



RAVING ON MARKETING



● by Toby O'Brien & Dennis Conrad

Chow Down and Ante Up!

Check out the article in this issue by David Rothschild on promoting food and beverage at your property. You'll find some outstanding tips for getting your customers into your restaurants. From the gaming marketing position, we thought we'd address the opposite side of this issue: Now that they've chowed down, how do you get your guests to ante up? Or in other words, if they are eating in your restaurants, how can you drive them to your gaming floor for some slot and table games action (or Bingo, keno, poker, or race and sports book for that matter)?

Even though many full-service resort properties in such jurisdictions as Las Vegas are finding that more of their revenues now come from F&B, entertainment and retail, the fact is that most Native American casino properties are still seeing a majority of their profits coming from the gaming side of the business. So, what kind of marketing strategies have been successful at introducing diners to gambling or enticing diners to try their luck on the gaming floor before they leave the casino?

Here are a dozen tactics you might find effective to boost your gaming revenues by preventing your guests from simply "eating and retreating:"

1. Leverage Players' Club benefits.

"If you like our food, you can build your own comp program by playing slots and table games, earning Club points, and using them to dine in our restaurants." Many casinos also offer special discounts if players pay for food with their Club points; playing means more points for more dining discounts.

2. Give them a chance to gamble in the café.

Many casual dining venues will provide a set-up for keno at the tables, including forms, crayons and rules. Guests can complete keno selections, and a runner places the bets and returns the winning pay-offs. Station Casinos in Las Vegas has offered a special keno game in their cafes that enables a diner to select two numbers, and if they both come up, the winner is entitled to a free meal during a future visit. (Encourages another visit plus gets the guest in the mood for a little gaming.)

3. Link your restaurant tables to slot machines.

One casino displayed a different slot machine

number on each table. If a jackpot was hit on the designated machine while diners were enjoying a meal, a bonus was offered to the dining guests (meals were comped or a cash bonus based on the jackpot amount was paid).

4. Give them a coupon.

Create a limited promotion (you want to avoid long-term entitlement issues) that offers diners some free slot play or table games match play when they present their restaurant receipt at the players' club.

5. Cross-sell your gaming product.

Display table tents and signage in restaurants, which lets guests know about casino floor promotions, new slots, and hotel stay-and-play packages. After perusing the menu and running out of small talk subjects, your guests may be looking for something to read while they eat. Might as well up-sell them while they are a captive audience!

6. Surprise diners with free food and play.

The owner of Macaroni Grill occasionally, with

no prior announcement, would comp all the meals at his restaurant on a Monday or Tuesday night. As news spread, guests started packing the restaurant on those nights, hoping their meals would be free, too. What if your restaurants did the same thing, but offered the cost of the meal in free play instead?

7. Serve food at slot machines and table games.

Barona Valley Ranch Resort and Casino has been extremely successful in creating a gaming floor dining program that enables players to order at their slot machines. Food is delivered on roll-up carts covered with tablecloths and sporting vases with flowers. Guests can eat and play at the same time, which means more time on device for the customer and, frequently, more gaming revenue for the property.

At Three Rivers Casino in Florence, Ore., the slot machine's screen simply says: "Hungry? Press your service light for a Slotside Menu." A beverage server comes by, takes the order and delivers the food (mostly finger foods). Posters on the casino floor advertise this service with the tag "Lucky You! Slotside Meals!" with pictures of the meal offerings and reasonable prices.

8. Gamble on your swimming pool.

Several Strip properties in Las Vegas have swim-up Blackjack tables. That way, guests can enjoy the pool, eat, drink and play. What better way is there to sell all your amenities and enhance gaming revenue at the same time?

9. Build value with competitors.

Cher-Ae Heights Casino and Bear River Casino in Northern California have experimented with co-op employee programs where employees can dine at the others' restaurants for 25 percent off. They've also tried cooperative customer promotions where Bear River Sunday brunch diners received a free shuttle ride and discounted Bingo at Cher-Ae Heights. You can be sure dining and gaming went hand-in-hand for many of the shared guests.

10. Link VIP food and gaming opportunities.

Whether high-end players are invited to a lobster-fest, a formal dinner, or a casual appetizer or dessert function, add a slot or Blackjack tournament and you get them onto your gaming floor. Include an option for accumulating players' club points toward gifts, and your guests have every reason to eat lots and then hit the slots.

11. Feed 'em late.

Keep your restaurants open late (2 a.m. works for T.G.I.F. in the Orleans Casino in Las Vegas), offer late-night and early-bird specials, and create some graveyard promotions that require play (earn 100 points and get a free gift or participate in our free Pre-Dawn Blackjack tourney). Most casino promotions don't benefit late-night players and there is definitely a following, especially for the Gen X & Y demographic and markets where there are round-the-clock businesses and other casinos whose employees work shifts and yearn for food and entertainment options.

12. Play up themes.

Carry your themed restaurant events to the gaming floor. Promoting Chinese New Year? After dinner at your Asian restaurant, guests might play slots for a hot seat drawing that rewards fortune cookies full of cash. Celebrating Cinco de Mayo at your Mexican grill? Let customers play slots and table games for a chance to break the piñata full of, that's right, cash — and maybe a trip to Cabo.

So, if your customers are likely to dine and dash... give them a reason to stay a while and share their discretionary cash. Ciao baby! **NAC**

Toby O'Brien is the vice president of marketing and client services for Raving Consulting Company, and Dennis Conrad is Raving's president and chief strategist. They can be reached at the Raving office at (702) 699-9798 (Toby in Las Vegas) or (775) 329-7864 (Dennis in Reno), or by e-mail at thebest@ravingconsulting.com. Visit www.ravingconsulting.com to learn more about Raving products, services and training programs.

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