



BCRFA LOCAL MARKETING & PROMOTIONS

COVID-19 RESTAURANT

MARKETING



The British Columbia Restaurant and Foodservices Association is a dedicated resource to help restaurateurs grow and succeed in business in our province.

COVID-19 RESTAURANT MARKETING

COVID-19 has changed everything for restaurants and customers. As a result, the core of your marketing program in these times needs to be on restoring confidence with your existing and potential customers. To successfully promote your business, you should share your new business parameters, the elements of your COVID-response and any new offerings like take-away or winter patios. Your customers need to know your hours and promotions, what to expect when they come in to dine or pick up take-away as well as what new protocols you have introduced to be compliant with Public Health Orders.

Your plan should openly communicate the actions you are taking to make your venue safe. While the operational and financial impact of physical distancing is core to your business concerns, safety and trust are core to regaining the confidence and patronage of customers. How you communicate the changes you are making to enact the requirements of Dr. Bonnie Henry's Public Health Orders (PHO) and the WorkSafe BC operating guidelines is essential to bringing guests back into restaurants.

START SIMPLE: PROMOTE YOUR COVID-19 CHANGES

People are beginning to have COVID-19 fatigue. They are tired of talking about it but they remain hyper aware of wanting to see things being done differently. Be purposeful in making sure that your marketing communicates customer safety and builds trust.

- Set the stage by promoting your COVID-safety plan before people come to your business.
- Share messages that reassure customers that you are engaging in all the current health and safety precautions.
- Talk about your reservation and on-site waiting processes.
- Call out your changes on your website, social media and in the window of your business.
- Don't focus on COVID-19 once a customer comes in the door. As guests enter, you want them to feel safe and see your protocols being followed but your focus should be on hospitality, guest experience and food.

- Connect your business with the requirements of the Orders of the Public Health Officer, Dr. Bonnie Henry. If you aren't already talking about Public Health Orders (PHOs), make these points a focus because they are what you are being judged against.

Don't make it complicated – showcase your real changes in simple ways:

- Let your photos tell part of your story of change. Things like “Check out our new plexiglass dividers” or “We're keeping our distance. How do you like our new team masks?” draw positive engagement from customers. If you can get masks that match your work “uniform”, this will enhance the appeal rather than make it clinical.
- Take welcoming pictures of people wearing masks to set an expectation and show that they can still have a welcoming experience with someone in a mask. Guests tell us over and over that they want to see masks front and centre.
- Show off a picture of your booths with plexiglass between them.
- Feature pictures of groups of no more than 6 at tables in your business.
- Broadcast the core tenants of your Safety Plan in a statement to customers on your Facebook page.

Website specific changes:

- Consider adding a page on your website that highlights any new safety elements you have introduced so those concerned can see.
- Add a simple banner to your site that explains a core change. “In order to ensure a safe dining environment we are requiring advance reservations.” Or “We are now offering take out and delivery. Check out our take out menu here.”
- Include any specific information in your online reservation confirmations – if guests may have to wait outside before being seated, let them know.

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Operating restaurants businesses must currently commit to the following Public Health Orders:

- Creating distance of 2 metres between staff and guests.
- Using rigid, impermeable, washable barriers for tight spaces and transaction spaces where distance cannot be maintained.
- Limiting parties to no more that 6 patrons.
- Posting signage to ensure that waiting areas and counter service areas are controlled and respect 2 metres distance between parties, both inside and outside your business.
- Providing hand sanitizer for all guests and staff and reinforcing the importance of using it.
- Collecting the first name, last name and phone or email for one person in every party that enters your business for the purposes of Contact Tracing by the Ministry of Health, in the event of any COVID-19 exposure.
- Assigning tables to all guests once they enter your establishment and ensuring that parties of guests remain separate from each other throughout their dining experience.
- Stopping alcohol service at 10:00 pm with tables cleared of all drinks at 11:00 pm and closed at 11:00pm, unless the kitchen remains open.

Requirements of WorkSafe BC:

- Creating and posting a COVID-19 Safety Plan.



CONNECT YOUR CUSTOMERS WITH YOUR BUSINESS VALUES

It has never been more important to showcase your businesses values and to be transparent about your commitment to your customers than it is today. This is your opportunity to showcase what you believe in particularly around hospitality, setting high expectations, staff and guest experience, and food and beverage.

- If you support local, this is the time to shout if from the rooftops.
- If you are doing things to protect your staff and make them feel safe, talk about it proudly.
- If you are newly offering take-away, make sure you talk about how you are packaging the food and how it will arrive safely AND not in Styrofoam.
- If you offer vegan and vegetarian options, talk about them.

Take the time to connect with new customers. Your customers today may be people that are currently living and working closer to your business than your previous clientele. Make sure you market to them and understand what they are looking for.

A standard email or a quick statement on your website isn't going to be enough to communicate what you believe in. Be intentional. Connecting your values and your guests is about making positive statements about experience and commitment:

- Highlight what your guest experience promise is.
- Target your ideal customers in your statements and your images: do you have a Millennial clientele, a strong retirement community or a neighbourhood following? Target them with different messages based on what they are looking for and what you can deliver.
- Let guests know what to expect when they come into your restaurant.
- Promote new features and menus that you've developed (can be a response to COVID-19) including new take-away options.
- Talk about your staff and their contribution to your organization.
- Update your hours so that they are always correct on all your channels.
- Encourage comfort and security.
- Visually showcase hospitality: happy people being cared for.

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PROMOTE YOUR COMMITMENT TO SAFETY BY REGISTERING FOR THE RESTORING CONFIDENCE APP AND PROUDLY DISPLAY IT IN YOUR WINDOW

The Restoring Confidence App is part of the B.C. government's Stronger BC for Everyone, Economic Recovery Plan. It was developed jointly by the Ministries of Jobs, Economic Development and Competitiveness; Health; and Citizens' Services. BCRFA has been a driving force behind the importance of a consumer confidence program to the industry's recovery and has provided input into the program's development.

This is a free tool that allows customers to connect through a simple poster in the window, the idea that a business is following Public Health Orders. In addition, by signing up, you are letting the government know you are serious about your COVID-19 safety plan.

Apply online: covid19localbusinessposter.gov.bc.ca

You should sign your business up because:

- Having businesses across our province adopt the Local Business Poster will build customer confidence through consistency, simplicity and easy access to safety protocols;
- The core statements on the poster make it easy for customers to understand what current Public Health Orders require of businesses in their COVID-19 Safety Plan;
- It moves the COVID-19 safety message outside your business and allows you to focus on food and beverage and hospitality inside.

To register, businesses must:

- Provide basic business and contact information (multiple locations possible within the same application);
- Upload an up-to-date COVID-19 safety plan (PDF required);
- Agree to statements that summarize the core principals required by the PHO and identified above.
- Print the custom Local Business Poster, with a QR code, on a standard printer (8.5 x 11 paper).
- Post the custom poster in an easy-to-see location in their business, like a front window.

BE SELECTIVE ABOUT WHERE YOU SPEND MARKETING DOLLARS

To be successful, you do need to keep marketing even in the most trying times like these. Given that your marketing budget will likely be reduced, spend wisely. Change your marketing channels to focus on local.

- Invest in ad campaigns on Facebook and Instagram. Social media platforms allow you to geo-target. This is essential. They have nominal costs and amplify your reach. Start small and see if these work for you. Target people by region, age, gender and hobbies and interests.
- Experiment with posters that you can put near the door of your business.
- Use chalkboards and sandwich boards to spread your message curbside. If you don't have a sandwich board but you have people walking by your business, buy one and update it everyday to create interest in your neighbours.
- Use window writers to communicate hours or specials.
- Take images of your business, your dishes and your team and post them on social. If you have the budget for professional photos, fantastic. If not, find a staff person who is great with their phone camera AND ask them to take photos weekly and post a range of photos on your social channels.
- Experiment with paid advertising on Yelp or Google – but make sure you have analytics turned on to see if these are working for you.
- Use your front window as your most obvious marketing location. Dress it up for the season. If people are walking or driving up, they want to see signs that you are engaged and ready to welcome them. If you haven't done Holiday lights or patio lights, this is the year to have that simmering light in the window to draw guests in on a cold evening.
- If you have a winter patio, spend some of your marketing dollars making sure it looks welcoming, has some winter greenery and some lighting that sets the tone. Make sure you have a great stand that has a winter proof (behind glass or plastic) version of your patio and take out menus for guests walking by to browse.

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HOST INFLUENCERS FOR A DINNER ON YOU

People in your community can help to bring new customers into your business. The word “influencers” often means someone with a huge digital footprint. Those people do have influence but they are monetizing their channels so they expect you to pay them to post. That’s not what we are talking about here.

There are often active people in your community who have a social media channel that many friends and colleagues follow and they are excited to be out and treated to a special dinner. Be very selective in the type of influencer you will host. These micro influencers have a lot of clout and often will get you a more effective reach. This can include local media writers/broadcasters with a social media following, local visitor centre staff, leaders of community organizations and food lovers. These individuals may share your story in exchange for the hosted meal. Reach out to people who might be a fit and see what kind of arrangement you can make with them to come in and dine.

PARTICIPATE IN STRATEGIC MARKETING PROGRAMS

BCRFA coordinates multiple programs that help to promote operators and showcase the outstanding dishes and promotions at different times of the year. Members can sign up and participate in our core programs: Buy BC: Eat Drink Local and Dine Around.

Buy BC: Eat Drink Local

The Buy BC: Eat Drink Local is delivered in partnership with Government of BC’s Ministry of Agriculture. It provides diners across BC with the opportunity to sample regional BC cuisine, and connect local producers with restaurateurs and chefs who are developing feature menus that highlight locally grown and produced foods. Buy BC: Eat Drink Local is an investment in the future of food and a way to enable consumers to easily identify local, seasonal and sustainable food. Program is free to participate. Send us your local creations for promotion on @BCTastesBetter and @EatDrinkBuyBC. Tag #BuyBC in your posts.

Dine Around Events

Dine Around Events run in areas around the province with the core events taking place January 14 – February 7, 2021. Comox Valley is later in February. Participating restaurants offer three course menus costing \$15, \$25, \$35, \$45 or \$55 per person giving locals and visitors the chance to channel their inner foodie, try new menu items and new restaurants! This year we want to make sure that strong take away experiences are offered in addition to the stable of dine in options.

Areas that have Dine Around programs for 2021: Okanagan-Similkameen, the Kootenays, Thompson-Nicola, Prince George, Comox Valley, Delta and Victoria.

If you want to participate, do not hesitate to contact us for the details for your area. We look forward to having you participate! Please contact our membership manager Christina Ferreira info@impactevents.ca or 250.469.1958.

INCREASE YOUR ENGAGEMENT ON SOCIAL

People are using their social media channels to connect with friends and family alike as COVID-19 restrictions limit us. If you don’t have strong social media engagement with your customers, you are posting but it isn’t getting reactions, you need to do more with your posts.

Things to try to improve your reach:

- Tag local foodies, industry groups and news groups in your social posts.
We have @BCRFA, @BCTastesBetter and @EatDrinkBuyBC – tag us!
- Tag your suppliers and partners in posts. If you support local, local will support you. If you buy from a local winery or brewery, make sure you engage with them on social and let them know you are featuring their products.
- Connect personally with your best clients and invite them to follow you back.
- Spread the word on LinkedIn. Business to business connections are essential right now. Tell your personal story on LinkedIn and get your work colleagues to see your business differently.

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- Connect with your local Chamber of Commerce, Business Improvement Association or service organization like Rotary. They are there to help you and if you have a promotion that they can support, when you tag them, they can repost.
- Post about your changes in your social media “about us” profiles or add a linkin.bio to your Instagram profile to direct traffic to a core page of your website.

Expand your Reach with Hashtags:

Use top foodie and regional hashtags to increase the visibility of your posts.

#EatDrinkLocal
#BCTastesBetter
#BuyBC
#SupportLocal
#EatLocal
#BCRestaurants
#BCHospitality
#BCSmallBusiness
#HealthSafetyHospitality
#MakingMemories
#CustomerConfidence
#HospitalityExperience
#HospitalityIndustry
#SaveHospitality
#IAmACook



THINK LIKE A CUSTOMER

One final note before you frame up your marketing message, walk through the experience of entering your business yourself and ask your staff to do the same, pretending to be a customer as we head into the colder months.

- Are you showing prospective customers that you are making significant changes to respond to COVID-19?
- Is your business more spacious?
- Have you removed opportunities for people bottlenecking?
- Are your enhanced cleaning protocols visible?
- Do you have a separate take out and dine in protocol that's visible?
- Are empty soap and hand sanitizers being replaced in a timely manner?
- Do you have physical distancing decals on the floor for counter service and washrooms, etc?
- Are you providing welcoming outdoor space including pick up windows and winter patios?
- Do you have appropriate heaters, well placed? (Note: no propane in closed spaces because emissions cause CO2 poisoning of guests.)

As you welcome customers, make sure you and your staff are comfortable that your COVID-19 safety plan is solid. Then walk through taking pictures and a mini-video of your winter dining protocols.

Use the experience to share your story on Instagram and Facebook. Be proud that you are taking the time to make real changes and allow your customers to see behind the curtain of those changes.

We're #InThisTogether. Let your customers know you are taking your part seriously.

More resources are available like this at www.BCRFA.com. Call 604.669.2239 or 250.317.4533.

COVID-19 MARKETING CHECKLIST

You should:

- ☐ Register for the Restoring Confidence program to showcase your COVID-19 safety plan prominently: covid19localbusinessposter.gov.bc.ca.
- ☐ Update your social media pages to show your current menu and any additional cleaning and physical distancing measures you are taking.
- ☐ Allocate a budget to boosting social media posts. Small amounts of money on a range of posts can help to see what works for you to grow your following. Keep track of days and times of posts to leverage the style, content and timing of posts that connect better in the future.
- ☐ Email loyal customers to let them know about new hours and upcoming specials.
- ☐ Explain your steps for providing an enhanced dining experience in a COVID-19 world.
- ☐ Promote anything local – people want to support local business as part of their economic recovery strategy. If you partner with a local farmer, fisher, winery or brewery, talk about it. If you support local producers, call out specific ingredients or products with pride.
- ☐ Revamp your website to include your COVID-19 safety plan, your new policies and procedures to enhance health and safety and any new menu items.
- ☐ Highlight any take-out options, curbside pick-up and contactless delivery options you are offering.
- ☐ Use your store front to showcase your community spirit. Make sure you use a-boards or window writers, window decorations and lighting to draw guests in. Your closest neighbours are your best chance for connecting with new customers. Target the people that walk and run by, or drive by on their way to and from regular errands.
- ☐ Promote any COVID-19 outdoor eating options: winter patio, après-ski, picnic in the park kit, winter barbecue kit, sunset special, date night, etc. Talk about how you are taking advantage of your outdoor space in new ways. Make it beautiful and welcoming, even if it is cold. Dr. Bonnie loves anything outside – your customers will love any ideas that you have that allow dining outside.
- ☐ Check with your municipality to ensure that anything you are doing outside with signage, patios or winter décor is permitted.
- ☐ Assure your customers that you are taking every measure to provide them with safe, clean food with your cooking, your packaging, your cleaning and your delivery.
- ☐ Provide sustainability messaging around how you are tackling take-away and delivery in a green way. COVID-19 is increasing waste and many customers are looking for environmentally positive solutions because they are not comfortable with the increased waste.