

## Nine Winter Marketing Ideas to Boost Traffic

Dec 23, 2024

Welcome to the third act of our Winter Marketing Series, folks! As holiday lights flicker like distant stars and consumers retreat into their cozy lairs—probably binge-watching their favorite guilty pleasures—we find ourselves at a crossroads. It's the perfect moment to whip up a marketing strategy that doesn't just tick boxes but ignites a fire. In our previous posts, we explored [the benefits of third-party delivery services](#) and [how to shine a spotlight on your rockstar staff in the digital realm](#). These strategies are designed to introduce your offerings to new and existing customers, but we still want them to make the effort and walk in the front door.

This week, we unearth a treasure trove of marketing magic to help you conquer those notoriously sluggish winter months. Don't let the beginning of the year slump hurt your business!

**1. Lean into the colder weather.** It may be tempting to try and distract diners from the fact that it's chilly outside, but sometimes the best strategy is to plan promotions that actually incorporate the outside temps. Take [Olmsted](#) in Brooklyn, for example. Their garden is the star of the show most of the year, but winter seating can feel like a frozen game of musical chairs. So, what do they do? They transform the garden into a cozy winter wonderland, complete with warm blankets and a DIY s'mores station. Suddenly, sitting outside in the winter feels less like a frostbite waiting to happen and more like a delightful adventure in marshmallow roasting! Who knew cold weather could be so... toasty?

**2. Do a birthday promotion.** Birthday promotions are one of many ways to [build customer loyalty](#), particularly during slow months like January. Ask just about anyone with a January birthday how tough it can be to celebrate appropriately! The holidays are over, everyone is grumpy, and it's freezing outside. Some restaurants have cracked the code: just tell diners to book a table on their birthday, and voilà—their dinner's on the house! It might sound like a gamble, but think of it this way: one free meal could turn into a lifetime of loyal customers (and their friends, who will undoubtedly hear about how they got a free meal). It's like throwing a birthday party for someone else and getting all the cake without the calories! Who wouldn't want to come back for that?

**3. Decorate.** If the dining room looks especially fun and festive, guests will handle some of the holiday marketing themselves. They'll encourage others to visit through word-of-mouth

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marketing. Whether it's New Year's Eve, Valentine's Day, or even Mardi Gras—put some thought into photogenic, seasonal decor that will have diners snapping pics they can't wait to share online. Their friends just may make a reservation to come see for themselves. No one wants to miss a great Instagram opportunity.

**4. Redo your website.** The new year is a great time to spiff up your most valuable digital tool: [your website](#). A site is often a guest's first impression on your restaurant. It's worthwhile to take the time during these slower periods to make sure that basic info like your phone number and address is front and center, your menu is up to date, all your photos look crystal clear, and the pages all load properly on mobile. These small details can be the difference between a guest deciding to try your spot or moving on because he or she couldn't get the information needed on the site.

**5. Extend your happy hour.** During the summertime, happy hours are perfectly aligned with spending a sunny afternoon outdoors. Not so in the winter, when people don't have Summer Fridays and most prefer to make a beeline to their apartment post work. Entice the 9-to-5 crowd with drink specials that go a few hours past your usual happy hour timeframe. Add in some snack specials, and you're sure to build up a happening post-work scene.

**6. Launch your email newsletter or blog.** Along with your website, [a newsletter can be incredibly useful for marketing](#). The early months of the year—when customers are resetting for the new year, and often cleaning up (and adding to) their email subscription—are the perfect time to start building an email following. A newsletter can be used for announcing winter recipes, specials, or openings. Even if you don't have an email to send yet, add a newsletter sign-up form to your website and social media platforms, and include it with your check presenters. When you are ready to make an announcement, you'll already have that built-in audience.

**7. Participate in Restaurant Week.** Many cities hold a Restaurant Week at various times throughout the year to drum up business across the industry. This involves each restaurant offering a set, fixed-price menu for one week. It's a particularly great opportunity to bring new types of customers in the door, as each Restaurant Week does its own marketing and advertising throughout the respective city.

**8. Warm up your drinks.** The early months can be tough for alcohol sales, not only because of #DryJanuary (a popular challenge to swear off alcohol during the first month of the year), but also because most cocktails are served cold—not ideal on a chillier day. Give

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your cocktails winter appeal by turning up the temperature. It doesn't have to stop at Hot Toddies; mulled wine, warm punch, cider, and spiked hot chocolate are just a few of the many options for hot drinks. You can even add a selection of non-alcoholic hot beverages for those committing to a dry month. Take a cue from [Alden & Harlow](#) in Boston, which serves up a playful array of wintery drinks like the Hearthstone, which involves homemade butterscotch and Montenegro whipped cream. This is also a fantastic opportunity to lean on your bar staff to get creative with recipes and [show them off in their own unique way](#).

**9. Go all-in on unique events and experiences.** The key is to create promotions and events that get customers off the couch, away from their Netflix binge-fest. [Some events require more effort and planning than others](#), so think about events you can comfortably host like trivia nights, board game events, and bingos. Once you get your feet wet, explore bigger ideas like viewing parties, paint nights, and screenings of holiday or winter movie favorites. Research local vendors who partner with bars to plan and host these. They may get a piece of the pie, but there's a chance they have a local following that you can leverage.

Most of these options provide the local press with something to write about your bar, because let's face it, a special on domestic buckets isn't exactly Pulitzer material. I mean, who wants to read about a deal that practically screams, "We've run out of ideas!"? But throw a one-night-only event into the mix, and you might just be the new star of the local news, basking in the limelight like a celebrity at a red carpet premiere. It can be a glorious public relations opportunity, transforming your bar from a simple watering hole into the hottest ticket in town—because who doesn't want to associate your restaurant with delicious comfort food instead of their couch?

## Prairie State Gaming

[prairiestategaming.com](http://prairiestategaming.com)

Some restrictions apply. Must be 21 to play or redeem offers. Promotional rules available on request. If you or someone you know has a gambling problem, crisis counseling and referral services can be accessed by calling 1-800-GAMBLER (1-800-426-2537) or text "GAMB" to 833234. Individuals can enroll in the IGB Self-Exclusion Program at all of the IGB offices located at all casinos. Additional information can be found at [igb.illinois.gov/help-for-problem-gamblers](http://igb.illinois.gov/help-for-problem-gamblers)

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