

Western Morning News

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I have just taken over a struggling pub. How should I set about promoting it?

I was really pleased to receive your letter, given the current state of the pub industry and the fact that you are taking over a 'struggling' business. It won't be easy, and I'm sure you appreciate that. The latest figures from the British Beer & Pub Association show that as many as 52 pubs a week are now closing in this country.

Promoting a pub is essentially the same as marketing a restaurant or any other kind of business. You have to know who your target markets are, where they are, how to reach them and effectively communicate your offer to them in a way that makes them want to visit.

This means carrying out some research. If you already haven't done so, talk to existing customers, find out what they liked about the 'old' pub experience, what was missing and explore improvement areas. For example, will you be offering food? If not, think very seriously about this because the overwhelming majority of the pubs closing down are focused on drink, not food. Good food brings in customers, sells more beer, and attracts higher margins.

Then spend some time getting to know the competition by visiting bars, pubs and restaurants in the vicinity. Identify areas that will set you apart from them, such as supporting local producers across your offer.

Then turn your attention to creating awareness.

There is a huge amount that you can do with a small budget and a bit of time. Face-to-face marketing is a great way of building personal relationships with your local community. It is always the people working in the pub that encourage customer loyalty.

Get regular customers' details, build a database and email them with news, events, quiz evenings, beer festivals and offers.

Work with the local media, online, and offline. To start the process, send in your launch story with a message along the lines 'saving a local pub'. Then send in regular press releases promoting events and awards that the pub might win. Start to build relationships with the relevant journalists.

Join in with national, regional and local initiatives that support the pub industry, such as CAMRA's Community Pubs Week campaign (www.camra.org.uk). As part of this campaign, CAMRA provide a range of free promotional material for you to work with.

Pub guides are also a great way to promote your pub and there are numerous published and online pub, food and travel guides out there. Spend some time researching them online and pick the ones that are most likely to appeal to your customers. The Telegraph, for example, publishes an online Wales and South West England Pub Guide.

Finally, and most important of all, build your reputation simply by doing things very well. Word of mouth recommendation is one of the most powerful tools in marketing today, and it is central to the challenge you face. Always give people a reason to talk positively about your pub. If they do they'll come back. And maybe bring their friends too.