

COOKING WITH SOCIAL MEDIA

Mildred's Temple Kitchen gets the word out every which way

BY SUZANNE BOLES

Today there's more to running a successful restaurant than just fabulous cooking and great ambience. It's also about positioning yourself in the public eye. And social media has become the way to do it.

Mildred's Temple Kitchen in Toronto is a great example of using social media to benefit your restaurant.

Donna Dooher, executive chef and co-owner, with husband Kevin Gallagher, describes the casual dining room, lounge and bar's menu as "farmhouse chic."

"We focus on local, seasonal cuisine and keep it simple, keep it fresh, keep it approachable."

Though she's not a social media-savvy Millennial, Dooher knows a lot about SM best practices.

The restaurant has more than 6,000 Twitter followers and 1,000-plus Facebook friends. Donna and Kevin use Instagram to post photos. Open Table database keeps them in touch with customers, and 10,000 subscribers have signed up through the restaurant's website.

Posts on social media typically include special events, menu changes and contests. Images of a special culinary creation or event add interest for those who follow the restaurant's posts. Posts are designed to "keep an interesting dialogue going with the guests" without inundating. "We try to keep it relevant and interesting...things our guests would want to know about us."

But it's not all about business. "We have some fun things going on with Twitter. We're always testing the waters."

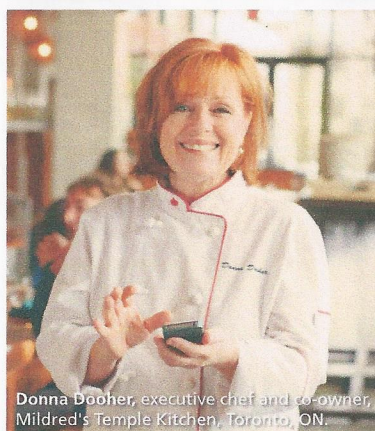
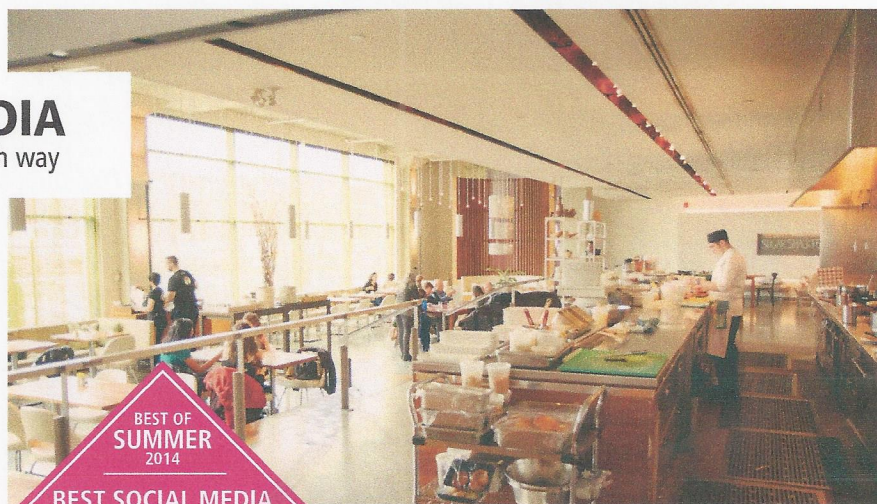
Social media, Dooher points out, has to be an integral part of your operation. At weekly management meetings the guest services manager, who oversees the restaurant's social media, generates "a hits and misses report" that monitors Google Alerts, Open Table, Trip Advisor, Yelp, Urbanspoon – in total, 12 influential websites for the culinary industry.

"We go through them as a team. We look for trends and always respond, to the good and the bad, when commentary comes with a contact. We try to take some learning away from their experience."

Dooher says it's important for every company to have a social media policy. "From a business perspective, you need to have boundaries." For example, guests don't appear in photos. Staff either, unless they give their written consent.

She also adds that social media can support your marketing but shouldn't be your only marketing platform.

"There's no turning back," she says of social media and restaurants. Her message to other operators: "If you have a task list and social media's at the bottom, you might want to move that one closer to the top."



Donna Dooher, executive chef and co-owner, Mildred's Temple Kitchen, Toronto, ON.



TOP TIPS FROM MILDRED'S TEMPLE KITCHEN

Keep it real and be honest. Don't use other companies to bolster Twitter feeds and other social media. The responses need to be genuine. Recruit responsible individuals within the organization to keep the feeds fresh and current.

Pay attention and respond. Even when the comment's negative it's an opportunity to remedy issues and glean further insights into your business.

Monitor. Recruit ambassadors online. The good reviews are your great ambassadors. The bad reviews can become great ambassadors if you reach out, listen and respond.