

Seasonal Promotions

It's important not to get complacent about your customers and what you offer. Whilst consistency in standards is key and some familiarity in your offer will keep customers happy, they will soon grow bored if you never do anything different, and only give them the same thing day in day out. Every hotel or restaurant wants to keep its offer fresh and one way to do this is to run seasonal promotions or themes, which run along side your core offer.

Having a theme will provide something of interest, but turning this into a promotion will add value. And anything that adds value will attract attention and stimulate sales providing people know about it. Give people an incentive to try you out or make a return visit and set you apart from the competition. The aim of any promotion to be to make something so irresistible to your customers they would be mad not to take up your offer.

Seasonal offers have a number of benefits:

- It's an opportunity to attract attention and bring in new business
- Providing you've done your sums they can bring in additional revenue
- It can make use of seasonal produce to increase margins
- Your regular customers have a reason to look you up if they know you constantly review your offer
- It gives you a reason to get in touch with existing customers, which keeps you in mind
- It motivates and stimulates staff

Traditional Holidays and Celebrations

Running promotions at times when there is a lot of demand is an obvious option, but inevitably there's a lot of competition too. The key with these is to plan ahead. Because your customers know that lots of other places will be offering other deals you need to ensure there is a real incentive to book with you and to book early.

You need to be offering something different than your competition - what will make your offer stand out above the rest? What will be attractive to your target audience?

- Easter for the family market - include Children's Easter Egg hunt, and other fun family activities
- Christmas - decide if your audience want the traditional fare or do you do an alternative Christmas lunch or parties for those who really want to get away from the norm

- Can you help customers with their Christmas preparations - party organisers get a free turkey or hamper, case of wine or gift voucher for your local butcher or wine merchant to make their own choice (as a joint venture with your suppliers)
- Mothers' day include a very special personalised gift for Mum that others can't copy
- Father's Day with some activity or entertainment suitable for Dad (suitable for their age group/interests) which has to be pre booked - to prompt advance bookings

Monthly or seasonal themes

A changing monthly theme is a good way to ensure a continual update of new ideas, providing it is planned well, and does not try to compete with other holidays and festivals.

Examples might include:

- Featured wine region (or food region) of the month - maybe offering a discount off featured wines or dishes from the region - ask your wine merchant or suppliers to sponsor this!
- Feature different seasonal ingredients of the month - e.g. make a point of dishes including locally grown asparagus in June, Strawberries in July, Raspberries in August, Chilli dishes in September and so on.
- What is happening in nature in your part of the world that could attract visitors: bird or animal migrations, autumn colours, wild flower displays
- Monthly film nights to celebrate 10, 20, 30 years since the release of some of the all time classics

Annual events

Thinking of your target audience, what are the significant annual events

- Consider the academic calendar:
 - End of exams or exam results day celebrations, with an offer that will appeal to teenagers as well as their parents
 - Summer holidays - what activities and entertainment can you include for even the wettest summer's day (organised on site or as a joint venture with local venues)
 - Back to school theme (for grown ups) featuring some old time favourites such as steak and kidney pudding, spotted dick and custard, baked rice pudding
 - If you are in a university town, something for parents during freshers' week
- What is happening in the sporting calendar (remembering what sports are likely to be of interest to your customers, not just what you enjoy!). Just reflecting over the last two months - The Grand National, The Boat Race, London Marathon, start of the F1 Grand

Prix season, Henley Regatta; all providing a potential theme to stage something different.

- Base your promotion around unusual seasonal or special events happening locally - pick on something your competitors won't be doing too. Talk to local attractions and businesses to see what they are celebrating that you can piggy back, and form a joint venture.

Anniversaries, national and international days and holidays

Consider your local community, your staff and where your customers come from. Are there special dates on the calendar that lend themselves as an excuse to celebrate? Unlike the main holidays and seasonal events such as Christmas and Easter, which will have a lot of competition, one off days and holidays are a good way to boost sales for a specific day or two during otherwise quiet periods. Everyone promotes Valentine's Day, Mothers' Day, and Fathers' Day. Be different, and celebrate some more unusual dates.

- Saints days: St Patrick's Day, St Georges Day
- Mid summer's day, longest day, first day of spring
- If you have a high number of overseas visitors (or staff) are there dates they like to celebrate: Independence Day, Bastille Day, Chinese New Year. Even if you don't, it's an excuse to do something different that might grab the attention of your target audience
- On this day in history: Guy Fawkes' Night, VE Day, first man on the moon, coronation, celebrity birthday, or anniversary of their death of a notable figure (musicians, inventors, artists, can make a good theme)
- Look up the history of your own town, village, region or building. Are there any legends, famous people or interesting events synonymous with the area which you could celebrate
- Celebrate important dates on the hotel's or restaurant's calendar: The anniversary of the hotel opening, a refurbishment, a new arrival to the team, even your birthday is an 'excuse' to offer something special

Celebrate in style

With a bit of imagination you can base a whole themed event around the day with special menus, fancy dress, memorabilia and related activities. Invite locals too to join in the celebrations, and involve your staff in the preparations - these can be fun events to run and a good way of gaining staff buy in.

Getting inspiration

It's not always easy to come up with new ideas, so here are some ways you might get some inspiration

- Buy a diary that features all the national and international holidays and festivals
- Talk to your team, who knows of local events and history, what national and international events from other countries to use as a theme, capitalise on their special interests if relevant
- Look to nature: If your customers are interested in the outdoors use this as a point of interest
- Check on seasonal availability of foods: talk to your suppliers particularly your green grocer, butcher and fishmonger. Are they planning any promotions you can pass on to your customers
- Identify what periodicals your customers read and buy these to see what are the latest hot topics
- Talk to local attractions, tourist offices, schools and businesses to see what they are planning
- Get to know your customers: what are the events they look forward to, or want to forget by drowning their sorrows?

4 things to remember

Seasonal promotions could be based on any of the above, but whatever you decide to do remember:

- Focus on what will be of interest to your target audience
- Draw up a schedule in advance so you can ensure variety with your themes and what's on offer, and to avoid two or more events competing with one another
- Make your offer different so it stands out from the competition
- Do your sums first to ensure profit projections are realistic

For help with planning, costing and running profitable promotions go to <http://www.zealcoaching.com/products-resources/promotion-programme/>