

MORE THAN A RESTAURANT

Turn Customers into Fans

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More Than a Restaurant: Turn Customers into Fans

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*To all inspired restaurateurs who dare to dream big
and have a passion for creating something
truly outstanding.*

*It is in your power to make your restaurant a place
that changes customers' lives.*

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Why I wrote this book

Everything seems to be said about restaurant marketing. It looks pretty simple. Make a great menu and promote it with different tools. Fortunately, there are a lot of them now for every taste and budget. You can find many articles on the Internet to understand a particular tool. All you need is the desire.

What happens in practice?

In my ten years in restaurant marketing, I repeatedly encountered distortions at the goal level.

I will explain what I mean.

Entrepreneurs are usually very ambitious. It is an excellent quality that pushes the business forward, but it often becomes a stumbling block that prevents people from choosing the right course. Because of this, restaurateurs often drive themselves into a situation where they seem to be doing a lot of actions: something is happening around them. Still, when looking at financial reports, restaurant owners may realize they are treading water. Here, ambitions hinder seeing the accurate picture and understanding what should be done to achieve great results.

For example, I often hear from restaurant owners, “Everyone should know that our restaurant is the best in the city/country/world. We must become number 1 in the market, the industry leader.”

After such statements, I have several questions:

1. Can you specify “everyone” who needs to know that the restaurant is the best in the city/country/world? How can you identify these people? Where can you find them? What social networks do they prefer? What are they interested in? Where do they hang out? What consumption situations do they implement in restaurants?

2. Do you want to become “number 1” among all restaurants or only among coffee shops, fine dining establishments, pubs, or cafes?

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3. What is “the industry leader” for a particular restaurant? How can you understand you have become one? What does it depend on? Maybe it depends on the number of new customers, regular guests, media mentions, website traffic, or social media followers?

The fact is that the restaurant is unlikely to be the best for everyone. Customers are different. Everyone has their understanding of what a restaurant should be like, their preferences in dishes, ideas of beauty, and atmosphere.

At the same time, by understanding the desires and needs of your guests, your restaurant can become the best for these particular people. Contribute to their lives. If you do this daily, you will gradually become more than just a restaurant. You will become a platform, a special place for customers, where their dreams come true, an area around which a community is formed.

How do you think such a place can become the industry leader for these specific people, the restaurant’s guests? Undoubtedly.

As you can see, these goals are achievable with the proper focus and wording.

We need to replace:

1. “Everyone should know that our restaurant is the best in the city/country/world” with “Become the best restaurant for our audience.”
2. “Become number 1 in the market,” with “Become the number 1 restaurant for our customers.”
3. “Become the industry leader” with “Become the industry leader for our guests.”

So we will get the following, “Our customers should know that our restaurant is the best in the city/country/world for them. We must become the number 1 restaurant for our audience, the industry leader for our guests.”

We have slightly changed the text, but the goals have become more

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transparent. Therefore, we understand what the next step should be.

We need to determine who our customers are and what they want from a restaurant. This will allow us to choose the actions that will help attract guests.

But the main question is different: how to turn one-time customers into the restaurant's fans? How can you make the restaurant a special place for these people?

And this is where the fun begins because you must go beyond the habitual perception of a restaurant and create something more.

In the usual definition, a restaurant is a place where customers can taste various dishes and have a good time.

Your task is to create a space where guests can become who they have always wanted to be and fulfill their dreams for at least an hour.

If you implement this, your restaurant will become number 1, the market leader, and the best place for customers. In addition, you will get real fans of the restaurant for years to come. They will recommend the restaurant to their friends, write about it on social media, and most importantly, your establishment will become a part of their lives.

Challenging idea? Perhaps. Is it realistic in practice? Yes, it is. The main thing is to follow the system.

I invite you to join me on this exciting journey and create a special place that will become a community's backbone, impact customers' lives, and attract many fans. I can't promise this will be an easy journey, but it will definitely be exciting and give you a fresh perspective on your business. Ready? Then, let's get started.

Introduction

If someone had told me ten years ago that I would write a book on restaurant marketing, I would have said they were out of their mind.

I never wanted to work in a restaurant. Probably because I saw what it was like since childhood: my grandmother devoted her whole life to this area. She worked as a chef and general manager of a restaurant. For some time, she taught future chefs in college, and for over 30 years, she worked as the head of the catering department of a huge industrial enterprise.

Every summer, I went to my grandmother for a short time. She often took me to work with her. Grandmother always spoke loudly and commanded wherever she was. She had a lot of costumes and rarely wore the same one twice. She was highly respected, and some people were even afraid of her.

She always had many things to do, so I was given a pack of paper and colored pens. I was supposed to sit quietly, draw something, periodically greet everyone, and politely answer, “Thank you” to exclamations like, “What a redhead! Is that your real hair color? It’s incredible!” or answer the question, “Do you want to become a real manager like your grandmother when you grow up?”

I knew one thing for sure: I didn’t want to be like my grandmother. I quickly realized there was nothing mysterious about the restaurant business. 90% of all activity is the control over small things, which seem to

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mean nothing at first sight.

For example, someone forgot to check the quality of cucumbers from a supplier. They think, “Well, this supplier always brings good cucumbers. Nothing will happen if I write once everything is fine and do not check.”

Then this “well, usually everything is fine” becomes the norm, and eventually, the person stops checking something.

What is the result?

Poor quality of ingredients means poor quality of food. I’m not even talking about the increase in write-offs and possible negative word of mouth.

That is why in any restaurant, everything should work like clockwork. There must be a system; otherwise, all efforts may fail. This can happen because of the so-called “human factor,” which is very high in a restaurant. My grandmother knew this well, and she controlled every detail.

It was boring for me: something to check, recheck, the same things every day. Generally, I wanted to do something significant.

At that time, journalism and marketing seemed very interesting. Journalism provides an opportunity to participate in new and exciting events. You are constantly on the move, and millions read your articles. Meanwhile, marketing is the field where you can create new products. Moreover, it is a chance to make people’s lives better.

That is how I thought and studied advertising and public relations at university. Learning was easy for me. It was interesting. I wrote various articles, participated in events, interned on TV, and worked as an advertising sales manager.

During my study, I realized one important thing: everything that surrounds us, any advertisement on television or social networks, any label on a product, the colors of a signboard, a slogan, or a product

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itself, is an element of someone's marketing system. So, the winner is the one who creates the system and manages it.

Why am I talking about this right now?

I often see how the system manages the business today, but it should be the other way around. Often, restaurant owners hold events or special offers without a specific goal. They do it only because competitors provide the same or have seen something similar in other establishments.

There is a substitution of concepts, and what should have been a means becomes a goal. The trap lies in the gradual normalization of this behavior—after it happens once, then twice...

After that, it may be complicated to return the situation on track. And this is the very moment when marketing stops working for a restaurant and starts working for a marketer who pretends to be active and earns their KPIs.

After completing a bachelor's degree in advertising and public relations, I decided I lacked business knowledge. I chose to get a master's degree in project management to fill this gap. It was challenging for me to study there with my creative mindset. We were required to measure every indicator, analyze, and think through every action one step ahead.

I had to go beyond my usual thinking, which gave an incredible result. I looked at marketing in a completely different way. I learned to work from the goal, not from the process. This proved beneficial in the future when creating a system, which we will explore in this book.

What happened next?

I started to look for a job. I sent out resumes and went for interviews: an advertising manager in a magazine, a marketer in a pharmacy chain, a manager in an advertising agency, a marketer in an industrial company, and a brand manager in a confectionery factory.

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Eventually, I came to work in the pharmacy chain. It was the most boring job on the planet for me. I had to sit in the office from 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. (still, I wouldn't say I like offices) and enter an endless client list into the database. That was the job I needed to do. Instead, I wanted to run away but didn't know where to. I continued to search for vacancies and send resumes.

One morning before work, I saw a new vacancy: a marketer in a cafe chain. It was a famous chain in our city. I sent my CV without really hoping to be contacted. Imagine my surprise when they called back in half an hour and made an appointment.

After a working day in the pharmacy chain, I went for an interview in the cafe. I entered one of the chain's cafes and immediately realized this was the place where I wanted to be.

What made this cafe chain different from others?

Now I can give an exact answer: it conveyed its value to customers. It was a place where they worked on the marketing system and clearly understood what they were doing and for whom. We had a friendly chat with the HR manager, and the next day, I met the general manager. I was hired almost immediately after the interview.

At that moment, I thought that restaurants were not only about food. Restaurants are more than that; I needed to understand what they were about.

Since then, ten years have passed.

For these ten years, I have been working in the restaurant industry. I worked in various areas of restaurant marketing: created promotion strategies, held promotions, worked with menus, held events and partner programs, launched rebranding, developed concepts for new restaurants, managed restaurant accounts on social media, and worked with websites.

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I created a company that empowers restaurant owners worldwide with the knowledge and skills to get more new guests, turn them into regulars, and make their restaurants a part of customers' lives. You can learn more about it at **milaholsha.com**

I worked with fine dining restaurants, fast-casual establishments, cafes, coffee shops, fast food, pubs, food trucks, and cloud kitchens from different countries. All this allowed me to create a system that helps restaurants become more than just places to eat out, get more new guests, and increase the number of repeat customers, delivery, and takeaway orders.

So, what's the secret?

The main thing is the right attitude toward your restaurant. But the intro seems too long. Let's get to the point.

What is the crucial aspect of attracting customers to a restaurant?

1. "The dishes. If they are delicious, guests will come."
2. "You need to make the servers smile."
3. "The main thing is to be inexpensive."
4. "Close to home/office. Location determines customer flow."
5. "A beautiful food presentation to take pictures for social media."
6. "Show the restaurant on TV; people love it."
7. "You need to collaborate with an influencer."

There is a person behind each phrase: an owner, manager, or marketer. But what is the crucial aspect of attracting customers to a restaurant?

I have been asking myself this question for ten years and can't give an unambiguous answer—finding a solution everyone will like is complicated.

To be liked, the answer should be unpretentious, with a beautiful

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scheme, easy to implement, preferably with a minimum budget and effort. I have concluded there is no such answer. Why? Any business is a system. The system consists of separate processes, which can be serial or parallel. Their task is to bring the best result to the company.

What can we call the best result in the restaurant business? The answer is simple: regular customers who actively recommend the restaurant to their friends. I often hear that marketing is associated primarily with promotion: advertising or managing social media accounts.

And here lies the fundamental mistake that prevents your restaurant from getting more customers—the perception error. There will be no best result if you perceive marketing only as a way to promote. Marketing shapes the restaurant. Marketing is the restaurant.

But let's start from the beginning.

Why do guests come to a restaurant?

“Probably to taste delicious food.” If this is the first thought that comes to your mind, it is normal. This is what most guests, employees, and even restaurant owners think.

This idea is usually the first one that comes to mind for one reason—it is simple and understandable. It is essential to create clear messages; they are easier to convey and distribute. But we will talk about this later.

The main challenge in restaurant marketing often lies in the abundance of incomplete information: it can feel like you are waiting for someone to unveil a clear and understandable system. The only thing is that even when a clear and seemingly understandable system is provided, it still does not become more evident. For example, you were told, “Look for your target audience, find out

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the needs, and satisfy them.” Has it become more apparent? Frequently, it has not. On the one hand, everything seems clear, but on the other hand, it’s difficult to say what to do with a specific restaurant in a particular situation.

Three key points of attracting customers

So, let’s see what it takes to get more customers. First, it is crucial to understand three points:

1. Whom will you attract? (Determine the restaurant’s target audience).

2. Why will these customers choose your restaurant? (Define the restaurant’s value).

3. How will the guests know that your restaurant suits them best? (Choose the promotion channels that will be most effective for this audience and convey the restaurant’s value).

We will explore these aspects in this book. I propose starting with the scheme showing the restaurant’s customer acquisition process (see Figure A).

The scheme is based on three components.

WHO? (Target audience). Who will visit the restaurant? First, you describe the restaurant’s target audience (whom you want to attract). From the very beginning, it’s important to understand that you do not attract everyone but only a specific audience.

WHY? (Value). Why would these people want to visit your restaurant? Here you define the value of the restaurant for a specific audience. Customers buy the restaurant’s value and return for it. The value is the basis of everything you do in the restaurant.

HOW? (Info hook). Today, you should provide customers with

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ready-made solutions, including reasons for visiting the restaurant. This means you can control the entire communication cycle with the guests and be the initiator of the visit. Also, helped by an info hook, the restaurant will be able to create a community, which will become the basis for increasing the number of restaurant fans.

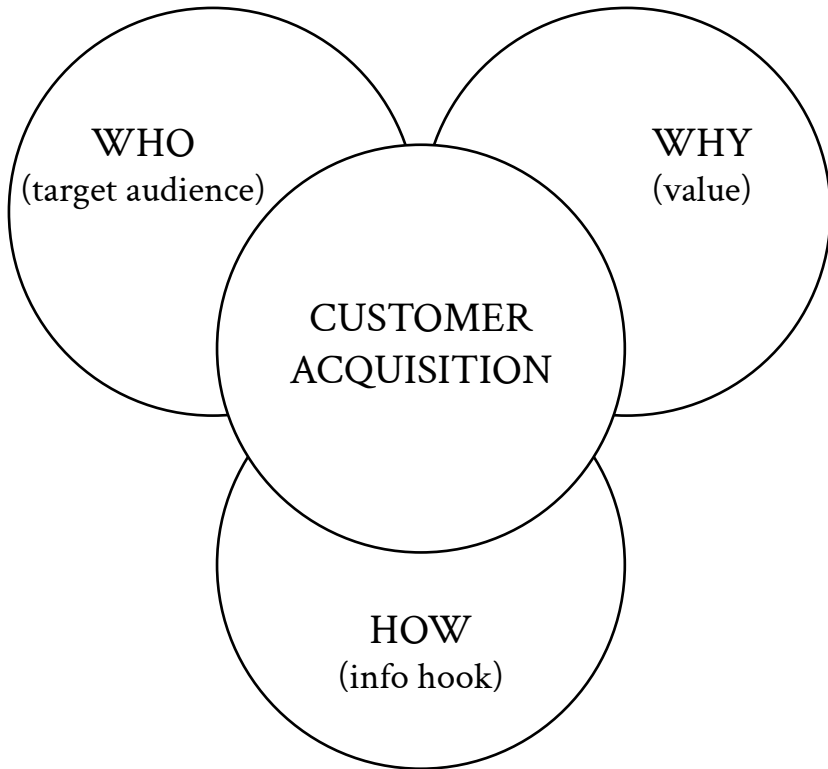


Figure A. Scheme Who? Why? How?

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