

CHAPTER 1

My Story

When I was thinking about writing my third book, I considered how I could write it so that people could take the knowledge from this book and easily adapt it to their current business, along with some of the strategies they use in everyday restaurant marketing that already work. I didn't want this book to be "This is how you do it, and this is the only way to market your restaurant." I wanted it to be a book that you could pull ideas from to optimize what you're already doing.

Why did I call it *Restaurant Marketing That Works — Back to the Basics*? Because, honestly, in dealing with thousands of restaurants over the past 11 years of being a marketing agency owner, the one thing I have seen is that people skip the basics. People go for what's sexy and what's easy — they ignore what they should be doing and do not have a plan in place to attack the necessary elements to take business to the next level.

Before I get into what this book is about, I want you to understand my background. I want you to understand where my beliefs are rooted and how I got to this point, because I have a unique journey compared to a lot of people in my industry. In 1999, I graduated from college and, after a short stint in TV, landed my second job in radio advertising sales for WGRR 103.5, the oldies station in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Now, what's unique about my position right out of college is that I was 23, with zero experience in advertising or marketing. My job was to make sure that people on the other side of the table — or, many times, on the other side of the phone — didn't know that I really had no clue what I was doing regarding advertising and marketing. I was simply conveying the message that my bosses had told me, about why our radio stations were exactly what every small business needed. The one thing that I was fortunate to have was training by my father. He taught me the art of listening in a sales environment and consultative selling.

Many of my first sales calls were to restaurants because I saw them as places that consistently needed to have their message in front of people. Unlike car dealers and other types of businesses, restaurants had a need for customers every week. I mentioned the part about my father teaching me because it is a very important part of my background in marketing. You see, being a “consultative seller,” as my dad calls it, allowed me to quickly become trusted by a lot of people I met with early on in my radio career.

Because I wasn't like a lot of my counterparts in the business, walking in to sell them something I didn't actually know they needed wasn't my style. I was walking in and having conversations with people to find out what sort of help they really needed within their business. I would then evaluate the opportunities we had and let them know if I could help. Many times, against the wishes of my managers, I wouldn't present anything. “I don't think I have the product that you need,” and I would then do my best to refer them instead to the person who could help them with that issue.

This led to a lot of great relationships. What I discovered in my early years of selling advertising is that most of my peers were just simply there to sell something. I was fortunate enough that my father taught me how to listen and how to become a trusted advisor.

A few years later, a buddy of mine told me that he wished he had taken the route I did in marketing, having thousands of conversations with small business owners on an annual basis to understand everything they were doing in their marketing. You see, he took the path of being a marketing director at a nonprofit and was stuck in an office, listening to himself and reading textbooks, while I was on the street talking to thousands of business owners about all of the marketing campaigns they were doing and what they loved and hated about them all.

Now I tell you this story due to the irony of the last phrase what they loved and hated about” all of their marketing campaigns. The vast majority of them had no clue as to whether it was working or not! By not knowing what was actually happening, they HATED marketing. I didn't know it back then, but, looking back, it's exactly what got me to where I am today. Those conversations are what got me so concerned with understanding the process of marketing as it relates to return on investment.

As a 23-year-old brand-new salesperson, the worst part was not knowing if it was working. I didn't want to ask my clients if the radio spots were working. They didn't want to tell me that the advertising wasn't working. It was a very awkward dance. Oftentimes, people bought advertising based off of emotion because they loved the product, or based off of their own predetermined thought process of why my radio station was the right place for them to advertise.

The one thing that all of them had in common was their uncertainty. Let's face it, not many consumers walk in off the street, especially to a restaurant, and tell the server, "I'm here eating because I heard your commercial on WGRR." Are people going to eat at that restaurant from the advertising? Of course. To what extent? No idea. Over the four years of selling radio advertising, I began to understand and see that there was a lot of hoping and praying in people's marketing plans.

When asked why they bought other marketing, clients would say, "Because we always have." "The rep's a friend." "It's the right place to be." There weren't facts backing most of the marketing decisions being made.

Now let me go back to the beginning again. In the fall of 1999, my brother, father, and I got together and came up with the idea to start a side hustle together. My brother had a full-time job. He had just returned from the Navy a few years prior. My dad had a full-time consulting gig in the boat business. I had my full-time radio job. My dad had fallen into the boat-consulting world due to his expertise on helping start a consignment RV business, selling campers and motorhomes on consignment. The problem was, they soon realized that, due to laws in the state of Ohio, you couldn't sell boats and campers on the same lot, so the campers were quickly removed, as it was already an established boat business.

After seeing the huge opportunity for RV consignment sales, my dad, brother, and I decided we were going to start an RV consignment business in Northern Kentucky. I knew nothing about the business. My brother knew nothing about the business. My dad knew everything about the business. However, none of us had a clue how to market it. The one thing we knew would be pivotal was the internet. If you think back to 1999 to how restaurants were using the internet, you'll remember that they weren't doing much of anything.

I turned to a friend, Glenn Warner, who owned SNS Computer Solutions, and bought a book at his store on how to build a website. The

software was called Adobe Pagemaker. By September of 1999, I'd built the website, and we were live with our company, Outdoor Consignments. The website mainly listed the inventory online and explained our process, since it was not a commonly known way to buy and sell campers.

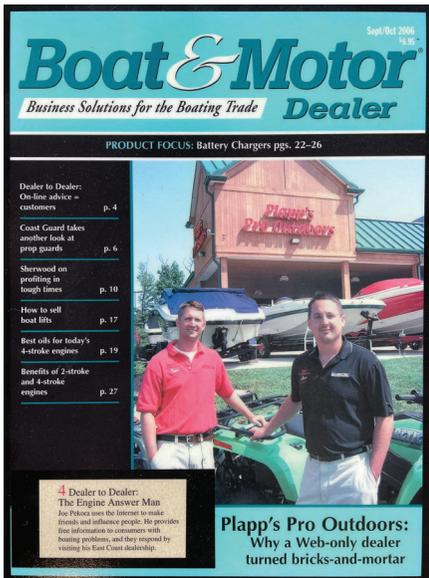
Our marketing at that point consisted of calling people who had units listed for sale in the newspaper, in the trader magazines, and on other websites every day, every night, every weekend. We knew two things:

1. The majority of the people who had their unit listed needed help selling it because they weren't good salespeople, and they didn't have the resources that a dealer had, like warranty or finance, and
2. The majority of people selling a unit were looking to buy a unit. They were selling the unit on their own because they didn't want to get hit with the huge loss by trading in it. We knew we could market the business on one side and then also find inventory at the same time. That led us to quickly create a website with a very large inventory of local campers for sale.

An accidental byproduct was optimizing the website for search engines. It was natural for me to give deep descriptions of the units for sale and to tell stories, but I had no idea that would help with this thing called "SEO." And I'll be quite honest with you: It wasn't until about 2003

that I actually knew what search engines were or what they did. Until that point, we did a lot of stuff by complete accident.

What we did correctly was load our website and the units for sale with very in-depth descriptions about what they were, what they had, and why people needed those options. Long story short, from 1999-2008, we built one of the largest boat and RV dealerships, mainly from our use of the internet. Through that time, I cut my teeth to become known as one of the



best digital marketers among all the boat and RV dealerships nationwide.

I discovered the power of the internet and what it would do for small businesses. By 2005, I'd been published in many magazines and newspapers around the country because of how our dealership had excelled at marketing our business nationwide online. Several former radio clients started calling. "Matt, tell me about Google. Matt, tell me about the internet. Matt, what's the website? Matt, how did you grow your website? Matt, how do you get traffic for your website?"

You name it, and they were asking it.

That's when I got back into the marketing game. Sometime around 2005 or 2006, I started fielding calls and visiting old clients.

As I mentioned early on, my dad taught me to be a consultative seller. A consultative seller builds strong relationships because people understand that you have their best needs at heart. These previously established relationships led me back to those people, and I started doing little side gigs for them, oftentimes for free because I didn't need money. I was teaching them what the internet was, what their website could do, what it shouldn't do, and what I had learned about search engine optimization.

By the way, if you want to hear the story about how I learned search engine optimization on a very deep level, it's a funny story. There's a video link below that'll take you to an explanation of how I figured out SEO and threw gas on the fire. With that, I re-ignited my love for marketing. In 2008, I started consulting as a part-time job, knowing that we were exiting the boat business in the fall of 2008. Those plans changed in the summer of 2008 when the economy collapsed and we were pushed out a little quicker and a lot poorer than we had planned

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By the end of 2008, my marketing firm was in full swing. We started with one basic principle: to help people spend their money correctly and actually see a return on what they were spending. In other words, I wanted to help businesses see an ROI with their marketing. The biggest thing I saw right off the bat was pure laziness in terms of how they were

spending their money on mass media, and pure ignorance regarding how they weren't spending anything on the newest and biggest emerging technology on the internet: social media.

By early 2009, I was helping a handful of clients manage Facebook, LinkedIn, their blogs, and YouTube, all of which was inadvertently done through Google.

From 2008 to 2015, I worked with many businesses in all industries, and we bought and helped market through all mediums. When we had the boat dealership, we were spending upwards of \$300,000 per year and having a lot of success in our marketing. Based on that, I was soon forced into helping businesses with their radio, TV, and billboard advertising. I was able to give them really good advice to help them be better at what they were doing in mass media and, at the same time, take over all of their digital marketing.

By 2015, we had amassed nine restaurant clients, which was the only part of our business that had a niche. I loved the restaurant world because I could share my successes across all nine restaurants, meaning I could do a marketing campaign on email, Facebook, or YouTube and see how it worked, then take that same campaign to the other restaurants. And that got me excited!



In April of 2015, everything went to the next level. One of my clients, Nick, along with a few other gentlemen, owned a really big brand called Hofbräuhaus, but they were skeptical of online marketing. They owned Hofbräuhaus Newport, Columbus, and Pittsburgh. Nick would frequently say that he couldn't deposit

social media likes and had tasked me with showing him how to do so.

I needed to prove to him how all of the money we were spending on social media was working. Keep in mind that at the time, about 5% of their marketing budget was going to online marketing, and the other 95% went toward mass media, which, honestly, was even harder to measure. He wanted me to show him how the people from Facebook and YouTube were walking into the restaurant and spending money, because he didn't believe it. He didn't believe in social media. In fact, at the time, he still had a flip phone.

A few weeks later, a great American holiday sprang up: National Pretzel Day. It was April 26, 2015. We put together a promotion with the owner's approval to do 50% off their number one P-Mix item: pretzels and beer cheese. On that Sunday, instead of spending \$10 on an order of pretzels and beer cheese, you could spend \$5. On top of that, we marketed it exclusively through the Facebook pages of their three locations to see if it had an impact. If it didn't, I agreed to quit bugging Nick and the team about social media. But if it did, they would let me do things my way and do what I knew was right.



The promotion was simple: Bring in your phone and show the promotion to receive the discount, which you've all probably done at some point. There was nothing else. The only tracking was knowing that they had learned about that promotion from Facebook. Long story short, the next day, the reports told a pretty good story: \$18,000 in sales attributed to the promotions across the three locations!

That, my friends, was one of the first times I had seen marketing work exactly how it was supposed to, and it also triggered a light bulb. What if I knew the names of the people who used that offer that Sunday? What if I knew their email addresses? What if I knew their phone numbers? More importantly, what if I could exclude them from seeing that top-of-the-funnel offer and walk them down a path of different opportunities? If I had all of their information and the ability to market to them in very unique ways with a long-term nurture approach of retargeted social media, email, and text messaging for years to come, then we could make a HUGE IMPACT.

And that brings us to 2020. Five years and thousands of restaurants later, we have figured out how to do exactly what I had wanted to do with that restaurant. We figured out how to use awareness marketing to build a database, then how to take that database and drive front-end sales. Last but not least, I've learned how to take this information and nurture your database long-term.

In the next chapter, we're going to talk about the five tactics that I've written this book about: awareness, database, sales, data, and nurture. I'll see you then.

CHAPTER 2

Five Steps

Okay. So now that you know my history, my background, and my beliefs, we should be able to move forward with an understanding that I know how to drive customers through the door. I can help you get the amazing food that you've created in your restaurant in the hands — rather, stomachs — of the ideal customers.

Over the past 22 years, I've come to the conclusion that there are five steps to marketing success.

Step 1: Awareness

At the end of the day, you have to make the effort to tell everyone about your business. All advertising, whether it's radio, TV, direct mail, Facebook, or YouTube, starts with awareness. All advertising works; it just matters on what level and what you're willing to spend to get it.

Step 2: Building a Database

If you don't take the necessary steps to gain awareness, you lose out on step 2: Building a Database. Every time you spend a dollar on advertising, you need to make an effort to gain the audience's information. Building a database from awareness is what leads to long-term success. You see, one of the biggest problems restaurants have is that they don't actually have an audience that they own. *More importantly, they're not leveraging all of their marketing tactics to build such a database.*

Step 3: Show Me the Money

This step is all about PROVING that you're reaching the right people. I call this "front-end sales." This is a way to prove that the database you've built is full of people actually visiting your restaurant. Think about it: What good does it do to build a database of people who aren't actually visiting your restaurant?

In fact, it can do a lot more harm than you realize. As I'm going to show you later on in the book, there are tactics that you can use to take the database of the "right people" and optimize your front-end marketing, to get the right *awareness* to people who look just like the people already visiting your restaurant. These are called "lookalike audiences."

But be careful! The front-end sales aspect of this isn't the be-all and end-all ROI. That's a dangerous and slippery slope. A lot of people, when they see what we do to track marketing on the front end, want to attribute all of the success or failure to that, when, in fact, it is the opposite. Sales is simply one-fifth of the equation. All we're trying to do in this step is to prove that the database we're building is the right one. At the same time, if we can recoup some of our front-end advertising expenses, that's not a bad thing, either.

Step 4: Data

A database of your customers is a gold mine! Add relevant data to each customer, and now you have 10 gold mines. I don't want you to just build an email or text list of random customers; I want you to find out WAY MORE about the customers who are walking into your restaurant. If you can tie that back to your database, then you can do a few different things. First, you can segment the audience based on what they tell you and market to them more efficiently. Second, you can get a deeper understanding of your clients and tweak your front-end marketing to reach the right people. Third, you can use that data to improve your restaurant as a whole, simply by understanding who your customers are.

Step 5: Long-Term Nurture

Now, all of this leads up to the most important part of any business, which is the fifth step: Long-Term Nurture. This is also one of the most ignored parts of a restaurant's marketing program. If you're not spending time each month planning your messaging to your customer database and then executing that plan, then you won't succeed in marketing. Email and text are a great way to reach a large portion of your customers each month. Don't just let that data sit in a computer somewhere and rot away.

Those are the five steps: attention, database building, front-end sales, data, and long-term nurture. What can YOU do to ensure that every dollar you spend on marketing hits all five?

When you spend money on advertising, all you typically get is that awareness. So, if you were to spend \$1000, you would reach a group of people and get \$1,000 worth of awareness. Why not demand more from your marketing and make that \$1,000 get you MUCH more? If you employ the tactics I teach in this book, you'll make the awareness be the match that starts the fire, versus being the entire fire.

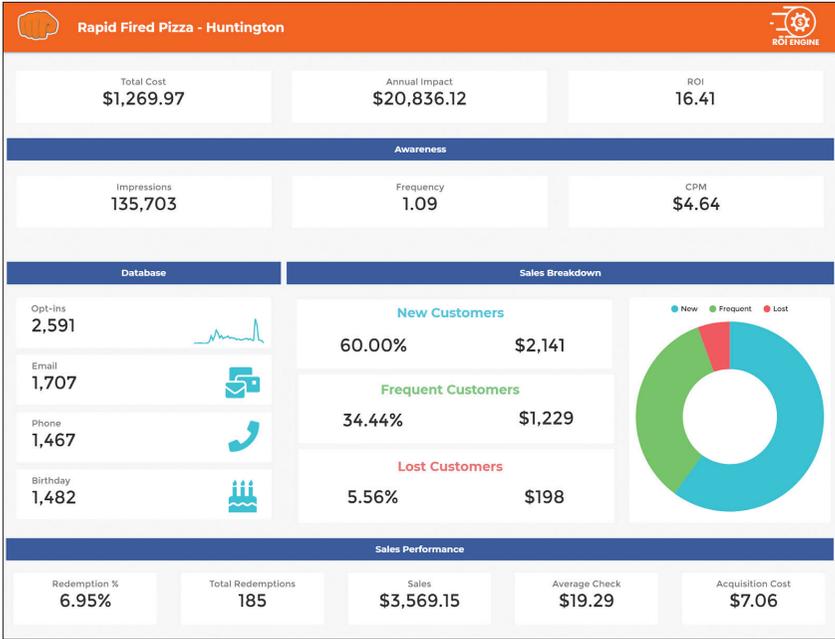
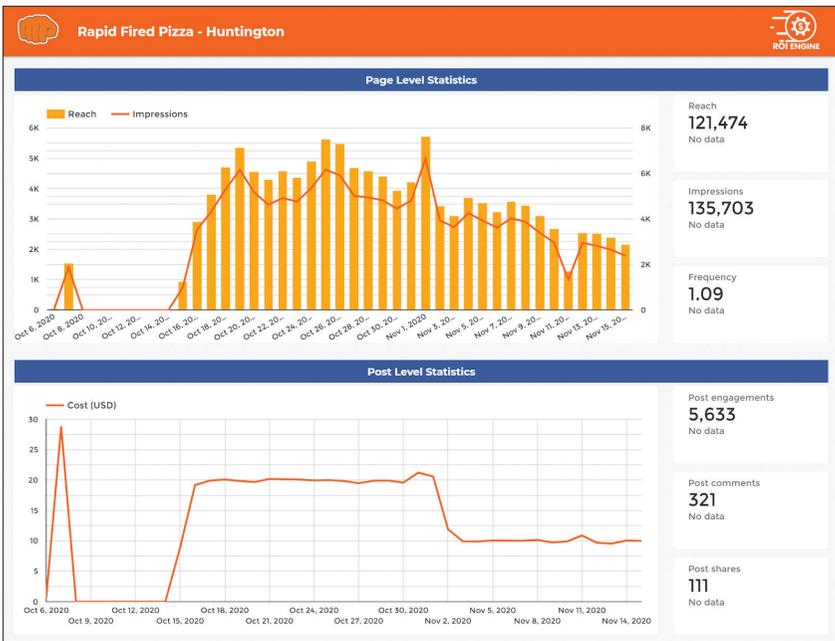
Awareness should build the database, the database should drive front-end sales, front-end sales help you collect customer data, and your long-term nurture brings it all together.

Restaurants want to know what their marketing is bringing in, but, unfortunately, there's not a plan that accounts for every dollar brought in compared to what was spent. However, if you follow my lead, you'll have a clearer understanding than you've ever had. When we spend a dollar using this tactic, we assign one fifth of the spend to each step.

As an example, there's a new client who has spent \$1,269.97 since his marketing program with us kicked off approximately one month ago. To evaluate the performance, we divide the spend by 5 and assign \$254 to each step (see the pictures on the next page for reference):

- Awareness = \$254 = Reached 121,474 people, gained 5,633 engagements, and 111 Facebook post shares.
- Database = \$254 = 2,591 people opted into Messenger, of which 1,707 gave us their email, 1,467 also gave us their cell number, and 1,482 gave us their birthday.
- Front-End Sales = \$254 = 185 people walked in and spent \$3,569.15 so far
- Customer Data = \$254 = With this customer we have a solid understanding of WHO their customer is. We know the split of male vs. female, their visit frequency, and important demographic info, such as if they're married or single, whether or not they have kids, and their proximity to the restaurant.
- Long-Term Nurture = \$254 = We had over 1,000 texts and emails opened this month, which is a good start.

MATT PLAPP


Sales Performance


RESTAURANT MARKETING THAT WORKS



\$254 is the cost we've assigned to each step of this process for this particular client. Next, ask yourself:

- Would I spend \$254 to get that attention again? HECK YES! That's like paying for one radio commercial and getting 100 for free.
- Would I spend \$254 to have an email database of 1,707? Would I spend \$254 for 1,467 customer cell phone numbers? Would I spend \$254 if 1,482 of my customers gave me their BIRTHDAY and asked to be invited to the restaurant? YES, YES, YES!
- Would I spend \$254 for \$3,569.15 in sales? I'm not going to answer that ... Okay, I will: YES!
- Would I spend \$254 for the valuable demographic insights into my customers? YEP!
- And, finally, would I spend \$254 to have 1,000+ email and text conversations monthly with these customers who saw my ads, stopped on the ads, engaged in the ads, raised their hands and gave us their contact information with the SOLE reason of being invited to eat at the restaurant? YES, YES, YES, and YES!

When you know what your money gets you, it's no longer tough to spend money on advertising. When you understand the value of what you receive, you can make better decisions moving forward.

EVEN IF you flopped hard on two of these five metrics, you'll still win long-term.

The final piece to the equation is LTV: customer lifetime value. What I just showed you is the front end, which does not take into account the many more visits that you will see from a portion of these customers. One time, a customer asked me, "How do I know they will return?" My response was, "Does your food suck? Does your service suck? Is your restaurant uninviting?" To which a customer, named Lenny answered, "No." Why do you think they wouldn't return? THEY WILL if you invite them back!

This customer LTV is an item that should be weighed more heavily because of the value of bringing somebody back, over and over. The value of somebody's email, cell phone number, birthday, or the ability to re-target them online based on past engagement and purchases and to make it a long-term impact on your business is significantly underestimated.



Let's use an example of a business that's in my region, called Walt's. Walt's is one of my favorite restaurants of all time. We go there, on average, three to four times per year and spend about \$250 each visit. Walt's doesn't have my email address or phone number, they don't know my birthday, and, to my knowledge, they don't use any of my past online engagement to market to me more effectively (I've never seen an online ad for them). I don't live by Walt's, I don't drive by Walt's going to work, and I don't drive by Walt's while running errands. In fact, I rarely, if

at all, ever drive by Walt's, with the exception of going to their restaurant.

Walt's is using the "hope and pray" tactic to get Matt Plapp and his family to come back more often. Think about it. If Walt's utilized these five steps and had my contact info, they could invite me back ALL THE TIME!

Currently, Walt's gets about \$1,000 per year from four visits from the Plapp family. If they had a way to invite me back, they could easily get me back four more times per year, which wouldn't be hard, and would be another \$1,000 in sales.

I want you to ask yourself, how many Matts are out there besides me? I'd be willing to bet that there are a few hundred people just like me out there. Meaning that they are leaving in excess of \$100,000 on the table every year. That sounds like a solid owner bonus.

At the end of the day, if you can get the people who know, like, and trust your brand to come back a few more times, if you can get the customers who used to come to your restaurant more often to get back into the habit of coming, and if you can use that information to leverage a campaign to find new customers who look just like your ideal customers, you can accomplish new customer traffic as well.

Those are the five tactics that I want this book to help you with. First, how to gain awareness correctly and how to optimize that awareness based off of steps two, three, and four. Second, how to build a database off of your marketing awareness, and I don't mean just an email list. I mean an in-depth database that you own. Third, how to drive front-end sales to do three things: (1) prove the database you're building is worth it, (2) gain revenue on the front end to cover your ad expenses, and (3) build an audience that you can use to find more customers just like them as ideal new customers. Fourth, get more data from the people walking through your front doors or ordering from your website. Fifth, create a long-term nurture approach to have more valid and concise conversations with your customers.

Let's move on to the next chapter and talk about attention.