SWELL COUNTRY

RESTAURANT GROWTH GUIDE

Influencer marketing for restaurants

The right local creator can introduce your restaurant to people who actually live, work, and eat nearby. Here is how to turn that attention into measurable visits.

FREE RESOURCE

A practical 30-day starter plan

START WITH THE STRATEGY

Influence should lead somewhere

A viral video is exciting. A full dining room is better. Build the campaign around people who can realistically visit your restaurant, not simply people with big follower counts.

01

Reach

Local people who might visit

02

Trust

An authentic dining experience

03

Action

A booking, visit, or order

Choose ONE business result for your first campaign. Trying to promote everything at once produces content that looks good but tells people very little.

- **Fill a slow service**
  Promote a Tuesday dinner, weekday lunch, or early seating with a clear reason to come now.
- **Introduce something new**
  Launch a chef special, weekend brunch, tasting menu, or seasonal dish.
- **Build local awareness**
  Show what makes the experience memorable: atmosphere, signature dishes, hospitality, and neighborhood.
- **Drive an action you can track**
  Use a reservations link, unique offer code, dedicated landing page, or “How did you hear about us?” at checkout.

THE BETTER QUESTION

Would this creator’s audience actually choose to eat here in the next 30 days?

Local beats famous

A smaller creator with a neighborhood audience can be more useful than a national account with a million followers.

- **Look where diners already look**

  Search Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube for your city + food, nearby neighborhoods, cuisine styles, and restaurant reviews. Check tagged posts from comparable venues.

- **Prioritize audience fit**

  Look for local commenters, relevant food content, genuine conversation, consistent posting, and a style that feels right for your restaurant.

- **Check the actual work**

  Watch recent videos. Can they show food appetizingly, tell a useful story, and make location and next steps clear?

- **Ask for audience data**

  Request recent reach, city-level audience breakdown, typical story views, and performance from similar restaurant campaigns. Screenshots are fine.

- **Start with a small test**

  Shortlist five to ten people, contact three to five, and test one or two partnerships before committing to a recurring program.

A SIMPLE CREATOR SCORECARD

Local audience	___ / 5	Content quality	___ / 5
Engagement quality	___ / 5	Brand fit	___ / 5

OUTREACH THAT SOUNDS HUMAN

“Hi [Name], we love your posts about [neighborhood/food]. We would like to invite you to experience [restaurant/dish]. Are you open to discussing a collaboration? If so, could you share your audience locations, rates, and recent content examples?”

Make the expectations clear

A complimentary meal can be a useful introduction. It is not a substitute for agreeing on deliverables when you need a specific marketing result.

- **Give every visit a hook**

  Choose one signature dish, limited special, or chef story as the focal point. Explain what makes it worth ordering, then plan good lighting and service for filming.

- **Specify the deliverables**

  Example: one short-form video, three story frames, restaurant tag, location tag, and a visible booking call-to-action. Agree on platforms and dates.

- **Put the terms in writing**

  Include compensation or hosted meal value, timing, approval of factual details, content usage rights, cancellation terms, and whether paid ad usage is included.

- **Leave room for real opinions**

  Give creators accurate facts, not a mandatory glowing script. Honest experiences make more credible content.

- **Plan your response**

  Share the right reservation/order link, notify front-of-house staff, and be ready to reply when people ask about availability, menu, or parking.

DISCLOSE THE RELATIONSHIP

Under FTC guidance, payment, complimentary meals, and discounts may create a material connection. Creators should clearly disclose it in the endorsement itself. A visible “Ad” or “Hosted meal provided by [Restaurant]” can be appropriate; a buried hashtag is not.

Turn one feature into a habit

A creator visit should be the beginning of a relationship. Pair trusted local voices with simple prompts that encourage guests to share their own experiences.

- **Invite proven creators back**

  Reach out to a creator who already knows the restaurant. For example, invite Dex to return regularly for a hosted meal and feature new dishes or specials. A warm, standing invitation can keep the relationship active.

- **Define the standing arrangement**

  For ongoing features, agree on a reasonable meal allowance, visit frequency, post cadence, content expectations, and review date. Do not require a positive opinion. Each endorsed post must clearly disclose complimentary meals or the ongoing relationship.

- **Search your own neighborhood**

  In Stockton and the Central Valley, try TikTok and Instagram searches such as “Stockton food,” “Stockton eats,” “Central Valley eats,” and local restaurant or neighborhood tags. Review audience location, real comments, and recent restaurant videos.

- **Make each feature about one thing**

  Offer a camera-ready signature dish, a limited-time special, or a chef favorite. Give the creator the story behind it, the price, availability, and one clear next step for viewers.

- **Turn happy guests into advocates**

  Ask guests to tag your restaurant when they post. Try a simple counter sign or receipt line: “Loved your meal? Tag @[yourhandle] so we can see it!” Repost guest content only with permission.

- **Make your handle impossible to miss**

  Keep the same, legible Instagram handle on menus, counter signage, takeout packaging, receipts, your website, and in-store QR prompts. Check that tags, profile links, and location information work.

LOCAL ACTIVATION EXAMPLE

Invite Dex back. Feature one signature dish this month. Approach three more Stockton-area food creators. Add your @handle to packaging and the counter. Track tagged posts, inquiries, and orders.

PART 4 · TRACK WHAT HAPPENED

Measure visits, not vanity

Views and likes can help diagnose performance, but they are not the same thing as customers.

AWARENESS	**Reach, views, story views** Did local people see it?
INTEREST	**Saves, shares, profile visits** Did the content create intent?
ACTION	**Link clicks, bookings, code uses** Did someone take the next step?
BUSINESS	**Covers, sales, repeat visits** Did it help the restaurant?

Example: A creator’s video earns 18,000 views and 60 tracked reservations. With a $600 total campaign cost, that is $10 per tracked reservation. Check actual attendance and revenue before deciding whether to repeat it.

A PRACTICAL 30-DAY ROLLOUT

WEEK 1	Pick goal; search Stockton-area creators; contact Dex.
WEEK 2	Agree on terms; select the featured signature dish.
WEEK 3	Publish; request guest tags; display your handle.
WEEK 4	Review bookings, customer tags, costs, and results.

WORK THROUGH THIS BEFORE YOU LAUNCH

The restaurant influencer checklist

Use this as your first-campaign planning sheet. A focused small test beats a complicated program nobody can evaluate.

PLAN

- [ ] Choose one measurable campaign goal
- [ ] Select the featured menu item, experience, or service period
- [ ] Create a trackable booking link or offer code

CREATOR

- [ ] Search local creator tags and vet audience fit
- [ ] Invite a past creator back and define repeat-visit terms
- [ ] Agree on fee, hosted meal, content rights, and deliverables

LAUNCH

- [ ] Confirm clear disclosure on hosted or recurring features
- [ ] Display your Instagram handle on signage and packaging
- [ ] Ask guests to tag you and request permission to repost

REVIEW

- [ ] Compare results with total campaign cost
- [ ] Decide what to repeat, change, or stop

A creator’s follower count is a starting clue, not proof of influence. Choose partners for relevance, trust, and the action they can inspire.

WORKSHEET

Plan your first collaboration

Write the answers before you offer a free meal or agree to a fee.

1. What exact business outcome are we trying to create?

2. Who is the diner we want to reach, and where do they live?

3. What experience would make someone want to visit?

4. Which local creators or past partners will we invite?

5. How will we prompt guest tags and measure resulting visits?

Good content gets attention.
A good system turns it into guests.

Swell Country helps businesses connect local visibility, compelling content, and customer follow-through.

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