

25 Ways to Build Same Store Sales

By Jim Sullivan CEO Sullivision.com Copyright 2008

We work in a chaotic industry whose success—or failure—is often determined by pennies earned or pennies lost on a store by store, period by period, and shift by shift basis. So I thought it may be helpful to share some quick and effective tips, tricks, and techniques to help build your bottom line over the next 90 days. The ideas are a mix of both the new and time-tested-and-true...but enough talk. You've got sales targets to hit and here's a quiver-full of revenue-building arrows.



1. Learn faster and train better than the competition does.
2. Improve service. Serve your team and guests better than anyone else, which will increase employee retention, customer traffic, and repeat business.
3. Market repeat visits to every customer through every transaction. The goal is not merely to “sell more” but to get the customer to come back more often. Getting a guest to return one more time in a month increases your sales 100% with that person.
4. Seek out, select, and retain servers, greeters and bartenders who are natural sales people, and prune those who are not. Stop paying people who make your job harder.
5. First teach servers WHY we must sell before you teach them what to sell or how to sell it. Show them how low the profit is in our business and reinforce it daily by pointing out that servers must sell as much as the kitchen can make and the kitchen must make as much as the servers can sell.
6. Training builds confidence. Confidence builds sales. Teach servers product knowledge daily via pre-shift meetings to help them feel comfortable and natural at suggesting items. It is better to know it and not need it than it is to need it and not know it.
7. Remove all internal obstacles to selling more. Make a list of potential obstacles by asking your managers to fill in this blank: “Our customer-facing team tends not to sell because...” Response may include things like: slow ticket times (work with the kitchen team to improve them), perceived POS slowness (practice order-entering with uncertain servers before it gets busy), or a variety of other possibilities including lack of inventory, faulty prep, operational and throughput bottlenecks during peak periods, kitchen issues, supplies, and employee attitudes all can slow down selling. Now that you know what they're citing as obstacles to sales, do what it takes training-wise to eliminate or minimize those obstacles.
8. Schedule smartly and staff properly so that servers have time to sell and time to connect with customers. Giving servers an 8-table section to save labor dollars may be “penny-wise” but it's certainly “pound-foolish.”

9. Train your hosts better. This is the first salesperson that guests meet when they enter a full-service restaurant. Don't overlook the importance of teaching them how to recommend drinks, desserts and specials while seating guests.
10. Set specific sales goals for each shift. First, agree at the weekly manager meeting what the gross sales goals are for each shift in the upcoming week. Then break the weekly goals down into the lowest common denominators for each salesperson for each shift: how many beverages, sides, desserts or combos does that translate to per server per shift? Share those goals with your team members in pre-shift meetings.
11. Make certain the team knows the difference between suggestive selling and upselling. Suggestive selling means recommending a beverage. Upselling means suggesting a "large" beverage.
12. Train the drive-through team and server team to upsell by using the classic "I say/you say?" training exercise. "Manny, I'm the customer and I say 'I'll have the #1 burger combo, medium size, with a Coke.' What would you say in return?" The answer you're looking for is "Would you like cheese on your burger combo?" Practice doesn't make perfect. Perfect practice makes perfect.
13. Institute fun and fair shift sales contests for servers and don't forget to include the kitchen team too.
14. Recognize and reinforce suggestive selling efforts as often as you can during the shift. Ditto for after the shift; as you're releasing each server let them know how they did goal-wise that shift.
15. Sell more Gift Cards year round. Don't wait for the Holidays. People celebrate special occasions (or have contests that could benefit from your gift cards) year round.
16. If you have a frequent diner program, drive business on slower days or dayparts by offering extra points for patronizing your restaurant then.
17. Connect to the community. Focus more on building positive relationships with key organizations, charities and businesses within your trading area. Think of it as social capital and factor it into your weekly marketing plans and efforts.
18. Reduce turnover. Profitability is arguably a simple formula of sales minus costs. Studies indicates that the cumulative cost of losing a current employee and then hiring and training a new team member to replace them is approximately \$6000 per employee. Return-on-retention should never be overlooked as a significant profitability matrix. Besides, retaining more high-performers practically guarantees higher sales.
19. Tim Kirkland, author of *The Renegade Server* (available at Amazon.com) reminds us that we should eliminate "Somethin' ta drink?" from a server's vocabulary and instead teach them to suggest specific beverages in mouth-watering detail as they would for food items.
20. Use a soft-selling approach for merchandising the menu. If the customer says "I'll have a margarita," perhaps the server could say "Have you ever tried our Cadillac Margarita, they're very popular."

21. Use the *Sullivan Nod*: Smile and nod your head slowly up and down as you make a suggestion. Example: if a guest says “I’ll have a Heineken draft,” the server or bartender should smile and say “Large??” (nod)
22. Managers should do 100% Table Visits. Seek out a stranger every shift and touch every table with hospitality.
23. Know and understand current, company-wide and historical sales trends. Use the data to set goals, project sales and beat targets.
24. Be better at local store marketing than the competition. Visit every business, school or organization within a 3 mile radius of your restaurant no less than monthly and find ways to either bring them in or cater to them. Assign your managers to “adopt” specific local businesses and have them design and share a marketing plan for each one.
25. Habitual consistency in food quality, cleanliness, service and suggestive selling brings customers back and keeps the till filled. Never get bored with these basics.

The best restaurants sell both great tasting food and memorable customer experiences. And they succeed through constant teaching, training, coaching and commitment, framed by never-ending care and maintenance. Yep, maintenance is not just for equipment, it also applies to systems, service, training and sales.

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