

Mama Fu's takes care of business by targeting potential guests at their places of employment

By MARK BRANDAU

AUSTIN, Texas (March 09, 2009) —As a growth-minded, 13-unit fast-casual chain, **Mama Fu's Asian House** has used direct marketing and e-mail to promote its concept from the beginning. Much of that advertising was sent to potential customers at their workplaces and offices, because, as director of marketing Marcia Oakes pointed out, that's where many people ponder what they're going to eat for lunch or dinner.

"It's useful to reach people where they make their dining decisions," Oakes said. "You're going to think what your plans are for dinner before you walk out the door. That's two-thirds of meal decisions being made at work. To know we're reaching them in that immediate trade area, within three to five miles of most of our restaurants, works well for us."

Targeting consumers at the office has become more important for Austin-based Mama Fu's and other restaurants as unemployment in the United States rises—the national rate was 7.6 percent in January—leaving those people still employed as a crucial demographic: customers who still have discretionary income. As such, Mama Fu's said it would continue to devote a sizeable portion of its marketing budget to direct marketing, provided by WorkPlace Media, a Mentor, Ohio-based firm.

"We had been using WorkPlace's service prior to the turnaround in the economy, but we have increased our efforts over the past six months because people are really making tough choices about where they spend their money," Oakes said. "We're staying in front of them as much as we can."



Mama Fu's Asian House said it plans to devote a sizable portion of its marketing budget to direct marketing to potential customers at their workplaces.

Not only do customers closely scrutinize their away-from-home food spending, they also spend a lot of time away from home, said John Cayne, national vice president and director of marketing for ID Media, parent company of WorkPlace.

"The consumer you reach at work is sitting in your trade area 250 days a year, eight hours a day," Cayne said.

In addition to broad e-mail blasts to workers opting to receive notification of deals, WorkPlace also has relationships with "key contacts" at more than 900,000 businesses nationwide. The key contact, an office manager or human resources representative, for example, distributes gift certificates or fliers and generally promotes a client brand with word-of-mouth buzz, Cayne said.

The reliance on direct e-mail and word-of-mouth makes for cost-effective marketing, Oakes said, especially for a smaller chain like Mama Fu's.

"For the size we are, 13 total restaurants, six of them corporate-owned, we don't have a huge marketing budget," she said. "We really need to make good use of every dollar."

She added that direct marketing to offices is a turnkey program that is simple to use. Mama Fu's plans to use the service to push catering and membership in its member loyalty program.

Mama Fu's asks franchisees to spend 2 percent to 3 percent of sales on marketing and provides them with creative materials, Oakes said, and the franchisor negotiates favorable rates with media services companies like WorkPlace for franchisees.

The chain will open in Austin in April a new prototype that reduces building costs by about 20 percent. It will be the fifth unit in that market, where it does some radio advertising.



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