DIGITAL MARKETING FOR RESTAURANTS: HOW TO ATTRACT AND RETAIN CUSTOMERS ONLINE

Denis Fulco Ramos

ABSTRACT

In the current scenario, digital marketing is a crucial tool for restaurants looking to increase their visibility and retain customers. Social media platforms, such as Instagram and Facebook, are ideal for sharing appealing photos of dishes, stories about events, and videos showcasing recipe preparations. According to Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2020), these platforms allow the creation of an engaged community and foster relationships with customers by using relevant hashtags to increase reach and responding quickly to comments. Paid advertising is also an effective strategy to reach a specific audience. Through Google Ads, it is possible to target based on keywords related to the restaurant, attracting customers who are already searching for similar services. Additionally, Facebook and Instagram Ads offer detailed targeting by interests and demographics, as noted by Smith and Zook (2019). Analyzing return on investment (ROI) is vital for adjusting these campaigns and maximizing results.

Keywords: Marketing strategies. Customer loyalty. Digital advertising. Social media. SEO for restaurants.

INTRODUCTION

The evolution of digital marketing has become an increasingly relevant topic in today's landscape, primarily due to technological advancements and consumer behavioral changes. The internet, since its inception, has revolutionized how people communicate and conduct business, opening new opportunities and challenges for companies (SILVA; BITAR, 2023). According to Pinheiro, Paixão, and Barroso (2020), with the advent of the internet, the communication process has become more efficient. Nowadays, all it takes is a technological device with internet access for individuals to integrate instantly and disseminate information. Conversely, digital marketing involves the use of online and electronic channels to promote and advertise products and services. It is based on strategies that utilize the internet, mobile devices, SEO (Search Engine Optimization), content marketing, email marketing, social media, among others. Digital marketing allows for more precise segmentation, personalization, and real-time measurement of results (OLIVEIRA, 2023).

The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 accelerated change and innovations. The decree for social isolation required organizations to adapt and engage more actively in the digital environment. In this context, investments and more targeted strategies in the digital space were included, encompassing e-commerce through websites and digital platforms that were also used to boost the brand (ZIMERMANN et al., 2023).

Collaborating with local influencers can significantly expand a restaurant's reach. Huang and Benyoucef (2017) emphasize that choosing influencers who share similar values and have a compatible target audience can be an effective strategy. This includes identifying influencers who frequent similar restaurants and proposing partnerships that benefit both parties while monitoring the impact in terms of new followers and visits.

Platform	Investment ($)	Return ($)	ROI (%)
Google Ads	0.20	0.60	300
Facebook Ads	100.00	24.00	240

Customer loyalty can be enhanced through digital loyalty programs that offer rewards based on visit frequency or amount spent. Loyalty apps that automatically generate points, combined with exclusive offers sent via email or SMS, can reinforce this strategy. Offering personalized experiences, such as menu adaptations for preferences or food allergies, also increases customer satisfaction. Collecting feedback through post-visit surveys helps adjust the offerings according to what customers value most.

For restaurant businesses, the most commonly used tools often focus on local marketing, customer engagement, and reservation management. Some that tend to be popular in this sector include:

Table 01: Most Used Platforms

Google Analytics	Essential for monitoring website traffic, user behavior, and conversion rates.
Facebook Insights e Instagram Insights	Provide detailed data on engagement, reach, and demographic characteristics of the audience
Google Ads	Offers insights into ad performance, including clicks, impressions, and ROI.
HubSpot	Comprehensive marketing integration that covers everything from SEO to email campaign analysis.
Hootsuite ou **Buffer**	Social media performance analysis, as well as post scheduling.
SEMrush	For SEO analysis, website traffic, and competitor research.
Tableau	Data visualization tool that makes it easier to understand key performance indicators (KPIs).

The choice of the right tools may depend on the specific goals of the restaurant and the target audience it wishes to reach. Tools that facilitate connection with customers, increase operational efficiency, and enhance online visibility are generally the most valued. Analyzing the results of these strategies through analytical tools is essential. Continuous adjustments help maximize impact in the competitive gastronomy market. Overall, strategically using digital marketing allows restaurants not only to grow their customer base but also to create lasting bonds with them by adjusting their approaches based on feedback and continuous monitoring.

Table 02: Growth of Followers on Social Media

Month	Instagram	Facebook
January	500	300
February	750	450
March	1,200	700

According to Loureiro and Sarmento (2019), consumers are only influenced by other users on social media when they receive messages from a valuable source, not necessarily an expert, friend, or relative. Researchers such as Nikunj et al. (2017) and Marist et al. (2014) argue that EWOM advertising, which is a desirable brand attribute, has a significant impact on people's loyalty if the information source is trustworthy. It is essential to continuously engage the channels chosen to communicate with the audience. Creating content in a consistent and regular manner allows your brand to grow organically, regardless of the channel used.

The consistency of well-produced content arouses the audience's interest and brings them closer to the brand. Knowing what message to convey, which channel to use, and being consistent in the engagement of these platforms enables your brand to grow within the digital environment and to become the first choice for customers in that market.

The development of attractive brands requires planned collection and analysis of consumer market information (Alizadeh et al., 2020). This process helps companies make changes to their brands to increase customer satisfaction and create brand value. Thus, the result is to attract more customers/consumers in this competitive market (Zhou et al., 2012). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed.

From the customers' perspective, the concept of brand relationship quality is relatively different from other common concepts in the branding literature, such as brand trust, internal branding, brand attitude, brand credibility, and relationship marketing (Severi and Ling, 2013).

The ESBRE (School of Bars and Restaurants), in partnership with Abrasel São Paulo, Bares SP, and the Instituto Percival Maricato, is dedicated to business education for managers in the out-of-home food sector. Focusing on professional training, ESBRE offers courses such as: Management for Bars and Restaurants; Manager Training Course; People Management; Delivery Operations; and Bartending Course.

With over 223,000 students graduated and 220 types of courses offered, ESBRE stands out in the market. Particularly relevant in the current landscape, the Delivery Operations course is essential for restaurants looking to expand their customer base through online services. The school provides practical tools to attract and retain customers in the virtual environment, thereby increasing the reach and efficiency of businesses. In an increasingly digitalized world, restaurants that adopt effective digital marketing strategies not only attract new customers but also retain existing ones. Building a strong online presence is essential, encompassing everything from an informative and optimized website

to active management on social media, where genuine engagement makes all the difference.

Investing in relevant content marketing and leveraging the power of online reviews and feedback can strengthen a restaurant's reputation, while SEO techniques ensure maximum visibility. Additionally, the use of email marketing campaigns and joining delivery platforms cater to the needs of modern consumers, who are increasingly seeking convenience. By effectively combining these strategies, restaurants can enhance customer engagement and drive growth in a competitive landscape.

Pappas, I.O. et al. (2019) state that artificial intelligence is shaping customer service by enabling personalized experiences. AI tools analyze large volumes of data to provide personalized recommendations, while machine learning algorithms help predict customer behaviors. Kaplan, J. (2020) mentions that chatbots have become essential in the service sector, offering continuous support and improving operational efficiency. They can perform tasks such as answering frequently asked questions, making reservations, and processing orders, all in real time. Chaffey, D. (2020) notes that by utilizing behavioral data, restaurants can segment their audience for more effective remarketing campaigns. The identification of groups based on previous interactions allows for more relevant advertising.

Many business owners feel discouraged when faced with more powerful and successful competitors. Often, they resort to copying these competitors' ideas, as it seems extremely challenging to create original concepts. There is a common belief that everything has already been invented, leading people to replicate others' ideas or follow familiar paths. To complicate matters further, many claim to be better than the original in most cases. Can you imagine being as successful as McDonald's but only serving vegetarian dishes? Or trying to be like Apple but at lower prices? Customers are not looking for something similar to McDonald's; they are seeking something different.

In a saturated market, differentiation is fundamental. According to Lima (2020), authenticity and innovation are essential for companies to stand out in a competitive environment, enabling them to gain and maintain consumer loyalty. Instead of viewing competitors as benchmarks to be copied, take inspiration from them and innovate with your own unique offerings. Understand the needs and preferences of your target audience and develop a value proposition that stands out. Authenticity and originality will not only attract customers but also foster brand loyalty in a landscape filled with imitations.

What makes a branding strategy successful?

There is no perfect and flawless development strategy when it comes to a restaurant. At times, it is necessary to take risks and make bold decisions. The restaurant market is highly competitive, and many establishments follow the same trends—most prefer rustic decorations, standardized menus, and cozy environments, as these are seen as attractive. However, new restaurants need to find innovative ways to stand out and capture customers' attention.

According to a study by Hwang and Seo (2020), differentiation through customer experience is crucial for the long-term sustainability of restaurants. The authors emphasize that an innovative interior design concept or a menu proposal that challenges the conventional can help a restaurant stand out in a saturated market.

For instance, a restaurant may choose a completely different approach, such as minimalist design or a focus on exotic dishes. A study published in the Journal of Marketing Research suggests that originality in dish presentation can significantly influence consumers' purchasing decisions (Kohli & Sharma, 2019). A restaurant that utilizes vibrant colors and an open kitchen concept can differentiate itself in a sea of traditional options.

While innovation and creativity are essential, one cannot expect every move to result in resounding success. An article from the International Journal of Hospitality Management highlights that success comes from experimentation, adaptation, and the ability to learn from mistakes along the way, pointing out that the implementation of traditional promotions and digital marketing strategies are powerful tools to increase the visibility and appeal of new restaurants (Liu et al., 2021).

Finally, it's crucial to remember that in the hospitality sector, the essence of success lies in offering memorable experiences. The combination of innovative digital strategies with excellent service ensures not only customer satisfaction but also loyalty. Restaurants that skillfully navigate the digital world are better positioned to thrive in a competitive and ever-evolving market. By prioritizing both the quality of their offerings and their digital presence, they can create lasting connections with their customers.

REFERENCES

1. Alizadeh, H.; Kashani, H.N. "The Effect of Brand-Consumer Relationships on Brand Loyalty Mediated by Brand Value Creation and Moderated by Brand Community Characteristics in the Hospitality Sector." Islamic Azad University, Department of Business Management, Central Tehran Branch, Tehran, Iran: Rev. Bras. Gest. Neg. 24 (4). Oct-Dec 2022.

2. Alizadeh, H., Kheiri, B., & Heydari, S. A. (2020). Investigating the model of the brand-consumer relationship based on digital marketing in the hotel industry. International Journal of Management , 11(8), 1075-1093. http://dx.doi.org/10.34218/IJM.11.8.2020.097

3. Chaffey, D., & Ellis-Chadwick, F. (2020). Digital Marketing: Strategy, Implementation, and Practice. Pearson.

4. Chaffey, D. (2020). "Digital Marketing: Strategy, Implementation and Practice." Pearson Education. ISBN: 978-1292266661.

5. Huang, S., & Benyoucef, M. (2017). From e-commerce to social commerce: A close look at design features. Electronic Commerce Research and Applications, 21, 50-62.

6. Loureiro, S. M. C., & Sarmento, E. M. (2019). Exploring the determinants of Instagram as a social network for online consumer-brand relationships. Journal of Promotion Management, 25(3), 354-366. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10496491.2019.1557814

7. Lima, J. P. (2020). Differentiation in marketing strategies: A study on how small businesses can stand out in saturated markets . Monograph, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro.

8. Marist, A., Yuliati, L., & Najib, M. L. (2014). The role of events in building brand satisfaction, trust, and loyalty of isotonic drinks. International Journal of Marketing Studies, 11(1), 60-77. http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ijms.v6n6p57

9. Nikunj, K., Shampy, K., Vinod, K., & Zillur, R. (2017). Examining consumer-brand relationships on social media platforms. Marketing Intelligence & Planning, 5(4), 2017-0088. http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/MIP-05-2017-0088

10. Oliveira, B. M. C. (2023). Perspectives and advancements in digital marketing 4.0. Revista Científica Multidisciplinar, 5(1), 72-78.

11. Pappas, I. O., Patelis, T. E., & Kourouthanassis, P. (2019). "Artificial intelligence in marketing: The end of creativity." Journal of Business Research, 104, 246-260. DOI: 10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.07.019.

12. Kaplan, J. (2020). "Chatbots and customer engagement: A study on their effectiveness in the hospitality industry." International Journal of Hospitality Management, 87, 102496. DOI: 10.1016/j.ijhm.2019.102496.

13. Severi, E., & Ling, K. H. (2013). The mediating effects of brand association, brand loyalty, brand image, and perceived quality on brand equity. Asian Social Science, 9(3),

125-137. http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ass.v9n3p125

14. Smith, P. R., & Zook, Z. (2019). Marketing Communications: Offline and Online Integration, Engagement and Analytics. Kogan Page.

15. Silva, A. L., & Bitar, A. B. (2023). What are the challenges in launching infoproducts through digital marketing? Revista Ibero-Americana de Humanidades, Ciências e Educação, 9(5), 550-566.

16. Zimmermann, P. E. P. et al. Opportunity or necessity? The case of ZM S/A. Cadernos EBAPE.BR, 21(6), 2023.

17. Zhou, Z., Zhang, Q., Su, C., & Zhou, N. (2012). How do brand communities generate brand relationships? Intermediate mechanisms. Journal of Business Research, 65(7), 890-895.

18. Delci, C. A. M. (2025). THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LAST PLANNER SYSTEM (LPS) IN INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECT MANAGEMENT. *Revista Sistemática*, *15*(2), 133–139. https://doi.org/10.56238/rcsv15n2-009

19. SANTOS,Hugo;PESSOA,EliomarGotardi.Impactsofdigitalizationontheefficiencyandqua lityofpublicservices:Acomprehensiveanalysis.LUMENETVIRTUS,[S.l.],v.15,n.40,p.440 94414,2024.DOI:10.56238/levv15n40024.Disponívelem:https://periodicos.newscience publ.com/LEV/article/view/452.Acessoem:25jan.2025.

20. Freitas,G.B.,Rabelo,E.M.,&Pessoa,E.G.(2023).Projetomodularcomreaproveitamentod econtainermaritimo.BrazilianJournalofDevelopment,9(10),28303-28339.https://doi.org/ 10.34117/bjdv9n10057

21. Pessoa,E.G.,Feitosa,L.M.,ePadua,V.P.,&Pereira,A.G.(2023).Estudodosrecalquesprim áriosemumaterroexecutadosobreaargilamoledoSarapuí.BrazilianJournalofDevelopme nt,9(10),28352–28375.https://doi.org/10.34117/bjdv9n10059

22. PESSOA,E.G.;FEITOSA,L.M.;PEREIRA,A.G.;EPADUA,V.P.Efeitosdeespéciesdealna eficiênciadecoagulação,Alresidualepropriedadedosflocosnotratamentodeáguassuperfi ciais.BrazilianJournalofHealthReview,[S.l.],v.6,n.5,p.2481424826,2023.DOI:10.34119/ bjhrv6n5523.Disponívelem:https://ojs.brazilianjournals.com.br/ojs/index.php/BJHR/arti cle/view/63890.Acessoem:25jan.2025.

23. SANTOS,Hugo;PESSOA,EliomarGotardi.Impactsofdigitalizationontheefficiencyandqua lityofpublicservices:Acomprehensiveanalysis.LUMENETVIRTUS,[S.l.],v.15,n.40,p.440 94414,2024.DOI:10.56238/levv15n40024.Disponívelem:https://periodicos.newscience publ.com/LEV/article/view/452.Acessoem:25jan.2025.

24. Filho, W. L. R. (2025). The Role of Zero Trust Architecture in Modern Cybersecurity: Integration with IAM and Emerging Technologies. *Brazilian Journal of Development*, *11*(1), e76836. https://doi.org/10.34117/bjdv11n1-060

25. Oliveira, C. E. C. de. (2025). Gentrification, urban revitalization, and social equity: challenges
and solutions. *Brazilian Journal of Development*, *11*(2), e77293. https://doi.org/10.341

17/bjdv11n2-010

26. Filho, W. L. R. (2025). THE ROLE OF AI IN ENHANCING IDENTITY AND ACCESS MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS. *International Seven Journal of Multidisciplinary*, *1*(2). https://doi.org/10.56238/isevmjv1n2-011