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The Rockin' Restaurant: Integrated Entertainment Media Takes Dining Experiences to the Next Level

By John Crooke



When it comes to dining out, consumers' choices are endless and from quick-service to fine dining, restaurants today are constantly in search of new ways to create engaging environments.

Restaurants often serve as an oasis from everyday life. Dining out is social and restaurants become gathering places to meet friends after a long day or bond with loved ones over a meal. To help build loyalty and establish a comfortable, familiar place for customers, restaurant owners are looking to engage all of the senses by creating unique environments and meaningful experiences that resonate with their customers long after they pay the check.

Music for the restaurant experience is far more than just pulling together a collection of songs. At its core, at its purest level, music is storytelling and is an essential part of what makes up a memorable restaurant environment. It's a critical customer touchpoint. In the same way that design, textures, lighting, materials, décor, menu, and service all set the tone for a positive guest experience, the music must work seamlessly with each of these elements to communicate as the experiential voice of the brand. It is the alchemy of all of these cues and triggers that make a real and lasting impact on the consumer, but

if one falls short, especially music which taps into the emotional side of the consumer, the spell is broken.

Music is a key factor in enhancing dining experiences. However, it's not just the sounds alone that create a meaningful atmosphere but the sights as well. More and more, many restaurants are utilizing digital menu boards and digital signage that offer quick decision points for consumers. As the demand and expectation for high-quality content grows from consumers, custom-produced original video content and branded entertainment features are quickly finding their way to the screens. Original branded content is the real differentiator from the restaurant down the street.

Today, consumers have more choices than ever and brand affinity, and loyalty is marginalized by those choices, so the experience must make a connection in a real way. It is critical to ensure that the restaurant environment not only tells a story but also tells the right story for the brand. Music and entertainment media are the voice.

This article will focus on the various integrated entertainment media that restaurants are using to turn dining out into a multi-sensorial experience. A more stimulating atmosphere creates a better overall experience, which will result in more return trips from consumers.

Entertainment Media

The expression "eat with your eyes" has never been truer as diners become more and more accustomed to a multitasking, multimedia world. Attention spans are shrinking and competition is growing so restaurant owners increasingly rely on less traditional ways to draw clients in and build their loyalty. Focusing on a branded content and media strategy is a highly effective tool for engaging guests. Executed correctly, storytelling and messaging through music and video media is a powerful option for restaurants. Think of it as a unified media network for your restaurants and each store location is a channel in that network. Entertaining content, of all descriptions, comes together as consistent, branded programming that is produced exclusively for your brand, scheduled to your dayparts and targeted to your customers.

Digital Menu

Rather than resort to messy chalk that smudges and requires maintenance, use a digital menu in the front of the house to promote daily specials or upcoming restaurant events. Digital menus, signage and original content can add an interactive element to your establishment by featuring games, trivia, branded video features, and timely "call to action" opportunities to create a lively atmosphere and reduce the perceived wait time. Even the wait can become an experience. Additionally, by moving away from print to digital, restaurants are

armed with a flexible, modular and dynamic messaging system that not only saves time, but ultimately dollars.

Table Screen

The table screen can be used as a more personal canvas for conveying messages to customers. It allows restaurant owners and managers to customize the displayed content based on the clientele and have a one-to-one conversation through media right at the table. Table screens can be used to encourage diners to participate in restaurant promotions and incentive programs or view compelling branded video. Combine branded content with the latest sports scores, breaking news stories, or lifestyle stories for a media and dining experience that guests will want to come back for. Restaurant owners can also take advantage of third-party advertising in this space by displaying content and advertising that is relative to the restaurant's brand concept or can be seasonally themed with greater, targeted opportunities for locations near shopping centers.

Music/Speaker Set

A restaurant's music selection can make or break a customer's dining experience. Management teams can provide guests with just the right ambiance that's consistent throughout all locations. Whether it's soothing sounds to kick off the day with breakfast, or the pulsating beat of pre-dinner drinks, it's critical to choose music that's right for the crowd, the time and the meal. This also offers the most accessible interactive experience with the opportunity to select a personal soundtrack or playlist, and through a truly integrated table screen experience, download or purchase music with revenue sharing opportunities for the restaurant.

In an age when restaurants fiercely compete to provide the most unique and innovative dining experiences, an integrated and dynamic entertainment media strategy can help eateries evolve and customize to the expectations of their customers. Some concepts more than others can also benefit from viewing the dining experience in the same way retailers view the shopping experience. Retail is theater and restaurants are theater with a meal. The retail media experience offers cross-selling and advertising/partnership opportunities that drive additional revenue and where appropriate, restaurants can benefit from the same approach to programming. Once in place, restaurant owners and managers can control their message, music and media offerings to suit the changing clientele or daypart. With the restaurant industry being so fast-paced, competitive and adaptive, having this kind of flexibility is not only an advantage, it is becoming a necessity.

John Crooke is the senior director of content development and creative services at [PlayNetwork](#). During his 15-year tenure in music, creative strategy and brand

development, he's been a part of impressive outfits like WD Partners and Shook Kelley Perception Design and some well-known projects like The Climate Project, Loggerheads, L'il Bush and The Wrecking Crew, which nabbed him credits such as associate producer, music producer and composer. Crooke's far-reaching rolodex allows him to assemble the perfect ensemble of entertainment, media and creative agencies to produce powerful TV and music projects for the fast-emerging frontier: the digital out-of-home and online markets. His client list speaks for itself and features heavy hitters such as Universal Music Group, Warner Bros. Records, EMI/Capitol, Steve Madden, Nordstrom, Macy's, Journeys and more.