

7 tips for suggestive selling

Teach a few basic upselling strategies to your servers and the boost to your bottom line could be significant.

BY LINDA DUKE



Specialty drinks, signature cocktails and coffee beverages make great upsell items. And half bottles of wine placed at the register offer an upsell opportunity before guests pay their bills.

Upselling, also known as suggestive selling, is an easy way to increase sales at your pizzeria. By developing a non-threatening approach and training your staff to take advantage of every upselling opportunity, you can see a substantial uptick in check averages almost immediately. Here are seven upselling strategies to consider:

1. Instill the skills. It all starts with server training. The upsell should feel natural and flow from the server's personality. Guests want to order from people who sincerely believe in your food and show genuine excitement about a menu, not from someone who sounds robotic. For example, your server should say, "You know, a side order of our spicy hot wings will go great with that pepperoni pizza," and make it feel like it's all just part of the conversation with the guest. In other words, you want to train your employees to upsell in a relaxed, non-threatening way without pressure.

2. Different strokes for different folks. Every guest has different needs and wants, and those should not be marginalized. Train your employees to read guests' personalities and to select the best approach for each type. Teach them to employ multiple suggestive selling techniques and to use different techniques every time instead of repeating the same pitch over and over. Set aside some training time and let your employees practice and role-play with each other.

3. Break the ice. Teach your employees to start a genuine conversation with the guests and ask questions, such as "Have you dined with us before?" or "Is this a special occasion [i.e., a birthday, a work lunch, a dinner date]?" The more your server knows about the guests, the better suggestions he can make.

4. Know your stuff. Your employees should know the menu backward and forward. If necessary, hold special tastings for your servers so they'll choose their own favorite pizzas and appetizers that they can recommend. They should know how to describe every menu item vividly (without parroting your menu descriptions) and offer details and suggestions to their customers.

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Dessert displays make it easier for servers to suggest and upsell.

5. Give something away. Sampling is a great way to break the ice. Have your server take a small sample of certain menu items to the guest's table to get the meal off to a good start. Later, the server should follow up and ask how the guests liked the samples. Sampling offers a great opportunity to truly engage with your customer.

6. It's never too late to motivate. Offer an incentive program for upselling. A sales contest for most desserts or add-ons will get servers excited about coming to work every day. Reward them with movie passes, gift cards and other prizes. Find out what they want to win, and offer them the chance to win it.

7. Go over the top. Provide an over-the-top experience with great, friendly, fun service, and your guests will appreciate being upsold. To encourage repeat business, teach your servers how to add that special touch, such as a thank-you note with the check or a card for a complimentary appetizer on their next visit.

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