

Foursquare Pays Dividends

Game-like marketing trend boosts biz sales, customer discounts



Karissa Armstrong loves a good deal. Buy one, get one? Sounds good to her. Ten percent off? Sure, why not. Free size upgrade? Well, if you insist. She doesn't have to cut coupons, carry a customer loyalty card on her keychain, comb through ads, or earn a certain number of punches or stamps on a punch card. Armstrong has an array of special offers, deals and discounts at her fingertips via the popular smartphone app Foursquare.

As more and more companies embrace social media to communicate with and attract customers, businesses are discovering the benefits of Foursquare—a location-based social networking service that incorporates gaming elements.

In a nutshell, Foursquare lets people “check in” using their iPhone, Blackberry, Android or

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other smartphone wherever they work, live, eat, shop and play. With each stop at various bars, clubs, coffeehouses, restaurants, retail outlets and other venues, they earn points and unlock badges based on where they're at and how often they check in. Check in at a location more than anyone else and become the "mayor."

Users can let their friends know where they are by checking in at one of the thousands of places Foursquare lists, based on your GPS location. You can see where your friends are hanging out, if they're nearby, and where they've recently checked in. You can leave tips and comments about places you explore around town, and you can score some sweet rewards along the way.

"It's an incentive to keep going back," says Armstrong, media director at Bozell, a creative marketing communications company in Omaha. "I think that businesses are really missing out if they're not using it."

Businesses use it to highlight special deals and discounts to Foursquare users who check in nearby. In return, companies gain insight about who's coming in, the time of day people stop in, total number of unique visitors, gender breakdown of customers, and other statistics.

"It's a great tool for small business owners to not only engage their customers but track everything," Armstrong says. "They're able to get real-time analytics."

National chains Red Robin Gourmet Burgers, Starbucks, Pizza Hut and many more offer discounts and freebies to Foursquare users. Several local businesses are using it, too, including the Blue Jay, the Pizza Gourmet Co., eCreamery Ice Cream & Gelato, the Reel Martini Bar and more.

To reward customers for coming in, they might offer a buy one, get one deal the first time you check in, 10 percent off your bill the 10th time you check in, or a free drink every fifth visit. Many establishments offer special discounts to the "mayor."

Some businesses leverage Foursquare in



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other ways to draw a crowd. Kona Grill restaurants around the country, including the Omaha location, hosted "Swarm Badge" parties in August. A coveted swarm badge is something you can only get when 50 or more Foursquare users check in at the same place at the same time.

This summer, Foursquare hit the 1.7-million user mark and a whopping 100 million check-ins. Armstrong and many of her coworkers at Bozell check in multiple times a day.

"It keeps getting traction," she says. "People have that curiosity and want to check it out."

At eCreamery in Omaha's Dundee neighborhood, Foursquare users receive a free size upgrade every third time they check in.

Co-owner Becky App says the custom ice cream shop at 50th Street and Underwood Avenue began offering Foursquare specials earlier this summer. The service helps build loyalty among customers, and it's a great way to drive repeat traffic.

"People have really liked it," App says. "It attracts customers. We get a lot of people from out of town who use it. It's a reward for coming back to visit us."

The Pizza Gourmet Co., which has three locations in the Omaha area, promotes their involvement with Foursquare with a sign on the door. The restaurant has offered a variety of Foursquare deals, including 10 percent off your bill and buy one drink, get one free.

Tyson Sevier, Pizza Gourmet general manager, says Foursquare is one way to help "create a fun little environment" for customers. The business has used Foursquare since spring and found that it's more economical than spending hundreds or thousands of dollars to advertise on billboards, TV, radio, and in newspapers.

"Social networking allows us to market very inexpensively," Sevier says. "Every little bit helps right now, especially as a new business." **B2B**

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