Executive Summary

Restaurant leaders diversify their promotional efforts across platforms, leveraging different types of content to resonate and align with the user bases on those respective channels. Continual engagement platforms, such as email and apps, can work to serve timely and relevant promotional material directly to existing customers as a means to prompt reengagement and commerce. To acquire customers or drive them to store, display advertising can constitute a broader campaign strategy, pulling the levers of store-based limited time offers as needed. As customer trends evolve, however, leaders focus on parsing content strategy based on which customers exist at each touchpoint — especially as certain platforms offer hypersegmentation or shareability to leverage in targeting.

Leaders like Wendy’s are deploying a mix and match strategy to marketing, developing custom language for different platforms and laddering insights into momentum. Despite growing ad centricity across social platforms, leading restaurants are pulsing spend on Facebook to drive seasonal awareness and digital conversion while looking to Instagram for organic brand-building and product launch opportunities. Striking the correct balance between promotional efforts, organic strategies and internal expectations is imperative for entrants looking into highly competitive territories — though opportunity continues to abound for restaurants to improve such tactics.

Key Findings

- A subset of leaders finds organic traction on social platforms, including 38% of restaurants which increased posting on Twitter, as new product launches on Instagram drive increased engagement and foot traffic.
- Restaurants are not optimizing for digital conversion, missing relevant price or limited time offer information on 57% of top display advertisements and connection to site on 32% of Facebook posts.
- Searches for breakfast terms are on the rise, but information aggregators like Yelp hog visibility in Google results, forcing restaurants to find visibility in branded conquesting and paid tactics.

Key Recommendations

- Call and response: Brands must build social listening infrastructure to monitor customer trends, turning that to rapid product development and organic traction on Instagram.
- Parsing paid avenues: Restaurants must connect customers to commerce on platforms like Facebook, while spiking limited-time offers (LTO) experimentation when seeking foot traffic.
- Important meals: Entrants looking to enter into competitive territories must strike a balance between executing SEO basics and deploying promotional efforts that target daypart competitors.

1. “4 Steps to a Results-Driven Content Marketing Strategy,” Gartner.
2. Gartner analysis of Pathmatics data.

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