

Using Location-Based Check-in Services to Market Your Bar or Restaurant

By Rieva Lesonsky



What's the latest hot topic in social media? Location-based check-in services are adding another layer to social media by making it 1) mobile and 2) geolocation-based. If you're not familiar with these tools, here's how it works: Consumers use the GPS technology on their mobile devices to "check in" to physical locations, like your bar or restaurant. They can then review your bar or restaurant, recommend

it to others, and alert their social networks where they are.

Location-based check-in services are ideal marketing tools for bars and restaurants. Why? First, according to research by ComScore, these services are most likely to be used by young customers in the 18-to 34-year-old age range—obviously, a hot market for bar owners and many restaurants as well. Second, users of location-based check-in services tend to be "early adopters" of new technology—which means they're often trendsetters whose recommendations influence others. And third, location-based check-in services are perfectly tailored for local businesses that depend on people physically coming into the site.

What are some benefits of location-based check-in services? First, simply by checking in, customers are alerting their entire network that your bar or restaurant exists. If they recommend it, review it or ask friends to meet them there, that's just gravy. Second, you can enhance the power of location-based check-in by offering customers who check in discounts, special offers or rewards for their loyalty. Last, but not least, all of the location-based check-in services allow you to track customer behavior, providing invaluable information for growing your bar or restaurant business.

Foursquare was the first big name in location-based check-in, with Gowalla close behind. However, most recently, Facebook Places got into the game and has become a

huge contender. Take a look at all three services (they're all free for businesses to use) and see which one works best for your bar or restaurant.

To get started with location-based check-in, visit Facebook Places, Foursquare and Gowalla and look for their information for business. There are slight differences among the services, but basically you'll need to "claim" your business, provide some basic information and then start using the marketing tools that each site offers.

Although each site's check-in deals vary slightly, they typically include first-time deals, limited-time deals (good for a few hours), deals for customers who bring a friend, or deals based on frequency or number of visits. Facebook Places offers "charity deals," which donate part of a purchase price to charity, and Fourquare enables you to offer deals to users who aren't even at your location—they're simply nearby. (That means you could lure customers who are considering the restaurant across the street over to yours. Sounds pretty good, right?)

You can also encourage users to recommend or rate your bar or restaurant and to invite their friends to meet up with them. All three companies are constantly adding new marketing and measurement tools, services and features, so once you get familiar with each site, be sure to keep up with the changes.

Talk to your [SCORE](#) mentor for more ideas on implementing these tools in your marketing plan. With smartphone ownership soaring, location-based marketing tools are only going to grow. Get in on them now, and your bar or restaurant will be one step ahead of the game.

Rieva Lesonsky is CEO of GrowBiz Media, a media company that helps entrepreneurs start and grow their businesses. Follow Rieva at [Twitter.com/Rieva](https://twitter.com/Rieva) and visit her blog at SmallBizDaily.com. Visit her website SmallBizTrendCast to get the scoop on business trends and sign up for Rieva's free TrendCast reports.