

Giangi Ratto, Ivan Lopez, , and Valeska I. Jacques spoke with [SPEAK OUT, INC.](#), President, Anne Freedman about cost effective ways restaurants can promote themselves during slow economic times. This panel was provided by the Miami Beach Chamber of Commerce Technology Council.

The Miami Beach Technology Council mission is to educate businesses on how to use technology to streamline operations, effectively market products and services, all while providing value to their clients and business partners.

After this panel, there was a hands on workshop on [cost effective internet marketing techniques](#) presented by Valeska I. Jacques.

Q: Anne Freedman: What do you recommend to improve customer service?

A: Ivan Osorio: Miami is known as a cold town in terms of customer service. Gone are the days of small restaurants where the customer and owner or waiter would know them by first name. Creating those personal relationships by using an ACCOUNT SERVICES system would allow you to create a network of preferred customers with personal relationships. By ACCOUNT SERVICE I mean a person preferably the host who would personally handle a preferred guest and keep contact throughout the year by contacting that client on special occasions.

A: [Valeska I. Jacques](#): It starts with leadership and how every person in the work environment embraces the restaurant values and incorporates it as part of its culture. After the process of what the restaurant owner creates for their corporate culture is in place the buy in for the waiters to have a positive attitude easily reflects at every point of contact. One of the incentives restaurant owners may instill are Custom Design Comment Cards. Based on the positive feedback and tracking improvements, waiters and waitresses should receive a bonus based on good customer experience. There is a system called Biz Grader that allows you to report on day to day or month to month to track improvement in customer satisfaction. Rather than pay your servers based on how much your client spent, the incentive should be on how well was their experience.

Q: Anne Freedman: What would you recommend restaurants should do to attract clients locally and internationally?

A: Ivan Osorio: Not enough restaurants take the time to capture data. Most restaurants depend on word of mouth advertising, yet do not go the extra step of tracking who are their best customers or how frequently they visit their place of business. Standing out this way in terms of accurate information of birthdays, anniversaries or favorite meals of your best customer is a very powerful tool which many restaurants are not taking advantage of. Imagine walking into a restaurant and the waiter asking you if you will have what you had last time, calling you by your name and having polite conversation.

A: [Giangi Ratto](#): Many restaurants these days are offering free WiFi for their customers. This is great to attract not just the local business lunch crowd, but tourist eager to check their email and find out things to do while in town. What a lot of restaurants do not realize is that they are not taking full advantage of all the benefits from offering free WiFi to their customers. By using a commercial grade WiFi solution, restaurants have more control over their customers browsing. Having users provide their email in order to sign into the wireless service, restaurants can create a database of their clients. This will enable restaurants to data capture who has frequented their restaurant and eriodically email them specials and promote special events. Please [click here](#) to see how a restaurant can have a “landing page” that a customer first sees upon logging on to the WiFi. On this page the restaurants can post menu’s, specials, and even generate advertising revenue by promoting third party services. A commercial grade WiFi solution is a lot more secured. Customers are not able to access the restaurants network and therefore gain access to sensitive files. Restaurants can be held

responsible for the users of their network activities, say someone running an internet scam. Without a commercial grade solution, a restaurant has no way of providing additional security.

A: [Valeska I. Jacques](#): Restaurants may locally and internationally attract clients through online strategic alliances, and online social networking platforms. Some are Yelp.com, miamibeach411.com,urbanspoon.com. I recommend Google cuisines (Italian food) or restaurant names to see what ranks on the top 10 and keep a list of where you plan to create a profile. I recommend to start with 4. What's most important is to monitor what people are saying. Periodically, restaurant owners should google their own restaurant names to do quality control on what's being said in other websites. I have here a statistic from AIS Media: 89%-- Percent of consumers who say they have researched a restaurant online before dining there. Using the Internet to check out menus and other information about a restaurant is most prevalent among consumers age 25 to 45 and those in the Northeast and on the Pacific Coast. Of those 89% of consumers, 57% indicated that prior to selecting a restaurant they view the restaurant's Web site. And 33% view other consumer's reviews online prior to dining. I came across ONE comment that was posted in Yahoo about Tantra restaurant. It was a very negative comment and so you can imagine how ONE comment stuck out like a sore thumb on this page. If they wrote in the comment to answer the user's response or if they had another client provide a positive experience to offset the balance this will help even out the good and bad responses. I have another statistic from AIS Media for International Clients: While traveling, 43% of consumers used a search engine to find restaurants. While searching for a restaurant while traveling: 32% of consumers would like directions on Web site. 28% wanted menu selections with pricing on Web site. 23% wanted an online rating/review system on a restaurant's Web site. Imagine the impact that negative remark can leave on those who base their decisions off of ratings.

A: [Giangi Ratto](#): I have some statistics for online shoppers, but this should help put it in perspective how user ratings are considered. 77% of online shoppers use reviews and ratings when purchasing (Jupiter Research, August 2006). In a study of 2,000 shoppers – 92% deemed customer reviews as “extremely” or “very” helpful. (eTailing Group). 59% of their users considered customer reviews to be more valuable than expert reviews. (Bizrate). 63% of consumers indicate they are more likely to purchase from a site if it has product ratings and reviews. (CompUSA & iPerceptions. 86.9% of respondents said they would trust a friend's recommendation over a review by a critic, while 83.8% said they would trust user reviews over a critic. (MarketSherpa)

A: [Valeska I. Jacques](#): Other ways to attract clients locally or internationally is increasing your Incoming Links on your website that RELEVANT to your content. What I mean by relevant is not asking everyone you know that have website to link to your website, thus restaurant websites should link to travel agencies, hotels, or their restaurant blog. Thorough ad words, you can also get paid for those who click on those names. In regards to Internet Marketing Strategies in the restaurant industry 64% of restaurant owners polled nationwide are using Internet marketing because of its increased exposure and profitability. (AIS Media, 2007)

Q: Anne Freedman: What should restaurants do to encourage customer loyalty?

A: [Ivan Osorio](#): As mentioned previously, expanding the roles of the host to an Account Executive role would create a personal point of contact for clients and business owners. Also creating customer rewards packages such as a Guest of the Month packages where a preferred guest is chosen from a lottery of the receipts and is allowed to host a party of 10-20 guests at that restaurant with discounted food items. In this, you create more advertising for 10-20 brand new clients and cement your place as a restaurant of choice with the preferred guest.

Q: Anne Freedman: What should restaurants doing to increase customer retention?

A: Ivan Osorio: Restaurants may locally attract clients and increase customer retention through text messaging. You can text message clients on their anniversaries or birthdays. You can set it up so it auto text them special promos on those special days so they have a reason to return.

A: Giang Ratto: One provider by mobilesmsmarketing.com charges 10cents for 500 people versus 8 cents for 5,000 people. There is a minimal monthly fee associated. They provide you with an online software to track what the message will say and group your contacts. It's very important to ask permission from your clients (from comment cards, website submittals, etc) so your list are from client who opted to receive your text message. Clients may also opt in to receiving text messages from your restaurant by texting the service directly. You should place the number on your website, receipts, or comment cards so are aware. I suggest you also provide on your website how they can opt out which typically is the same code.

A: [Valeska I. Jacques](#): We have local .com business here at the beach called Sweetslap. It's an online service catered to provide couples with ideas as to what to do for each other on anniversaries, birthdays, romantic get aways, etc. I think this will be a good strategic alliance. Their website is sweetslap.com

A: Ivan Osorio: A tool local restaurants should take more advantage of are e-newsletters. Some statistics on how e-newsletters increase customer retention are:

- i. 79% of consumers are very likely to frequent the restaurant when they receive coupons or specials. (BizGrader consumer survey)
- ii. 60% of consumers feel more loyal to a restaurant when in their email club. (BizGrader consumer survey)
- iii. 62% of consumers have used coupons from restaurants in the past 6 months (BizGrader consumer survey)

Q: Anne Freedman: What would be ideal as to what the food service industry should strive for and what would you like to see in place to get there?

A: [Valeska I. Jacques](#): What would be ideal is when every point of contact made with restaurant is consistent to ensure good experience. The ideal scenario will be where the individual answering the phone can pull your information in the system so you don't have to repeat your phone number and when you arrive they may refer to you by name. Track your food history so when your waiter arrives he is aware of how you like your coffee served, what you had before, or suggest an alternative meal that's similar to what you had before.

Q: Anne Freedman: Are there any other technologies that you would like to mention?

A Giang Ratto: We held a restaurant focus group recently where we asked how they feel about Wireless Credit Card. One of them mentioned that there is no insurance guarantee on these devices in case his staff drops the equipment and breaks it.

A: [Valeska I. Jacques](#): Most of them mentioned during the focus group how they prefer to wait a year or two before adapting new technologies.

A: Ivan Osorio: Plasma tv's displaying ads of what's going on in Miami Beach or other restaurants. Creating a network of referral business that can be used among each other.

A Giangi Ratto: You can also set up Tablet PC's and PDA's to take orders, which works like a standard POS system, except they are hooked up to the restaurant's network wirelessly. The technology is already out there, and it is no less secure or efficient than standard POS systems.

A: Valeska I. Jacques: Another interesting technology that may be used in restaurants is the only patented technology that's called Menus that talk. It's a menu that reads for you by the press of a button. She is actually here with us today and can show everyone how it works. Here is a link to one of the interviews from NBC: <http://menusthattalk.com/videos/clip2.wmv>

Biography:

Giangi Ratto

Title: CIO South Florida

Geeks on Call (1800-905-GEEK) is a nationwide company that provides on-site Computer and IT support to small businesses and residential customers. As your "Part-Time IT Department," **1-800-905-GEEK™** delivers on-demand, on-site computer and network services that are convenient and reliable. Their commitment to world-class customer service has made them the most respected on-site computer repair and support provider in the nation.

Ivan Osorio

Worked with Condo.com, Miami HEAT and works extensively in the Hospitality Industry. Ivan went to school at Florida International University where he studied Psychology and has worked in Sales, Advertising and Marketing for various companies. Ivan currently manages a business development team with the Miami HEAT and works with restaurants in the Miami area to help increase revenue through community events, customized marketing programs, promotions and networking events.

Valeska I. Jacques

Valeska I. Jacques is Founder and President of uVium, an organizational consulting and training firm with a focus on the Internet for the past 6 years. She has helped clients such as One Biscayne Tower in Downtown, CAC Florida Medical Center, Greenwich Development Group, Community Bank of Florida, The Women's Alliance and much more in various vertical markets increase value through operational improvement, internet business strategies, blog coaching, and web software training. She is a Certified Business Process Management Consultant and has 6 years of experience in all aspects of internet technology.

Valeska is actively involved in the Miami community. She serves on the task force for the City of Miami Beach, the Board of Directors of the National Association of Women Business Owners Miami Chapter and recently partnered with Miami Beach Chamber of Commerce to pioneer the Miami Beach Technology Council.