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## STAYING AHEAD OF THE COMPETITION

Florida is known as the destination capital of the United States. With Disney World, Sea World, Daytona, Miami Beach and hundreds of other noteworthy locations, visitors flock to Florida year round. Up in the northeast corner of the state about forty miles north of Jacksonville is another destination, Murray's Grille. "We're off the beaten path and unless customers know about us they probably wouldn't find us. That makes us a destination restaurant," says Larry Murray, who owns the busy restaurant along with his son, Scott. Located in the small town of Yulee, Florida, Murray's Grille has built a regular clientele from folks who drive as far as 30-40 miles to dine there. Designed to look like an old farm house, the restaurant seats 200 people and is famous for its American Cuisine of steaks, seafood, and delicious bar-b-que. "We opened five years ago and during that time we've built our business by word of mouth, along with a little radio and newspaper advertising. So far our business has steadily grown. But things are changing around here. Right now we haven't had any serious competition but our community is suddenly starting to grow. A Super Wal-Mart is currently under construction, along with several other major chains. We have a feeling that chain restaurants are close behind," shares the elder Murray. Believing that this is the time to build a stronger customer base, the Murray's have been looking to develop a marketing plan that will help them increase their base of loyal customers and to bring back those loyal customers more often. "When I first heard The Restaurant Marketing Group's offer for a free marketing analysis, I was intrigued and figured what have we got to lose? The analysis was designed specifically for my restaurant and demographics." Based on the analysis and a new marketing plan Murray's Grille is seeing increases in sales and profits. "It's working and our level of service has gone up another notch. Within the first month over 1,000 people joined their VIP club" Murray continues, "Our servers were briefed on our new VIP club. They invited guests to sign up for the club. For those entering, we promised to send our special offers throughout the year as well as birthday and anniversary acknowledgments. Everyone has a birthday and more people go out to eat on their birthday than any other occasion. This is all increased sales. In addition we offered an incentive for those who took the time to fill out the card. Immediately we began building our database of names, e-mails and addresses of loyal customers...Then we sent them Bounce Back offers." At the end of the first month Murray's had enough data to be able to start a monthly birthday and anniversary campaign. Within a few days of their first mailer they started seeing a steady flow of those offers coming back. "One of the first couples to redeem their anniversary offer came in and booked a party for thirty people. So we can see the importance of getting customers back through our doors!" adds Murray. "RMG has taught us how to identify our First-Time Customers; take extremely good care of them; how to get them back into the restaurant very quickly and how to make them Regular Guests. But that's not all, with the help of a weekly coaching phone interview with Larry Murray has developed a number of other marketing campaigns. "I think I'm most excited about our Employee Challenge. We have printed business cards with a line at the bottom so our employees can sign their name. Printed at the bottom of the card is an offer for 20 percent off any menu item. Every employee is involved in this challenge, from the dishwashers, cooks, hostesses to the servers. We ask that they pass out their business cards to friends, relatives and acquaintances. When the cards are redeemed the employee whose name appears at the bottom of the card gets a cash bonus of five percent of what that customer's meal cost. An additional five percent is placed in another pot and the employee that brings in the most during our month-long challenge will get the money in that pot as well. Sometimes you need to spend a little money to get some returns. Based on the enthusiasm of our employees, this marketing campaign is a real winner!" adds Murray. The company is also utilizing New Move-Ins and sending out welcome letters with an incentive attached to all newcomers to the area. "We want to welcome these people to our neighborhood and help them to establish Murray's Grille as their Restaurant of Choice where they will dine often." We recently went through our Chamber of Commerce and sent a letter to all our fellow members with an offer that they can give to their employees or customers. It's such a simple concept," says Murray. "Foodservice Marketing provided by RMG helped me to identify areas within my restaurant that were creating problems. I did not know that these problems existed prior to the survey. It has been a great help in strengthening the relationships between my employees and the respect level that our management team has for the employees. We have accomplished an awful lot in a short period of time." The Murrays understand that the number of dollars customers have in a given market are limited. To get more than your share, you are frankly going to have to take them away from your competition. By building a sound database and developing successful marketing campaigns, Murray's Grille is posed to do just that. Staying ahead of the competition-now that's a wise decision.

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