

Digital food focus

The benefits of digital marketing tools for restaurant competitive advantage

Marketing for restaurants has gone through a fundamental shift towards digitalization over the last decade. In order to reach bigger audiences and build larger loyal followings, restaurants have looked to the power of digital marketing over more traditional forms of advertising. Social media and the prevalence of e-word of mouth, and customer review platforms has created a new metric by which restaurants are now measured. Customers are being more discerning, choosing to look for places they want to eat based on a number of categories, rather than sticking with what they know, or what is closest. This has meant that restaurants of all sizes have had to adapt their marketing strategy, fighting more cleverly and harder for customers. This has driven restaurants in the UK and India to reach out to digital marketing experts, rather than continuing to do their own marketing in house. This is, in part, due to the complexity of digital markets, but also down to the highly competitive nature of the smaller restaurant industry.

In the UK, there is an obvious preference in restaurant customers to favor the experience over and above all other criteria when choosing where to eat. Small establishments are now having to promote themselves based on the whole package that they can offer, and many are finding that the price of dishes is no longer a deciding factor for potential customers. Furthermore, in the UK, restaurants are facing the challenge of creating a brand identity, with which to encourage patrons to remain loyal and return multiple times. With the prevalence of competitors in the restaurant industry, customer loyalty is becoming a key facet of gaining competitive advantage. These dual focuses – on maximum reach to demonstrate the experience they can offer, and the need to create a brand to encourage a loyal following – are causing restaurants to have to commit significant resources to their digital marketing.

In India, there is a similar picture emerging, with restaurants having to fight hard in an overcrowded market. There is a significant boom in the disposable wealth of Indians in urban centers due to the growing Indian economy, meaning there are more potential customers to entice. Yet the prevailing demand of customers of Indian restaurants is value for money. The UK's focus on experiences has not yet landed with the local customers of restaurants in India. Whilst those restaurants in India which focus on tourists are having to compete with the West's focus on the culinary experience, the rest are not. Yet the restaurants catering for local communities are still turning to digital marketing in order to win over as much custom as they can. Yet both in the UK and India, there is a marked lack of technological skillsets, meaning most restaurant owners are not able to do their own digital marketing.

Digital marketing benefits

The work of [Dabas et al. \(2021\)](#) has highlighted the benefits of digital marketing for restaurant owners in the UK and India. Due to encompassing both social media marketing (SMM) and search engine marketing (SEM), it is able to provide a superior web presence for restaurants, as well as adopting targeted advertising for potential customers based on

Marketing for restaurants has gone through a fundamental shift towards digitalization over the last decade.

their browsing habits. This can create a better level of interaction between customer and restaurant, which in turn creates better data for restaurants to use for longer-term planning. The power of data is becoming more apparent to restaurants, and for those that can afford to hire the right people, data analysis can point to growing market trends and customer demands, giving them a competitive advantage, and a significant return on investment (ROI).

By adopting a more analytical approach to engaging and targeting customers, restaurants can better benefit from digital marketing. There are three phases to this, as identified by [Dabas et al. \(2021\)](#):

1. the creation of a clear vision and understanding of the market orientation of the restaurant, based on data from target markets, identifying a unique selling point, through data mining and analysis of customers;
2. an in-depth understanding of customer behavior, including past habits, trends, and preferences of restaurants is required in order to better align the restaurant to meet those, and market appropriately; and
3. the test and learn phase, which looks to measure the impact of marketing efforts and allow agile refinement of processes until the results match the demands of the restaurant.

The COVID-19 pandemic has hit restaurants hard across the world. Digital marketing strategies are becoming more relevant than ever if any are going to survive the significant disruption already faced to the market. Those that have been able to adapt and utilize their online presence have so far gained a significant competitive advantage. Yet the pressures from the pandemic are not over, and restaurants in the UK and India will face tough challenges for a while to come.

Keywords:

Entrepreneurs,
Consumer,
Food and beverage,
Digital marketing,
Restaurant owners

Comment

The review is based on 'Adoption of digital marketing tools in independent businesses: experiences of restaurant entrepreneurs in India and the United Kingdom' by Swati Dabas, Savita Sharma, and Kamal Manaktola, *published in Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes*.

Reference

Dabas, S., Sharma, S. and Manaktola, K. (2021), "Adoption of digital marketing tools in independent businesses: experiences of restaurant entrepreneurs in India and the United Kingdom", *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes*, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/WHATT-09-2020-0120>

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website:
www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm
Or contact us for further details: permissions@emeraldinsight.com

Reproduced with permission of copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.