

Client: Tender Greens

Publication: *Chain Leader Magazine*

Date: May 2009

Circulation: 16,153



all a-twitter

A tiny **SOCIAL-NETWORKING TOOL** proves a powerful—and free—way for restaurants to reach avid fans.

Los Angeles-based Tender Greens uses its Twitter page to advertise specials; it also kept San Diego followers up to date on its restaurant opening in that city.

It's small—8.9 million users compared to Facebook's 200 million. But Twitter has become the social-networking tool of choice for many restaurant chains wishing to court a young, hip clientele.

Twitter enables users to write 140-character microblogs as many times a day as they please, which in turns enables their friends to keep

constant track of them. Like Facebook, the site is free. Unlike Facebook, Twitter users can connect with, or follow, whomever they want; no permission is necessary. Generally speaking, new users choose to follow current users in hopes that the favor will be returned.

BROADCASTING SPECIALS

Erik Oberholtzer, chef and co-owner of Tender Greens, a three-unit, fast-casual, health-skewed chain based in Los Angeles, began "tweeting"





Right now Twitter is a corporate venture for Tender Greens. As the chain expands, each store will have its own Twitter voice, says Erik Oberholtzer, chef and co-owner.

The chain began tweeting in early March after Michael Breed, senior marketing manager, found multiple mentions of Maggiano's during Twitter searches. "We thought it might be a good way to

engage guests," Breed says. Within a week of launching its Twitter presence, Maggiano's had 130 followers.

The Dallas-based chain, which has 45 locations, got a big boost after launching a Twitter contest that offered \$100 gift certificates to two winners. Maggiano's sent the following message: "Follow @Maggianos by 5pm CST to be entered to win \$100 in Maggiano's gift certificates."

By the end of that day, Breed says, Maggiano's had 2,000 followers. Winners of the gift certificates were chosen at random from the followers.

THANKS AND APOLOGIES

The chain now has almost 2,900 followers; Breed uses Twitter to search for mentions of the brand and thank guests for positive comments and get to the bottom of unpleasant experiences. "The fact we can reach back out—it's immediate and feels more personal than the traditional way of having things resolved," Breed says.

In the near future, Maggiano's will use Twitter to tell guests about menu specials, contests and promotions. Until then, guest engagement is one of the most valuable benefits of Twitter.

"Keeping them engaged, developing a personal connection with the guest—that's the biggest aspect," Breed says. ■

on the web: Restaurant chains are also promoting new menu news and creating loyal fans with cell-phone text messages. Visit www.chainleader.com or [@chainleader \(Twitter\)](https://twitter.com/chainleader).

earlier this year after some prompting from his publicist.

"Honestly, the microblog culture was not something we understood right away," Oberholtzer says. "The perception was that it was a lot of people sharing a lot of useless information." He no longer feels that way. "The benefit is getting a message out there and building a community," he says.

Oberholtzer "tweets," or sends Twitter blogs, about three times a day; most messages advertise the restaurants' daily specials or tell followers about his finds at the Santa Monica farmer's market.

Oberholtzer also wrote about construction updates on the chain's West Hollywood location, which opened at the end of March. The store opening had been delayed due to a permitting snafu: "We didn't know until 5 p.m. if we were going to open or not," Oberholtzer says. The store ended up opening the next day, "and Twitter was the best way to get that out," he says.

GATHERING FOLLOWERS

Tender Greens' publicist initially built the chain's Twitter list by choosing to follow food bloggers, writers and other interested parties in the Los Angeles area.

Dallas-based Maggiano's discovered another way to build a following, and fast.

Eight Tips for Savvy Tweets

1. Twitter, but not too much. Five or six posts a day is probably enough for most restaurants.
2. Be pithy. Twitter limits its posts to 140 characters. Not words, characters.
3. Be relevant. "It should be personal and from the house, not a big corporate branding voice," advises Christina Wong, account executive at JS2 Communications, a Los Angeles-based public relations firm that helped Tender Greens launch its Twitter presence.
4. Keep up with the tweeters. "It has to be managed," says Erik Oberholtzer, chef and co-owner of Tender Greens.
5. Twitter with one "voice." Both Tender Greens and Maggiano's have one person in charge of Twitter responses so communications are consistent.
6. Link Facebook to Twitter and vice versa. The two social-networking sites work well together; make sure the brand message is consistent.
7. Be choosy about whom you follow. Twitter allows anyone to follow anybody—even celebrities. But as with any media, you're trying to reach a core market.
8. Expect your follower count to drop. Because it's a fairly new application, "spam" is still a problem on Twitter, so some followers might not be real people. And Twitter is like Facebook: Some users drop out after the initial fun wears off.

