



## promoting

# f&b

By David Rothschild

We know we're getting close. Billboards for the casino appear one after another on the highway. Most of them are fairly generic: Loose Slots, Big Payouts — that kind of message. It's pretty difficult to pick up details on a sign when traveling at 75 mph, but I do spot one for a casino restaurant. I must be getting hungry. The sign proclaims something about "King crab specials all month." Nice to see the casino promoting one of its restaurants.

We arrive at the casino hotel, check in and head up to our room. I've never been in an elevator of a Las Vegas casino that wasn't plastered with signage for the property's restaurants. Here, the mouthwatering fine dining photos and try-our-buffet messages are conspicuously absent. Come to think of it, I rarely see promotions — for restaurants, events or players' cards — in the elevators of Native American casinos.

Once we've reached our room, I notice the key and sleeve are also without advertising. I'm so accustomed to seeing them used at non-casino hotels to promote restaurants, offering a discount or reduced-price bottle of wine when presented to the server. I guess I shouldn't be surprised that this opportunity has fallen through the cracks here; I don't recall having ever seen them used in this manner in tribal casinos I've visited.

After we freshen up, we head down to the gaming floor. I ask a beverage server how to find the restaurant that was featured on the billboard. Even with directions, we have difficulty locating it. The signage is hard to find and even harder to follow. We imagine how much business this place might be losing just because people don't know where it is!

While we're browsing our menus, I enquire about the King crab special. "Oops," replies our server, "That promotion ended two weeks ago. Sorry." We see outdated signage on most of our casino adventures. Billboards for concerts, promotions and special events are left up long after their expiration dates. In this case, our stay was off to a bad start because the casino didn't keep on top of their marketing efforts.

Casinos can no longer think of their restaurants as break-even amenities. They have to be revenue generators. Ask any food and beverage director. They'll tell you that the GM expects food and beverage to show a profit. Why, then, aren't we actively and aggressively promoting our restaurants, both within and outside of the property? We should all be taking our cues from the Las Vegas casinos. In 2008, gaming accounts for just 41 percent of casino revenues. The balance comes from rooms, food and beverage, and shopping.

In all of the major commercial gaming destinations, advertising and promotions for the restaurants are everywhere. They start with banners or posters in the parking lot. Prominent signage, with clear directions, continues in the entryway to the gaming floor and throughout the building. Special offers, packages and discounts are designed to sway guests to dine on-property.

Indian Country casinos are doing a better job than in the past of posting hours of operation and displaying menus at restaurant entries. In many cases, however, this could be done so much more effectively. Up-to-date, computer-generated menus with full-color photos, current offerings and pricing are a means to capture the attention — and the dining business — of the gaming public. Also, be sure your restaurant menus, hours, days of operation and pricing are accurate on your property's Web site. On numerous occasions, we've arrived at a casino only to find the restaurant we planned to visit wasn't open that day or was no longer serving lunch.

I really dislike a cluttered restaurant table. In addition to the requisite salt, pepper and

**Before they'll eat, you  
gotta get 'em in the seats**

**Want some great ideas on how to get them back to the gaming floor after they eat? Check out Raving Consulting's article, "Chow Down and Ante Up!" (Use the articles page link to access the PDF file)**

sugar, casino tabletops sport bulky keno paraphernalia. We also often find table tents — plastic sign holders with promotional inserts. On inspection, they're almost always food-splattered and covered with fingerprints. If you're going to use these materials, they need to be clean. And, again, they need to be timely. If you're advertising your Easter brunch on Father's Day, somebody's not doing their job.

### How do we get people into our restaurants to sample a new menu? Or after a redesign or re-conceptualization?

• **Use comment cards.** This gives diners a way to offer feedback on your changes and make additional recommendations. It also gives you and your marketing/promotions team a way to secure contact information such as e-mail addresses to use for future contact.

• **Make use of the local media.** And this means more than placing paid advertising. Invite local, regional and even national food and beverage writers to experience your new menu or the restaurant's new look. Provide them with media kits (either print or online) including menus, photos of your food, dining room and chef and fact sheets on all of your property's restaurants.

• **Tie in with a local charity to launch/relaunch a restaurant.** This is a terrific way to give back to your community while generating buzz about your foodservice facilities.

• **Send bite-sized menu samples from your restaurant onto the gaming floor.** Have your chef, sous chef or servers circulate throughout the casino with samples, copies of your new menu and maybe even a promotional piece such as a discount, free appetizer or dessert. Your gaming customers are a captive audience. They're the most likely source of business for your restaurants. Entice them with the aromas and tastes of your food!

• **Have your menus promote the other restaurants on property and think of other cross-promotional opportunities.** If your guests will be on property for a full day or more, they need to know what dining options are available to them. Train your staff to mention and suggest the other restaurants, too. And be sure to provide info to hotel guests when they check in.

• **Consider a room/dinner or room/golf/dinner package.** We recently suggested a client do a "Stay, Play, Chardonnay" package that included a room, golf and tickets to a wine dinner. If you're in a remote location, it's even more attractive for guests to stay over after an evening of wining and dining. And, speaking of wine... If your property serves alcohol, run a series of three or four wine (or beer) dinners and sell them as a package. Even a slight discount off the per-event price will likely generate "season ticket" sales to your dinners.

• **Even if you don't serve alcohol, putting together an affordable, fixed-price, multi-course dining option can boost sales.** Guests are more likely to indulge in appetizers and desserts when they're part of a "tasting" menu.

• **Play up the "locavore" angle by using and promoting local produce, meat, fish or wine.** List these ingredients prominently on your menus; have servers mention them in their "raps" when describing specials. If an item on your menu (pasties in the Midwest or chicken-fried steak in Oklahoma) is a regional specialty, point it out. Visitors from outside your area will want to give it a try.

• **When guests leave your restaurant with a take-out sack, make sure it has your restaurant logo.** What better way to promote a restaurant than to have diners carry something emblazoned with your restaurant's name throughout the property — and maybe to work for lunch the next day?

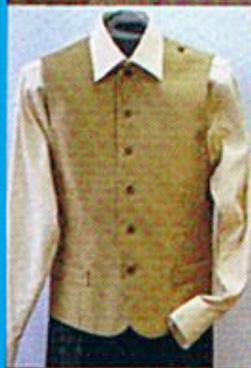
• **Institute a frequent diner program.** Your regular customers are your restaurant's bread and butter. Reward them for their loyalty and let them know how much you appreciate their business.

We can't rely solely on our marketing departments to promote our restaurants. It's the responsibility of everyone within our F&B department to help build and retain business. Enlisting assistance from other departments makes the effort even more effective. A casino employee who has experienced the food and service is more likely to recommend them to a guest. Consider comping meals as a reward for outstanding employees. Remember that your dealers, member services reps and cashiers can potentially become enthusiastic advocates of your restaurants.

Find ways to give everyone on your property a taste of what your F&B team offers. When the entire casino staff commits to familiarizing guests with the dining options on property and making suggestions based on their own experiences, both diners and restaurants benefit. **NAC**

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