



THE RESTAURANT GROWTH PLAYBOOK

# Make every day a Grand Opening.

How to pack your restaurant — and turn first-timers into regulars. The exact system we run for our clients, written down for you.

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## Dear restaurateur,

This is a playbook we wrote from our own experience — the lessons we picked up helping local restaurants grow anywhere from 24%+ month over month to a 7× jump in sales on their busiest day.

Not all of it will fit your restaurant. Every concept, menu, neighborhood, and team is different, which is exactly why we usually step in, build the strategy with you, and run it alongside you. But even on its own, there are real nuggets here you can put to work in your own dining room this week. Try them. Then tell us how it went.

We're sharing it for free for two reasons. First, we want to help you — that's the whole reason this company exists. Second, we want to learn from you: what worked, what didn't, and what we should sharpen for the next version. We won't pretend otherwise: we're a for-profit startup, and we want to grow fast, because the faster we grow, the more local restaurants we get to help.

So if you finish this and think, *"I love it, but I don't have time to run all of it myself,"* that's exactly what we're here for. Book a call, tell us about your restaurant, and we'll take it from there. Who knows — we might just be the help you've been looking for a long time.

Either way, enjoy. We hope it helps.

Best,  
Choi

### How to use this playbook

There's only one engine that grows a restaurant: **regulars**. Everything here is organized around the three things that create them — **drive the crowd, make the experience flawless, and bring people back**. Read it once, start to finish, to see the whole picture. Then keep it open as a checklist while you run your next campaign. None of this is theory — it's what we actually do for our clients, written down.

# First, the three best ways to **waste your money.**

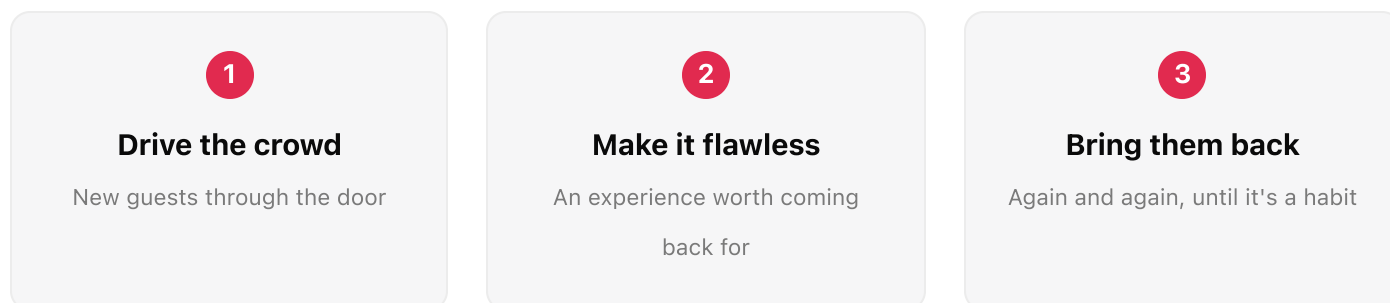
Most restaurant marketing is money on fire. Three classics we see again and again:

- 1 Untracked influencers and ads.** A creator posts, you get a spike, it fades. You never captured who walked in, so you can't bring a single one of them back. The money's gone with the buzz.
- 2 Blind loyalty programs.** You end up handing free food to people who were already coming. The deal-seekers collect the punches; the guests you actually needed to win never change their behavior — and you never learn who churned, or why.
- 3 Mass SMS and email blasts.** Low response, high opt-out. "Hi [first name]" isn't personalization. It's noise, and your guests can feel it.

They share one root cause: **you're not capturing customer data, and your marketing isn't connected to what happens inside your four walls.** It's like spraying water across the whole yard and hoping it lands on the right plant. The move is to put the hose on the roots — reach the right people, know who showed up, and follow up with them by name.

## The only thing that grows a restaurant: regulars.

Not a viral week. Not a one-night line. **Regulars.** A dining room full of people who keep choosing you is the only thing that compounds. To turn a stranger into a regular, three things have to happen — in this order:



Skip any one and the other two leak. Drive a crowd to a team that isn't ready and you've paid to show strangers your worst night. Nail the experience but never follow up and you're a great meal they forget by next week. Most vendors sell you exactly one piece — an ad tool, a loyalty app, a POS — and then wonder why the needle didn't move. This playbook is the whole loop. We do every part of it except cook.

# 1 Drive the crowd

**An empty table is your biggest cost. A crowded room is your best marketing.**

Hold onto that one sentence — most of Part 1 follows from it. Don't spread your firepower thin. The instinct is to trickle one influencer in per week. It feels safe, and it does almost nothing: a few guests scattered across seven days never trips the algorithm and never *looks* like a moment to anyone scrolling.

Instead, **concentrate**. Bring a wave of creators into the same window. The room fills, their content drops together, the platform notices the spike, and the ads running behind it all land at the same time. We call it an **Influencer Tasting Party** — and once it's happening, people show up because other people are showing up. That's the splash. And one splash isn't a strategy. **Repeated splashes are**. Each round teaches you what your guests actually respond to, and the momentum compounds month over month.



*A splash in progress: a DJ, balloons, and a line at the door.*

## The Influencer Tasting Party, in a nutshell

- **A wave of creators, one window.** Five to ten (sometimes twenty) local creators in the same sitting, twice a month, for at least three months. Give them food credit, real hospitality, and something genuinely worth filming. Have them post around the same time so you hit the algorithm together.
- **Vet on engagement, not follower count.** A creator with 8,000 obsessed local followers beats a "100K" account whose audience is three time zones away. Ask for the engagement and the local-audience numbers before you ever talk about reach.
- **Amplify with ads.** The party makes the content; paid reach puts it in front of the exact neighborhood that can actually walk in tonight, not just the creator's existing followers.
- **Make every creator a salesperson you can measure.** Give each one a unique promo code or link. When their followers show up and redeem it, you learn who came and which creator sent them. *Influencer marketing without tracking is just money you'll never see again.*
- **Follow up, always.** The party is the start, not the finish. Everyone who came is now a relationship; don't let it fade. New menu, new LTO, happy hour, anything fresh? Bring them back in. Make them feel like part of the restaurant. Part of your story.

### Running a restaurant near a campus?

Throw a student-club party alongside your creator parties. Invite the clubs, feed them, and actually engage: get to know them, tell your story, listen to their feedback. Students are one of the few cases where we'll bend our no-discount rule: a dining pass at ~10% off is fine (they're students, and they're hungry). Repeat it monthly if you can, or at least every two or three months.

**Here's why it works:** Students inevitably churn — you lose a quarter of them every year because they graduate — but student *clubs* don't. Clubs are how a lot of students discover local spots, and students tend to stay loyal once they find a place they like. Build relationships with the clubs and you own a renewing source of demand, instead of re-buying the same customers every fall.



What it looks like when a wave of creators posts together — real Stories from partner events.

## Running the party like a pro

The summary above is the *what*. Here's the *how*, step by step. None of it is complicated — it's just rarely done well, and the details are where the results hide.

- 1 Plan the cadence.** A single party won't do it. Plan for **two parties a month, two weeks apart, for at least three months** — say, seven creators in week one and three to four in week three. It takes repetition to build real relationships with the local creators who'll become your long-term ambassadors. Let creators bring a friend or two; feed them and treat them just as well.

<b>Week 0</b>	Throw the party.
<b>Week 1</b>	Reels go up.
<b>Week 2</b>	Run ads on the reels.
<b>Week 3</b>	Creators post Stories to keep it alive.
<b>Week 4</b>	A little more ad spend, and the second party.
<b>Week 5</b>	Second set of reels, and so on.

Can't do twice a month? Ask the creators from your party to post a Story about two weeks later, and you keep the buzz going on a lighter cadence.

- 2 Vet the right creators.** There's no perfect formula — you never truly know until you see the result — but you can stack the odds with a few hard filters.
  - **They have to reach local people.** A local creator, or at least one with real influence over your neighborhood.
  - **Engagement rate over follower count.** So much reach now comes from organic impressions served to people who don't even follow the creator. Look at the posts and reels: given the views, how many people *like, comment, and share*?
  - **Where the followers live.** Many creators make their audience insights public; check how many of their followers are actually in your area. If they won't share, move on — your time is precious.
- 3 Reach out — short and human.** Don't open with a wall of text. Something like: *"Hey, love your reels! We're [restaurant]. Interested in collabing?"* works far better than the essay. And hold this mindset: **you're not hiring them, you're collaborating.** You serve them your best food and a great experience; they amplify the experience they had.
- 4 Schedule around them — during your busy hours.** Most foodie creators have day jobs, so be flexible. And here's the counterintuitive part: most owners want creators in during the *slow* hours. Don't. A full room ends up in their content, and tells them they picked the right place. Not busy yet? That's the whole reason you're doing this — treat them beautifully and the crowd will come.

- 5 **Agree on comps — and write them down.** Usually a small cash comp plus food credit; anything beyond the food credit, they cover. Set the credit high enough to cover the dishes you actually want them to show off. This is your highlight reel — don't starve it.
- 6 **Brief them: give them the ingredients, let them cook.** Write out the themes, the message, the dishes, the story — how you opened the place after being inspired by your grandmother, how many batches it took to land the house hot sauce. That story is what your future customers fall for. But **don't micromanage**. Creators are creators for a reason; respect their style.
- 7 **Remind them — without it feeling like a reminder.** Nudge them **3–4 days out, the day before, and the day of**, but make it warm: *"Only 3 days out! Any questions?" ... "It's tomorrow — can't wait!" ... "Today's the day! Come hungry."*
- 8 **Host like it's a six-star night.** Reserve their tables, set out name cards, make the welcome personal. While they eat and film, engage — ask about their content, ask for feedback, befriend them. And before they leave, ask who else might love the food. Foodie creators run in tight circles and are happy to introduce a few peers.
- 9 **Say thank you.** A day or two after, send a genuine thank-you note, and gently confirm when they plan to post.
- 10 **Get your staff ready for the rush.** Picture a guest walking in — "I'm here for the reel, I've got the code" — and your server has no idea what they're talking about. That's a hundred-dollar bill on fire. Get the team onboard *before* the crowd arrives: write down exactly what to do, print it, post it on the wall. And treat everyone who came because of a creator like a VIP — because they are.
- 11 **Run the ads: amplify the best content.** Get each creator's branded-content code so you can run their reel from your own account. Let it breathe a day or two for organic views, then start ads.
  - Use Ads Manager — not "Boost." Set the objective to **engagement**, optimize for 2-second views, run about a week.
  - Put every reel as a separate ad inside **one campaign** and let Meta's AI shift budget toward the winners.
  - Get creative with targeting: a hyper-local radius, plus interests that match your room (K-pop fans for Korean BBQ, commuters for an office-district lunch spot). Try a setup, record the result, brainstorm the next experiment.

**12 Keep the momentum between splashes.** After the ad week, ask creators to post a **Story** (around week three) right as your next round comes in. And run a little competition: a reward for the most-viewed reel *and* one for the highest engagement rate — a nano creator can win the second even when a mega account wins the first.

## 2 Make it flawless

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A crowd you can't convert is a party, not a business. Here's how a first-timer becomes a regular.

### It takes 3–4 flawless experiences to make a regular

That's the number. Land three or four genuinely great visits and roughly **70% of those guests stick**. The classic mistake is pouring all your marketing into the *first* visit and leaving visits two through four to luck. Here's a mechanic that fixes it:

A guest walks in for the first time. "First time here? Here's a red napkin so the whole team knows to take care of you — and the rib dinner's on us." That rib costs you about **\$4** and sells for \$15. At the end: "So glad you loved it. Next time, you *have* to try the chicken." You write it on the back of a card — *bring this back, and the chicken's on me*. They return for the chicken, then the cheesecake. Three flawless visits, each item about \$4 — roughly **\$12 total**.

**\$80–120**

Typical cost to acquire one new regular

**\$12**

Three free items → a regular, at ~70% odds

The mindset shift: **don't do discounts. Give free items.** Discounts cheapen the check and train bargain-hunters; that's a habit you never want to teach your guests. An unexpected free item does the opposite — it builds a relationship, and it walks the guest toward that magic number of visits.

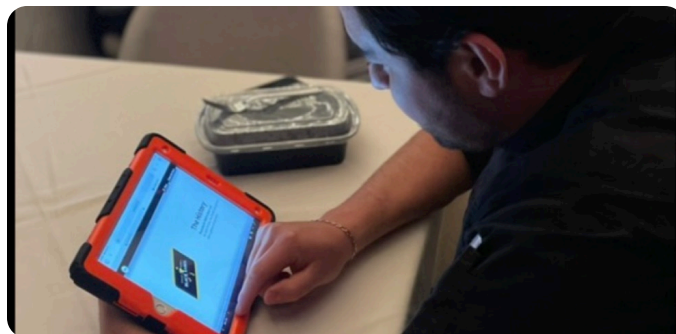
### Train your team like an athlete

You can't fix service with a once-a-year handbook. Dump everything at once, like drinking from a fire hose, and the team forgets it by the weekend. **Drip learning** works the way a workout does: 5–10 minutes a day, every shift, and you see the change in about three months. Nobody gets a six-pack in a day.

## Strongly recommended: run pre-shifts.

You can't expect a sports team with low energy to win the game. Every pre-game, you make sure the team is ready — with high energy, a sharp game plan, and the knowledge to back it up. You can't skip pre-shift. Pre-shift is a broadcast, not a memo: what's new, who earned a shout-out, the story behind today's special. Then quick reps — a flash quiz on a tablet — build muscle memory and surface exactly where the team's menu knowledge has gaps.

And it's real money. At a high-standard steakhouse we ran this with, year over year: **per-cover sales up 8%, voids down 48%**. Voids are a silent leak; a confident server who knows the menu cold plugs it.



*Five-minute reps on a tablet, between tickets and before the shift.*

## Get feedback that's actually true

Ask a guest "How was everything?" and you'll hear "good" — then watch them quietly torch you on Yelp. Open questions get polite lies. Ask the opposite: **"Tell us one thing we could do better."** Small, specific, easy to answer. Then close the loop two weeks later: *"We added a few spice levels after your note. Thank you for that — come back, it's on us."* That's how a complaint turns into a regular.

## Don't Yelp us — help us.

And remember Zappos: a pair of shoes didn't fit, so they sent a handwritten apology and a box of chocolates, and turned a frustrated customer into a lifelong one. A bad experience isn't what loses a guest; how you handle it is what decides whether they ever come back. **A bad experience handled well is your single best shot at a regular.** So don't fear the feedback — chase it.

## **A note on catering**

If you also cater and want more of it, the most durable strategy isn't a separate campaign — it's relentlessly great experiences on your floor. Guests who had an awesome time talk about it at the office, at home, with friends. And when a catering occasion comes up, they're the one who says, "oh — what about that place I keep raving about?" Great in-house experiences quietly fill your catering calendar. The two feed each other.

### 3 Bring them back

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You've got the crowd and the experience. Now make it repeat.



*A full room of regulars is the whole point. This is what the loop builds toward.*

#### **Capture who walked in — at the door**

The codes and vouchers from Part 1 aren't discounts; they're **identity**. A redemption tells you who came, when, and what they tried. Without that, every guest is a stranger again tomorrow, and you're back to spraying the yard.

#### **Personalize with context, not a name field**

Real personalization isn't "Hi [first name]." It's:

"Junia — hope that pulled-pork sammy with the vinegar sauce hit the spot on that rainy night. Looks like rain again tomorrow... come grab another."

That's a message a human would send a friend. You can't hand-write it for 4,000 guests — which is exactly why almost nobody does it. Find a tool that remembers the context so the message stays human at scale. If you find one, use it; you won't regret it. Personalization done right is how you win most of the competition before it even starts.

## Turn your regulars into a sales force

Once a guest hits *your* definition of a regular, ask them to bring people. A regular who loves you is your cheapest, most credible marketing — they just need a reason and a nudge to bring three friends on Friday. And when they do, treat those friends like the first-timers they are: give every one of them the red-napkin treatment. Your regular becomes an ambassador, proud that the people they brought are being looked after.

## Win the 7 o'clock decision

You're not really competing with the restaurant down the street. You're competing with **everything a guest could do at 7pm tonight** — cook at home, order delivery, the other twenty restaurants, or just the couch. Staying in the feed, in the inbox, and top-of-mind at the exact moment someone decides — that's the whole game. Everything in this playbook is, in the end, about winning that one moment more often.

### — ONE LAST THING

## Running a restaurant is hard.

The fact that you started one already makes you braver than most people will ever be. So first — be proud of yourself. You chose work that takes enormous time and effort just to keep other people fed, healthy, and happy. Real kudos.

We wrote this playbook out of respect for you. We wanted to be useful by sharing what we've learned putting everything we have into making our clients happy. We've still got a lot to learn, but sharing what we know so far didn't need to wait.

If there's one lesson above the rest, it's this: **everything is connected, and there is no silver bullet.** Marketing and training are connected. You can't grow in a lasting way by only driving customers — your team has to be ready to serve the crowd you bring. Your servers should know what the restaurant is saying publicly (that's marketing), and some of your training material — where the brisket comes from, why it's special — is itself great marketing. Marketing, training, loyalty, operations: you have to connect them all, and that takes real time and dedication.

Drive the crowd *and* train the floor *and* capture the data *and* personalize the follow-up *and* keep the splashes coming, month after month — without letting quality slip the moment it gets busy. That's the full loop, and the pieces only pay off when they're connected. Most vendors hand you one piece and wish you luck. So run the full loop yourself, at least once, and you'll learn exactly where your gaps are — what you can handle and what you can't. Only then do you really know who to hire to fill which gap.

And if you don't have time for any of it, that's what we're here for. We run the whole loop, end to end, so you can just host.

One more time: running a restaurant is hard. I grew up watching my grandmother run a tiny takoyaki shop in a small town in Japan. She looked genuinely happy at that counter, but every night at home she'd wash off the exhaustion with a few glasses of beer. Every single night. (She passed from liver cancer.) Running a restaurant is hard. That's why we want to help.

## Want us to run it for you — or just want to rant and vent?

Either works. We DM, brief, schedule, and pay the creators. We run the ads, capture the data, train your floor, and bring people back — end to end. You just host. And if you simply have a question about driving customers or running ads, we're always happy to listen.

**Book a 15-minute call:** [app.usemotion.com/meet/jeongsuh-choi](https://app.usemotion.com/meet/jeongsuh-choi)

**Email Choi directly:** [choi@upswell.ai](mailto:choi@upswell.ai) · **Web:** [upswell.ai](https://upswell.ai)