



LET'S GO FOR DINNER!

WHERE DO YOU WANT TO GO?

By Phyllis Ann Marshall

When the question arises, "Where shall we eat?" are you on the "mental restaurant rolodex" of potential guests? Are patrons compelled to return, possibly with new guests? Do you have that social appeal and energy that causes diners to say "Oh yes! I've been there!"

There are ways to stay "TOP OF MIND". Have a powerful drive-by. Don't miss the FREE opportunity to take advantage of this asset. Photograph your restaurant from every visible direction to see what guests see! Advertise by word of mouth. Create a buzz. Change. Try something new. If it's broken, fix it.

La Cave is a small, below-ground, retro restaurant with a nondescript entrance in Costa Mesa. The drive-by couldn't have been weaker. The sign read La Cave, Steaks, Seafood, and Cocktails and was paired with a tired, plain white, triple-lined movie marquee-type surface with removable black block letters that previously never changed. Until recently, nothing about the entrance made you want to dine there or even check it out. One day a friend told me about a delightful evening at La Cave listening to the best "Frank Sinatra" singer he could imagine. He raved, so I went. The place was full on a Monday night. The owner, Mike Talitz has made very positive changes, created a buzz by adding intriguing entertainment, and changed the sign to read: La Cave Presents the Original Underground Lounge, Nightly Music..., and then announces the changing talent.

Public Relations, Email, and Direct mail. Get the word out. When a newsworthy item about your restaurant appears in a magazine or newspaper, or hits your guest's email or mailbox your name will be added to that mental list of "restaurants". Here are some examples of recent newsworthy items:

- Growth. Rich Mead recently announced the opening of a second Sage restaurant this summer by press release and email. Everybody loves a winner and we're delighted with his success and popularity. What a great reminder to add Sage in the Bluffs to this weeks dining list. I've got a friend that lives over there...think I'll give a call.
- Awards. Randy Schoch of Thaipoon – Taste of Asia sent out a press release announcing that his restaurants were awarded the National Restaurant News 2004 "Hot Concept Award". That's definitely worth a celebration. Have never been? Well, better check it out!
- Special products or recipes. Katie Averill of Mirabeau sends personal emails to let fans know what Chef David Pratt has cooking. For Easter it's a whole spring lamb and in a P.S. she says, "The fresh frog legs have just been delivered by FED EX". Hungry? Planning a party? This news could sway the vote.
- Charity events and helping others are always news.

Then there is the "I've got it and you may not be able to get it unless you..." I call this the "Soup Nazi" style from Seinfeld. The Soup Nazi made a wonderful Mulligatawny soup and had outrageous rules for purchasing it. The wine industry does it best with selectively allocated wines. Turley is the master. To get on their email list you must fill out very complete forms. You may then be permitted to buy some of their lesser wines. If you order consistently and buy a fair volume you are slowly permitted to buy some of their "Limited Edition" wines. So, to have Turley wines in your cellar is a major status symbol. You can try this philosophy. Test your tolerance for withholding by creating a signature recipe that literally sizzles as it circulates through the dining room. Command a big price and promote an exotic image. Once you have created the demand, limit the supply! Reservations a must...Only on Sundays, etc. Don't believe me? When Wolfgang Puck was first cooking at Ma Maison they had an unlisted phone number.

Whatever works...the goal is to put more "diners in your seats" by creating a compelling curiosity to dine and re-dine in your establishment.

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