

## **Cutting-edge marketing – Source: *Seafood Business Magazine* (August 11, 2009)**

Restaurants are also embracing social media. Casey Clinch, manager of Madfish Grill in Sarasota, Fla., began Tweeting over the past couple of months, listing lunch and dinner specials and events such as Lobster Bake Wednesday.

The Tweets supplement information provided through monthly e-mails and local newspaper advertising, he says.

Clinch writes a blog as well, but spends less than one hour a day on social media, which he says is likely to attract a younger clientele to the family-owned, casual-seafood restaurant.

Jeremy Ashby, executive chef and partner in Azur Restaurant & Patio in Lexington, Ky., says communicating with customers via Twitter and Facebook fits with the restaurant's idea of being cutting edge with food, technology and trends.

"I think our customers will be Internet-based," says Ashby, who is one of the primary Tweepsters for Azur. "This is direct and personal. We want our efforts targeted. This is a voluntary opportunity to follow what we do."

Like Clinch at Madfish, Ashby posts information on the restaurant's menu changes, events and daily specials.

"I'm trying to get everyone on board," he says, noting that the manager and servers Tweet about specials or to let their friends and customers know what's new.

Through the restaurant's newsletter and Web site, Ashby says he's able to follow up on the brief subjects of his Tweets. He also has a personal Facebook page as well as one for the restaurant. Ashby uses his phone to take pictures of new dishes and posts them on the pages, which flow into the Web site and Twitter, "so all three are linked together."

With minimal set-up time and just a few minutes a day spent on Tweets, Ashby finds social media useful. "We like to think that it's working," he says. "We all feel this is the direction in which marketing is going, and we want to be on the cutting edge."

The immediacy of Twitter is perfect for moving perishable items such as seafood. Azur brings in fish from all over the country and customers like the idea of knowing what the fresh catch of the day will be, adds Ashby.

Suppliers also have a need to let customers know about what's fresh and what's limited, which is one reason why Plitt uses Twitter, says Smith.

Plitt also uses Twitter to remind customers to place orders. "I've seen a little bit of movement because of this," she notes.

And there's the indirect message sent by using Twitter, which is, "We're hip and we're on top of things. The value of doing it now is you're considered groundbreaking in your marketing, not copycatting," she says.

The seafood distributor has Twitter, Facebook and YouTube accounts that feature video as well as text. Smith, who recently spent three weeks in Alaska, sent Tweets about her travels and plans to post videos of the fishermen and places she visited.

"I shot a ton of video in Alaska," she says. "It's not a Martin Scorsese flick, but it's fine. I think people worry too much about production value."

Like any marketing tool, Smith says social media requires maintenance. "Once you start, you can't stop. It's just like a Web site, you have to maintain it."

For now, she says, social media “is just another weapon in our arsenal. Because it doesn’t cost anything, and doesn’t take much time. It’s not important to impact the bottom line.” That could change, of course, if social media becomes a paid service. Then, says Smith, she’d have to think about getting a return on the investment.

Meanwhile, companies that enter the social media marketing realm can go forth and Tweet, post or blog their seafood offerings, knowing that their customers — and potential customers — will be online as well, hungry for seafood and information.

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