not have another go, but with a different theme.

The good news is there are only three things you need to do to increase sales. These are:

1. Increase the number of customers
2. Increase the average sale per customer
3. Increase the numbers of times customers return and buy again

Here we are going to focus on 2 & 3: how to increase spend per head, and how to get existing customers and their friends back time and again. Why have I started here, and not with increasing the number of customers? Well it is considerably easier to increase business through existing customers who already know you, and hopefully trust you, than it is to win business from new customers who don't have first hand experience of who you are, and what you offer. Often the best way to reach these people is through your existing customers, so we'll look at some of the ways to encourage this.

Of course it's unwise to assume once you've got your customers through the door that your job is done, far from it! We all want to increase the lifetime value of each customer, to gain the maximum return on all your efforts to win them in the first place. But how to do this in a way that does not seem exploitive, and greedy?

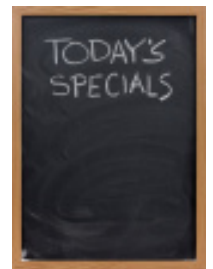
1. Be clear on who is your **target market**. Who is your perfect customer? Restaurants that try to attract anyone, end up satisfying no one. Is your menu, ambiance, hours, location aimed at families, businesses, parties, romantic candle lit dinners, locals, holiday makers,....? What are their needs, likes, dislikes, their priorities, what do they value when they dine or drink with you? Everything you do to market your restaurant needs to be done with **your** perfect customer in mind.
2. **Define your identity**. Decide what style of dining works best for you and your target market, and in your surroundings. What is it that existing customers come for - are you traditionally English or ethnic; casual or more formal? Once you have defined it, stick to it.
3. **Assess your competition**. Get out there and see for yourself what others are doing that either compete for the same audience or identifies a gap. If other restaurants in your town or street, or area are offering a similar menu, the same deals, or identical style of service, you need to change something that gives you the edge. Even if you were doing it first and they've copied you, what can you now do to make what **you** do different, but still being true to your identity?
4. Review your **whole customer journey** starting with bookings. How easy is it to make a **table reservation**? If you aren't open during the day does your answer phone say when you'll be able to get back to them, or when you are open to take bookings - not everyone likes to leave messages.
5. **Make your restaurant inviting**. Check how easily it is for your customers to park at your busiest times. Does the exterior look inviting: well maintained, well lit, menu displayed, clean and tidy? If your back door and bin area are visible from the car park, what does this area say about your attention to detail and your hygiene standards? All these have an impact on the customer and how they feel at the point they start spending money in your restaurant.
6. What's the first thing your customers see as they enter the restaurant? A welcoming smiling face, and an offer to take their coat, or a cluttered cloakroom, out of date signage, and your chef having a quick fag break? Ensure your customers get a **first class welcome** the minute they arrive. First impressions do last, and have a dramatic impact on their willingness to spend.
7. Dedicate a comfy seating or lounge area near the bar area (assuming you have one of course) to encourage **pre dinner drinks**. And factor time in for this when taking bookings. Invite diners to this area for coffee to make it more of an occasion than taking it at their table. You are more likely to prompt additional drinks sales as a result.



8. Make **suggestions** and offer **samples** at the bar to encourage people to try something new - not just your expensive wines, but any new drinks, cocktails or guest beers.
9. Focus your menu on **local produce** - this appeals to locals and visitors to the region alike. Don't limit this to food - are there locally produced wines, beers, cider, soft drinks, snacks. Better still, **grow your own** vegetables, fruit or as a very minimum your own herbs. Then promote this on marketing, on your menus and even encourage customers to sit in the garden amongst your homegrown produce, whilst they enjoy their pre meal drinks.
10. **Promote sustainability** - talk to suppliers - your fishmonger for example - about less well-known, but equally delicious alternatives, and use the Red Tractor logo for other ingredients where applicable. Including the dish's provenance can add to the perceived value of the dish,
11. Keep your **menu simple**, and well within the capabilities of your chef(s), equipment and front of house staff. A smaller range of dishes prepared and served well will always fare better than an extensive menu that stretches skills and resources to the limit, and inevitably results in lower stock turnover and higher wastage.
12. **Keep a record** of what sells well with different menu mixes and at different times of the day, and year, and plan your menu accordingly. What works well for a lunchtime dish in summer may be totally inappropriate for dinner in autumn and vice versa. If you **offer two different menus** for bar meals and restaurant do people ask to mix and match.
13. **Keep an eye on the market and current trends**, so you know ahead of your customers what's in and what's old hat, and so you can adapt before your competition get in first. Keep up to date by visiting trade shows, reading the trade press, following other restaurants and chefs.
14. Use **descriptive language** on your promotional material, tariffs and menus. It doesn't have to be flowery language, but make things sound irresistible. Not just Roast Chicken with Sweet Potatoes, but 'Sussex farmed free-range chicken roasted with sweet potatoes and garnished with olive and fresh basil sauce' and to follow, instead of just Summer Pudding 'Jack's home made summer pudding made with refreshing plump English strawberries, redcurrants, blackcurrants and raspberries. Served with a generous portion of Cornish Clotted Cream'.



- 15.** Be prepared to **change your menu daily** or offer specials to take account of seasonal availability - giving you the best quality ingredients, with the best flavour and at the best possible price. Talk to your butcher, fishmonger and green grocer about availability and suitable substitutions for key ingredients when prices rise. Less traditional, and less expensive ingredients (e.g. cheaper cuts of meat) can sometimes give better flavour if cooked correctly and add to the novelty factor.
- 16.** **Feature different produce or different wine producing regions** each month to add interest and variety for frequent visitors and plan your menu accordingly. You can then find other related products to sell alongside.
- 17.** **Train your team how to upsell**, to recognise when it is appropriate to do so, and what items to sell. This needs confidence in their knowledge of the products on offer, and a good understanding about the customers' needs or how to ascertain these. Note: Up selling is not all about trying to sell the most expensive menu item. It's about selling the most **appropriate** one to meet the customer's needs and tastes.
- 18.** **Identify what to promote**; promoting your loss leaders is not a wise strategy! Ensure front of house staff understand the menu items that make the biggest margin, and where you have a particular dish you want to promote to encourage follow-up sales. Once you've decided what to promote **focus on this one item**, and avoid confusing your customers with conflicting or competing promotions on two or more similar items or offers.
- 19.** Consider the physical **position of a dish on the menu** or promotional blackboards. Items at the top and bottom will often outsell those 'lost' in the middle; so reserve these positions for your high profit items.
- 20.** **Update on site promotional information daily** to get customers attention. Advertise promotions in advance and promote today's specials. For example, let people know what's on the menu **before** they get into the restaurant; it could just be the dish that converts a casual customer at the bar into a restaurant diner. And let people see the dessert menu when they order so they have the anticipation of dessert (and leave some room!).
- 21.** Demonstrate and promote the fact if you can **cater for special diets and needs**. With the growing number of people with food allergies and intolerances to foods, you are missing out on a huge sector of the market if you don't.



- 22.** Identify what you can do to **add value** to attract attention, set you apart from the competition, and stimulate sales. Provide a free glass of champagne, canapés with pre dinner drinks, hand made chocolates with coffee, a recipe leaflet of one of the dishes they've ordered. Give people an incentive to try something new, buy something different, or make a return visit. Talk to your suppliers about their promotions and manufacturer incentives where you can pass on the benefits to your customers.
- 23.** **Offer other products**, which are unique to your restaurant that they can take home or share with others. Could you offer home grown or home made produce, branded condiments, celebration cakes, or hand made chocolates? Or specialist ingredients from the recipes you've provided. Anything with a high margin, novelty value or that adds that personal touch.
- 24.** **Provide something customers can't get elsewhere.** Be the only restaurant in town to make cocktails, have the best selection of wines by the glass, provide blankets for people who want to dine outside and make the most of the views or the winter sunshine - anything to be different.
- 25.** Allow customers to **'Try Before You Buy'** to encourage them to try something new or entice them away from another venue with no risk to them. Offer samples of beer or wines, hold taster evenings for your new menu, invite locals to try out your new cocktail list and experience what you offer first-hand, invite existing customers to bring a friend with them for free, invite local businesses to sample your buffet or party menu.
- 26.** Use a reputable wine merchant to help you with **your wine list**. Include some favourite grape varieties and well-known brands to provide a sense of familiarity and reassurance. You can still include some more unusual choices to complement your menu.
- 27.** Promote your existing or a new wine list by holding **wine tastings**. Talk to your wine merchant about partnering you - this builds goodwill for both of you. If you want to charge a nominal entrance fee to avoid freeloaders maybe make this a donation to a local charity, which is great for them and good PR for you. Combine this with a cellar tour - if you have a cellar, that is!
- 28.** Make the most of your wines, by making a recommendation next to each dish of the **wines that complement the dish**. If you have dessert wines, as a minimum do this with your dessert menu.



29. Run **one off 'impulse' promotions** or specials in response to media events, to take advantage of supplier deals, or make the best of seasonal produce. Promote via social media, e-mail and text.

30. **Sell gift vouchers** online or on site. Not only a sale, but a great way to introduce you to new customers. They're great for your cash flow too.

31. **Be flexible and give your customers choice.** This does not mean that you have to have 100 different menu items, but where can you offer different sized portions, or mix and match menus, a variety of glass sizes for wine by the glass, starters served as a main course, starters or desserts for sharing, etc. Yes, have systems and standards, but don't be bound by rules at the expense of customers' needs.



32. Ensure any promotional material is **visible and eye catching**. No point having it tucked away out of view! What are your high traffic areas - at the entrance, on the bar, restaurant tables? Table talkers don't have to be tacky; use quality images and finishes in line with your image.

33. Make sure your **promotional material conveys the right message** and is consistent with the dish or drink. Remember that much of what you are selling is based on the senses and emotion, so use these in your promotional material - a refreshing thirst quenching drink needs to conjure up the image of cool and crisp, whereas a hot dessert may need to imply homely, filling, warming.

34. **Become an 'expert'** in something that you are interested in, and attract the type of customers with whom you can build up a good rapport and a better prospect of repeat business. Stand out from other hotels. Host meetings or club/group dinners, and general social events; run educational weekends and breaks; invite topic experts, celebrities or people of specific interest or host quizzes and workshops.

35. Set up **Joint ventures** with other businesses or individuals to either share resources or help each other out. What other businesses have lists of people you would like to attract as customers? They might be suppliers, clubs or organisations, or other businesses that sell complimentary services, such as hotels and bars, theatres and cinemas, local attractions, exhibition and show venues, salons and specialist shops and boutiques - anywhere that attracts the same target audience.

36. **Collaborate with competitors.** What other restaurants may have complementary offers, or can you refer people to when you are full and vice versa. Recognise that your customers won't necessarily want to eat with you every time they eat out, so where do you recommend?

37. Recruit the right people to help you sell more. You can't do it alone, so choose your team wisely. Be clear about what you are looking for, and differentiate between minimum requirements and those skills that can be learnt. Whilst people can be taught how to take a reservation, how to serve wine, or how to clear tables; it is far more difficult to teach someone how to be welcoming, to use their initiative, or stay calm under pressure. And even more difficult to instil your values on people.

38. Involve back of house staff too. Your kitchen staff's receptiveness to customer tastes, and your kitchen porter's appearance, and everyone's attitude towards customer service as a whole will have a major impact on your customers' experience, their perception, their willingness to spend money, their likelihood of referring others and their prospect of returning.

39. Train your team in customer service; provide guidelines for staff to follow in specific situations. This gives your team confidence - which will be apparent to your customers - and provides consistency.

40. Give staff authority & skills to deal with issues. From your customers' perspective things will get dealt with more quickly, as staff don't need to find you or a manager. It gives your staff a sense of responsibility, which will normally be rewarded by better use of their initiative and taking responsibility in other areas too. Plus, it means you don't have to be there keeping an eye on things 24/7.



41. Ensure staff **understand everything you sell** so they become an ambassador for your business and are able to spot sales opportunities. The more they know about the wine list, the origin of your beef, special dietary options, the features of your function room, the better placed they are to make recommendations and make a sale. Ensure they are familiar with everything on the menu and on your website(s), including all updates, current offers, and promotions.

42. Conduct **daily menu briefings** and tasting before service so everyone knows what's available each day, what you want to promote, what's in short supply, and all the ingredients of each dish. Even if only one thing has changed from yesterday's menu, ensure this is communicated.

43. Encourage your team to take **the customer journey**, and see everything from a customer's perspective. The more of your services and items your staff are able to experience first-hand the better. Let staff be waited on in the restaurant, and taste everything on the menu. Then encourage them to make recommendations and suggestions to improve the products and service.

- 44. Teach staff the importance of timing.** Keeping an eye on the level of wine - ask if they would like another bottle too early and they may be tempted to spin it out - too late and they decide not to bother. Likewise desserts - too soon and they are too full, too late and they've gone off the idea or run out of time.
- 45. Train staff to ask for feedback.** Face to face feedback will always win over a comments form or questionnaire. It needs to be something more than "*I hope you enjoyed your evening*" or "*is everything alright with your meal*". Train your staff to ask direct and specific questions, and when it's appropriate to ask.
- 46. Offer staff incentives** to motivate and encourage them to sell more. As well as sales training, ensure they understand your margins and how these are calculated, then give updates on how well you are performing towards these. This encourages ownership and puts them in a stronger position to come up with ideas that contribute to your margins. Be transparent with your staff about how your business works, your overheads and what needs to come out of your gross profit.
- 47. Be visible** in your restaurant, and talk to your customers. Get to know them personally - their likes and dislikes, their routine, their suggestions, their feedback, their network - all this builds rapport and trust, and makes it a lot easier to upsell and tailor your offers to your market. But recognise the difference between being friendly and over intrusive.
- 48. Always ask your customers for feedback first hand.** Talk to them during their meal, or once they have finished. Not just about the food, but their whole dining experience from booking to paying the bill. What do they think of pricing, portion sizes, variety, speed of service, attitude of staff, etc? Capture the good and the bad, then analyse it, learn from it and act on it - whether you agree with it or not.
- 49.** Don't let **the details** let you down - How often has a great meal been spoilt by a long wait for the bill or to take payment? And that last visit to the ladies or gents on the way out - what does the state of the toilets at the end of a busy evening say about your attention to detail or hygiene standards?
- 50. Do something exceptional.** Think of the things that are of high value to your customers but low cost to you so you can give added value. Do something unexpected, something they will remember once they get home when people ask how was their lunch or their evening. Give people a real reason to talk about you.



- 51. Ask for referrals** - it's a great way to build your customer base. The person making the referral has already experienced what you offer and will do the selling for you. Making referrals builds loyalty as well as bringing in potential new business. Make this easy by creating a **simple referral form**, which you include with the guest's bill, and make this prominent.
- 52. Reward customers** who give you contact details of others. As an absolute minimum, ensure that you thank anyone who makes referrals to encourage them to continue to do so in future. Don't wait to see if this actually leads to business, as what you are looking to reward is the referral process. The more referrals you have the greater the likelihood of gaining new customers.
- 53. Give customers a reason to return** by offering exclusive promotions and vouchers for a return visit. These could be transferable for them to pass to friends or colleagues. Impose a limited time period to prompt action.
- 54. Promote forthcoming events** so customers see what you've got coming up in the future - either to prompt a return visit or passing the details onto friends or colleagues. Use flyers or leaflets, which people can take away as a reminder, or pass on to others
- 55. Send thank you notes** (not just a survey!) to all your diners, within a few days of their visit. Great for building rapport, and even if they haven't picked up a business card at the time of the visit; they'll now have your contact details handy for future bookings.
- 56. Build a list** of existing customers (and prospects). Train staff to capture the contact details of anyone who enquires. Collect any information that would help you segment your customers, e.g. interests or hobbies. Record birthdays and anniversaries, dates of booking, dates of visit, to time your offers. Note source of initial contact (e.g. via website, advert in local paper, travel agent, etc) what newspaper and/or magazines they read on a regular basis, and so on so you know how to reach them.
- 57. Keep in constant contact**, to maintain your relationship; remind your customers you are still there. Let them know about promotions, seasonal events and any other newsworthy information relevant to your niche. By keeping you in their mind they are more likely to come back or refer you to friends and colleagues.
Note: Always get permission to e-mail, and include opt out options.



58. Write about what interests your customers. Adopt different themes to maintain that level of interest. Let them know what others think of you; when you've been in the media, any awards you've won, testimonials from VIP's. Recommend places to go or do whilst in the area to make a whole day out or an event of their visit. Give your own account of visits to these places with photographs. Ask your head chef to write something about dishes on the menu with a recipe. Ask your customers to share some of their experiences of their visits to the area. All of these things remind customers of what you have to offer.

59. Use direct mail. Don't stop at e-mails - this is the least you can do. Sending letters, flyers and post cards provide a physical piece of paper in front of someone, which has longevity, and can be referred back to when the time is right. Postcards are more eye catching than a letter, and more convenient to file (or better still stick on a notice board or the fridge door) than a brochure or leaflet.

60. Make people want to open and read your mail by writing compelling subject lines and eye-catching envelopes. Use a variety of formats to appeal to different people. A handwritten envelope these days will always get attention. And if sending e-mails, make it clear who the e-mail has come from to avoid suspicion and landing straight in their spam folder, or being automatically deleted.



61. Use fax, telephone, text, too, as a follow up to other mediums; these are a great way to promote last minute offers or to remind people when an offer is about to expire. But remember to always have permission to contact people these ways.

62. Keep your website up-to-date. Promotions that are out of date or events that have already passed are not only unhelpful but make it look as if you don't care. Include forthcoming events, your menu (or sample menus if your menu changes daily), promotions, Christmas function menus, etc

63. Maintain in house control of your website. Going through a web designer every time you want to make a change or an addition can be a chore (as well as adding additional cost), so ensure you (or someone in your team) are able to update the content easily in-house. This flexibility allows you to add local events, last minute promotions, update availability, travel bulletins, seasonal messages, and so on. If your current website doesn't allow you to do this - seriously consider getting a new one (it will pay for itself in time saved and the opportunities it gives you very quickly).

64. Target your promotions to specific customer profiles. Then ensure anything you send is targeted and personalised to that target audience. Don't just tell them about it once, build up a bit of suspense - a sort of drum roll to the launch of a promotion, new menu, and special events. Then once it's launched send more details, giving updates of how it's going, to let them know what they're missing.



65. Make use of **social media** sites such as Facebook, Blogs or Twitter, according to your customer profile, to continue to build your profile and notify customers of promotions or special events.

66. Get your name in the media to remind your existing customers and rekindle their interest in you. Think from the editor's perspective; what is going to make a compelling and newsworthy article, and one which his or her readers will be interested in? Talk to the media about the type of stories or articles they want more of. Or write a letter to the editor - something topical or respond to a previous article. And invite the media to your events. Even if they don't attend the event itself it may present an opportunity for you to be interviewed. Then post clippings on your website, to add to your credibility and reputation.

67. Get creative with your promotions; don't just copy what your competition is doing, as it won't stand out. Promotions need to stimulate activity; they need to give people an incentive to come and visit you so it needs to be exciting, worthwhile and enticing enough that your customers feel compelled to come back. Involve your team, and plan ahead.

68. Use price promotions sparingly. Slashing your prices to increase your patronage levels is not the answer to generating higher sales margins. Instead offer promotions for a limited period or on specific services to get attention.

Buy One, Get Second Half Price or Three for the Price of Two promotions still offer additional value, but leave you the flexibility to offer these only on certain items, at certain times, or to a specific target customer, whilst still selling other items at full price.



69. Help people celebrate. Use your list to check for birthdays and anniversaries. Send an invite or an exclusive offer or gift to redeem at the restaurant. Send your business users lunch menus, and make a note of their important dates to offer special deals for meetings, AGM, awards dinners, etc. And of course, use your own anniversaries as an excuse for an offer or promotion.

70. Run **regular special events** on certain days of the week or month - cookery classes (and invite partners to come after the class) cocktails night, monthly charity events, live music night, meal deal night.

71. **Create meal deals** by bundling a number of your items together, which offer exceptional value for money. Not just on menu items, but talk to suppliers and joint venture partners to create combined packages. The key is to make the offer excellent value for money, irresistible and prompt a booking.

72. **Create a sense of scarcity and urgency** to prompt an immediate booking. For example, limit your offer to the first 10 customers who book; state the maximum number of people you can accommodate for a particular event; let people know when you only have three tables left for a popular date. Impose a deadline on your offer or a deadline for booking. The shorter the time frames the better to prompt action.

73. **Reward your loyal customers**, by offering bonuses or exclusive deals, even a simple card, stamped each time they visit works. Make a point of contacting customers when they are nearing a reward level to encourage a visit. Give bonuses that are high value to your customers and with qualifying levels within their reach. But at the same time ensure the rewards level is such that it promotes sufficient business (and profit) for you to allow a reward that doesn't diminish your margin in one hit.



74. **Cost all your promotions** before launching to make sure you know your breakeven point. A 20% reduction in your selling price on a 30% margin equates to a 66% drop in profit margin, and a 40% reduction in selling price @ 30% margin means a **10% loss** on each sale. You must know your numbers!

75. **Make a plan.** Trying to do everything without some kind of structure or objectives in place is likely to lead to frustration, wasted time and wasted money. Devise a strategy to promote your sales and get repeat business. Have clear objectives. Is it part of a longer term marketing strategy (remember the lifetime value of each customer), or does it need to be profitable in its own right. They don't have to be costly. Have you an oversupply of stock; can you purchase a product when in season for a very reasonable price; can your suppliers or Joint Venture partners donate towards your promotion, if they are set to gain from it? Then ensure you have the infrastructure in place to support the promotion.

76. Delegate or Outsource if you don't have the time or the expertise to do everything yourself. If your time is worth £100 per hour to the business, and you can find someone who can do the task for £17 per hour, or even £70 per hour, and in less time, then get them to do it. If you don't have the expertise in our own team look externally for someone who has. Chances are they will not only do it in less time, but if they have the right experience they will probably give you ideas on how to maximise your return on investment.

77. Test & track everything. Don't throw away your hard earned profits on marketing, promotions or training that does not deliver. You must know what works and what doesn't (and do more of the former!).



Summary

None of these ideas will have any impact on your sales or profit unless you take action! So make a plan today. What can you action straight away?

We've focused here on 2 aspects of increasing sales: increasing the average sale per customer, and increasing the number of times customers return and buy again.

If you increase either of these by 10% you will get a 10% increase in income.

But look what happens if you increase each of these, plus the number of customers by 10% i.e. **all three** by 10%.....

This would equate to a **massive 33.1% increase** across the board, opposed to just 10% if you were to only focus on the number of customers.

Whilst working with only one of the actions only gives you linear growth; looking at all 3 simultaneously can give you exponential growth.

And assuming your fixed costs stay the same and that variable costs go up proportionately this can have a **massive impact on your profit margins**.

So, what are you waiting for? Start today.

Make a plan and take some action. **Now.**

About Caroline Cooper



Caroline is the founder of Zeal Coaching, which specialises in helping independently run hotels, conference centres, spas and restaurants to be more successful and profitable.

Caroline has over 26 years' experience in the hospitality industry and is supported by an equally experienced team of professionals who between them are able to coach, advise and mentor on all aspects of running a highly profitable hospitality business. Her team includes specialists in strategic & business planning, finance, marketing, website design, operational management, food production & service, health & safety.

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