

# Feast On This: “Big Picture” Internet Marketing Will Fill Your Tables



## How to Reach ALL of Your Potential Customers Online

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**About the Authors:** Matt Creer and Mindi Cabe launched TwoTables Internet Marketing in Spring 2009. With over 10 years of combined experience, they specialize in marketing restaurant and restaurant management group websites.



## Restauteurs + Marketing = Oil + Vinegar

Conventional wisdom dictates that if you are a restaurateur, marketing is pretty far down on your list of favorite ways to spend your time. To you, marketing has most likely been an unfortunate byproduct of owning or managing your business. It can be tedious, mysterious, complicated – and it’s certainly not how you saw yourself spending your time as a restaurateur. As with so many things in life, however, in order to do what you love – cook – you have to acknowledge the necessity of embracing something you may not – marketing. After all, it’s hard to cook when people aren’t seated at your tables.

## The Evolution of the Internet as a Marketing Platform

The onset of the Internet marketplace came so hard and so fast it was easy to procrastinate in giving it the attention it deserves. But over a decade since its inception, it’s obvious the Internet will continue to be the largest single consumer resource in the world.

In a poll study conducted in July 2007, 89% of respondents said they have researched a restaurant online before setting foot inside its doors. Of those, 57% visited the restaurant’s website as part of the research process. (AIS Media, Inc. July 2007)

That was almost two years ago, and those percentages will surely be higher in July 2009. So it’s time to ask yourself: **Can you afford to continue to underutilize effective Internet marketing strategies?**

## Social Media and Email Marketing are Not Enough

As Internet marketing pertains to restaurants, these are currently two of the biggest buzzwords. Those of you who have already dipped your toes into the world of online promotion are most likely employing tactics particular to social networking and email marketing. Hype, unfortunately, is a consistent companion in the business, and many marketing companies jump on the “flavor of the day” bandwagon because they believe the hype will facilitate an easy sale. Indeed, the alacrity with which the buzzwords proliferate veritably ensures you’ve at least heard of their product and have likely learned a bit about it before they even contact you.

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Anyone who tells you social networking and email marketing *shouldn't* be included in your overall strategy is either unprofessional or ill-informed, and we're certainly not calling out legitimate companies who specialize in these areas. We are asserting that as stand-alone, exclusive techniques, they are not enough to effectively compete in today's Internet marketplace. In fact, nothing but the "big picture" is going to capture the entirety of your potential customer base, because people use the Internet to research in different ways.

### So What is Enough, Then? What is the "Big Picture"?

In order to be accessible **and** appealing to your audience, it's essential to embrace a long-term, comprehensive strategy that effectively utilizes a majority of the following tactics:

- 🕒 Search Engine Optimization
- 🕒 Local Search Optimization
- 🕒 Paid Advertising Campaigns
- 🕒 Online Directory Submissions
- 🕒 Social Media Networking
- 🕒 Email Marketing
- 🕒 Online Reputation Management
- 🕒 Compelling Website Content
- 🕒 Effective Website Analytics

A bit overwhelming, no? Don't worry – you don't have to leap headfirst into all of these techniques – as the old adage goes: "It's a marathon – not a sprint". The key to effective utilization is to implement each in a manner that complements and enhances the remaining.

In other words, you need to cover all of the bases, so that:

- #1 – Your website can be easily found
- #2 – Your website content entices visitors to your restaurant
- #3 – Your online reputation is well-managed
- #4 – You are proactively fostering relationships with current and potential diners
- #5 – You are utilizing reliable metrics to measure the Return on Investment for your marketing strategy

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Perhaps it can be explained most easily with an encompassing statement: Your objective is that no matter how or where people discover information about your restaurant on the Internet, they are impressed and intrigued by what they find.

## The Big Picture - Deconstructed

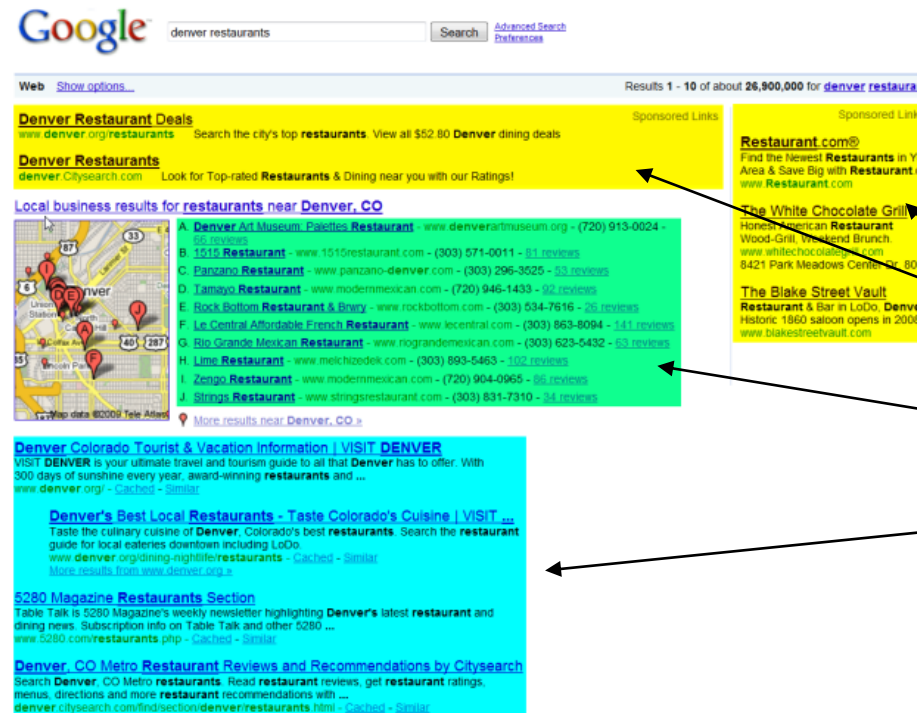
Really, the overall concept is just that simple. Here's how the aforementioned techniques address each of your five goals:

### #1 – Your Website can be Easily Found

This is perhaps the most neglected aspect of Internet marketing within the restaurant industry today. Not only are restaurant websites not optimized effectively to gain a strong presence within Search Engine results for important keyword terms, it's often difficult to find a restaurant's website when **searching for their own name**. The key strategies to make sure your website is "visible" to researching consumers are SEO, local search optimization, paid advertising campaigns, and online directory submissions.

The screenshot below shows the results in Google for the term **Denver restaurants**. The three highlighted areas break down the ways in which your website can appear on the first or second page of results.

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**Yellow-Highlighted Areas = Paid Search Results**

**Green-Highlighted Area = Local Search Results**

**Turquoise-Highlighted Area = Organic Search Results**

### **Paid Advertising Results**

Paid (pay-per-click) advertising, put simply, is a service offered by Search Engines that enables **any viable website** to appear in their results through a straightforward bidding system.

In reality, it's a bit more complicated as you factor in keyword selection, ad copy, consistent monitoring, and relevant landing pages (but that's another whitepaper).

For this example, it's enough to know that the opportunity to gain a presence on the first page of Search Engine results is **immediately available** with the effective utilization of pay-per-click campaigns. In this particular case, **only two individual restaurant websites are represented in the yellow highlighted areas**. Talk about prime Internet real estate going to waste...

### **Local Search Results**

When a search term includes a geographic location – in this case “Denver” – Search Engines will display a list of local results. Which websites are displayed (and in what order) depends greatly upon sound website optimization, local map listings, submissions to local and regional platforms, and targeted onsite techniques that allow Search Engines to quickly and easily verify your exact geographic location.

### **Organic Search Results**

Solid, effective, search engine optimization strategies will often result in your website gaining a coveted spot on the first or second page of organic search results. Search Engines use algorithms to ensure they display the most relevant websites to the keyword query, and SEO is an effective way to demonstrate your website should be in the mix. These results include the benefit of allowing you to write a short description so people can get a brief but helpful synopsis of what your restaurant is all about.

So, on the first page of search results for **Denver restaurants**, there are three separate opportunities for your restaurant to show up on the front page. Take a moment to perform the same type of search for your city. How many of the highlighted sections are you in? **How valuable would it be to be represented in all three?**



## #2 – Your Website Will Entice Visitors to Make a Reservation

So you've taken care of #1, and you're effectively driving traffic to your website through paid advertising, local search, and organic search results. Now it's time to ask yourself: what do your visitors find once they get there? Is your site easy to navigate with clear, unimpeded paths to the information they need to evaluate your restaurant? Does your content clearly explain your cuisine, your ambience, and your customer service philosophy? Can they peruse your menu quickly and easily, find nutritional information, and conveniently make a reservation directly from your website? Can they purchase and print a gift card directly from your website?


Your website is your "online" property, and you should really be giving it as much attention as the appearance of your physical property. Whether it's fair or not, in the minds of many people, a sloppy website equals a sloppy restaurant. Putting the time and effort into designing an aesthetically pleasing, informative, and enticing website **that provides your visitors with the information they seek** is well worth your time and effort.

## #3 – Your Online Reputation is Well-Managed


Now you're driving traffic to your website, and visitors are impressed with both its content and usability. **What are they going to find if they go on to research reviews of your restaurant?**

It's no secret that peer reviews play an important role in consumer research. A study conducted by JupiterResearch in November and December 2008 showed 77% of consumers researching online products and services seek out user ratings and reviews. Whether someone types in the name of your restaurant or a geographic/industry term, reviews of your restaurant are going to be in the mix of results. In fact, Search Engines place a quick link to your restaurant's reviews right next to the local search results.

The trick is to effectively manage both positive and negative reviews. For example, dedicating a page of your website to display positive reviews of your restaurant will immediately lend credibility and impress your potential customers. But even restaurants with the finest cuisine, exemplary service, and the most pleasant of ambiances will experience dissatisfied



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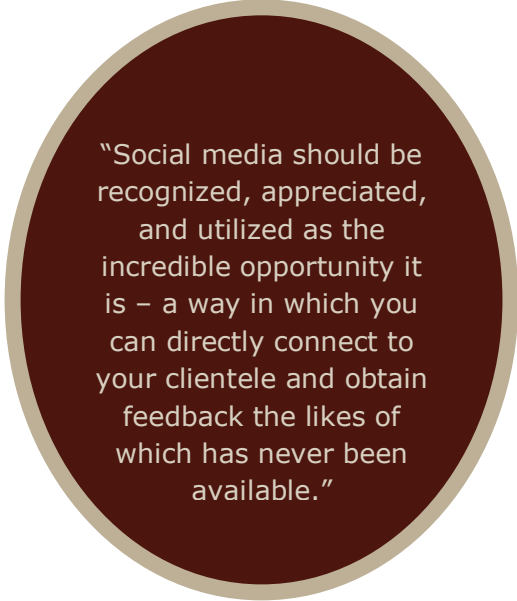
customers from time to time. There are proven, effective techniques to address negative reviews to minimize their impact on potential diners. In fact, at times it's possible to turn a negative into a positive with a quick and appropriate response to "bad" reviews.

#### **#4 – You are proactively fostering relationships with current and potential diners**

At this point, your prolific presence in Search Engines and directories allows people to find your website, they are happy with it when they get there, and they are impressed with the way you've managed your reviews. What about the Internet user who's first preference is to solicit recommendations through social networking sites? This is the Social Media piece that has garnered so much attention. There are many benefits to implementing and maintaining social networks, but direct marketing should never be the main focus. People spend time on social media websites to be social – not to be inundated with 500 marketing messages every time they log in.

As a restaurateur, you should have one question in the back of your mind whenever you post to Twitter, Facebook, and other conversational forums: "Does what I'm saying inform, educate, or entertain my friends/followers in a helpful way?" For example, posting a lunch special is helpful because (particularly these days) people are watching their pennies and information about keeping more money in their wallets is very welcome. Responding to a request for a recommendation such as "where should I eat while visiting <your city>" is perfectly appropriate. Sending the same, tired, thinly veiled marketing message on a daily basis, however, is not only obnoxious but counterproductive as well.

Social media should be recognized, appreciated, and utilized as the incredible opportunity it is – a way in which you can directly connect to your clientele and obtain feedback the likes of which has never been available.



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## **#5 – You are utilizing reliable metrics to measure Your Return on Investment**

At this point, you've taken care of Steps 1 – 4 and are committed to maintaining them in the future. Where do you go from here? It's time to look at your tracker...

Marketing your website without using analytics can be compared to driving at night without using headlights. You may eventually reach your destination, but it's very likely your headlights would have spared you from a lot of confusion and dead ends.

Expert marketers should also be expert analyzers. They should be both willing and able to share with you the Key Performance Indicators that will be monitored in order to evaluate the efficacy of your marketing plan and to provide you with reports that detail specific statistics about the traffic coming to your website. They should be able to determine which website or Search Engine your visitors used to find you, which pages they viewed on your website, whether they went on to make an online reservation, and many other, more subtle indicators that will help them determine how and where you should allocate your marketing dollars in the near future.

It's about cutting loose the dead weight and concentrating on what's working specifically for you. It's what separates "custom" marketers from the "cookie cutters". Strategizing and implementing techniques for your specific restaurant, based upon your specific analysis, will always result in a greater return for your marketing dollar.



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## Now is the Time to Implement a Sound, Global Online Marketing Campaign

Although we've outlined some of the broader ways in which to ensure your website is available and enticing to the vast majority of your potential clients, the "bear is in the details". Each strategy requires experience and expertise, and tying them all together in the most mutually beneficial way requires a bit of talent as well.

At TwoTables Internet Marketing, we believe in two things very strongly:

- ⑤ Restaurateurs who utilize every facet of Internet marketing for promoting their website will enjoy a significant advantage over their competitors.
- ⑤ Internet marketing companies who focus on a specific industry are more effective in strategizing and implementing effective marketing techniques for their clients.

Please visit our website ([www.twotablesmarketing.com](http://www.twotablesmarketing.com)) or call 888.822.5836 to have a relaxed and honest conversation about how we can help you get the most out of your marketing budget. Proposals are free of charge, and we strongly believe in employing transparency as a fundamental business practice.