



MARKETING

Restaurants Experiment With Artsy Marketing

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How do you get customers to come in on slow nights? Creative restaurants and bars came up with this idea.

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The hospitality industry is always on the front lines of difficulty. When the economy is sluggish and people generally don't have extra money to spend, they don't go out, which directly affects the income of bars and restaurants. Even when things are decent, the spending gets concentrated on the weekends, meaning that other days of the week can be highly unprofitable, because the fixed costs of labor and operations don't go away.

New promotions are always important. And a slew of restaurants and bars have hatched some interesting ones lately involving art--as in, making it, not displaying it. Establishments across the country are hopping aboard national programs that bring amateur (and sometimes not-so-amateur) artists out at times when the places might normally be slow.

Dr. Sketchy's

One example is [Dr. Sketchy's Anti-Art School](#). As the site explains the concept: "From illegal flashmobs to the Museum of Modern Art, Dr. Sketchy's has brought artists a rule-breaking cocktail of dames, drinking and drawing."

More practically, Dr. Sketchy's is an attempt started in 2005 by New York artist [Molly Crabapple](#) to break staid academic associations with drawing sessions, particularly life drawing in which a nude model would pose and artists would spend a few hours honing their skills of observation and realistic drawing.

A licensed Dr. Sketchy's evening (there are [more than 100 branches](#)) typically involves going to a bar, drinking, and drawing models and burlesque performers with a variety of attire and props. During the session, the bar makes money on drinks and snacks. Patrons pay a cover charge and there are often prizes given out.

Paint Nite

[Paint Nite](#), which started last year in Boston and uses the tag line "drink creatively," has a slightly different approach. Instead of building on the life drawing experience that is common to many artists, this group runs a two-hour session in which no one needs to have experience. Operating more like a central company that creates the events, Paint Nite charges money in advance, provides supplies and a local artist-teacher, and promises "your own unique masterpiece" on a 16-by-20-inch by the end of the evening. Again, customers buy food and drink directly from the hosting establishment.

Riding on the coattails of art may seem like an unlikely marketing approach for someone in the hospitality industry, but the growth of these events are proof of their potential usefulness.

Seen any creative promotions lately?

IMAGE: COURTESY OF COMPANY

LAST UPDATED: SEP 4, 2013