

CASE STUDY



STRANGE BREW CAFE

PREPARED BY

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Background

Strange Brew Cafe is an independent coffee shop located in suburban Palos Hills, Illinois, offering specialty coffee drinks, toasts, smoothies, smoothie bowls, and other assorted items, such as their bagged ground coffee. Established in 2018 by Matthew Mullen, the coffee shop offers walk-in services, as well as in-store and curbside pickup, which can be ordered on their website. For dine-in services, the coffee shop features a modern, cozy interior with plentiful seating. Their target audience includes young adults (ages 16-35), as well as families. They have a social media presence on Facebook and Instagram.

Challenge

Strange Brew was experiencing hardships during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as a decline in sales and indoor dining restrictions. With that being said, they were looking to boost up their sales and put themselves back on the community's radar as a fun, delicious cafe to support during these trying times. The restaurant industry has been hit particularly hard as a result of the pandemic; not many people have been going out to restaurants or coffee shops due to safety concerns. Cardinal PR was tasked with engaging the community to support their local businesses, particularly Strange Brew, when they needed it most. The team needed to increase follower engagement on the cafe's Instagram page, which would in turn increase the sales of Strange Brew products, both in-person and online. We were also looking at ways to make the social media followers more aware of the Strange Brew brand. By improving on brand awareness, it allowed us to consider how the brand could reach new audiences on social media. The main challenge is to inform followers that they can still enjoy all Strange Brew has to offer, while remaining safe and healthy at the same time.

Solution

Key Points

- Provide families and teenagers a fun DIY project that's ideal for Holiday Season gifts - Hot chocolate kits
- Seize the viral and local hot cocoa bombs trend to make a Deluxe Version of the kit to sell more product
- Invite clients to share their hot chocolate drink creations through an Instagram Showcase in hopes to win a gift card to the cafe
- Modify the theme of the kits from Christmas to Winter to Valentine's Day

Ideation Phase

Strange Brew has always had a unique position within the local community. Their location nearby the local high school and the public library had made them a beloved spot among a variety of demographics - from families and high schoolers all the way to loyal elderly customers. We aspired to create something that would be suitable for a wider scope of the community and show how each demographic segment can join in through marketing collateral.



Initial Solution

We began our collaboration right before the Holiday Season. Just like everything else in 2020, winter holidays did not escape the effects of the pandemic - gatherings were cancelled or limited and so were most other traditional activities. The challenge became about giving loved ones an opportunity to connect and share the festive joy without jeopardizing their health. Brainstorming and meetings led to one prominent idea: **to-go hot chocolate kits**, which included cocoa powder, mini marshmallows, and peppermint, that families, friends, and individuals could enjoy from the safety of their own home during the winter season. The kits were then paired with two additional ideas to maximize sales and relationship building within the community: **deluxe kits & a social media showcase**. Deluxe kits were inspired by the cafe's current popular holiday item, hot chocolate bombs. A social media showcase was added to invite customers to share pictures of themselves enjoying the product, spread holiday cheer with others, and invite friends and family to purchase their own kit.

Implemented Solution

The Holiday Season turned out to be busier and more challenging than anyone expected, resulting in a delay and reshaping of the project. The cafe continued to sell the hot chocolate kits and bombs throughout winter months, but did not introduce the showcase until February. Instead of a Christmas/Winter Holidays themed showcase, customers were invited to participate in a special Valentine's Day themed showcase instead. The new timeline provided an additional opportunity for our team to reach out to local food blogs and foodie-influencers who also promoted the products on their accounts through attractive pictures of the kit and videos of the hot chocolate drinks.

The showcase ran from January 26th to February 16th to give participants enough time to enjoy the product and post the results. To enter, users had to make sure their profile was public, tag @strangebrewcafe on their post, and use #strangelove and #cocoatogo in their captions. The Cardinal PR team provided the client with a content calendar, copies for captions and emails, and tracked the analytics throughout the process. The client was in charge of the photos as well as posting the content.



Conclusion

Results

Overall, the connections created between Strange Brew and local influencers allowed the coffee shop to increase brand awareness with potential new customers on Instagram, which is seen through the rise in accounts reached and profile visits. The showcase strengthened relationships between the Strange Brew brand and both its pre-existing and new followers, as exhibited through the increase in engagement with content (Impressions were up 15.9% at the end of February).

The positive engagement rate implies that consumers are likely to continue to remain loyal to the Strange Brew brand and purchase from the coffee shop in the future. Furthermore, inquiries about the coffee shop's location seemed to increase drastically, as the analytics showed a great increase in taps to get directions to their address. New Instagram followers may have the intent of visiting the shop for the first time, showing their potential as new customers.

Takeaways

Given these points, influencers are a good resource to utilize in the future. Building relationships with more local, family-focused influencers will help increase foot traffic in the store as well as grow the Strange Brew brand within the community. However, keeping connections with Chicago influencers will also help increase brand awareness in the city. These relationships could be used to promote products/events in the future in order to continue to expand Strange Brew throughout the Chicagoland area. Some ways to cultivate more partnerships is to utilize Facebook and Instagram to discover new influencers, as well as join local community groups to promote the Strange Brew brand, which opens the door to connect with journalists and fellow local businesses.

Linking Facebook with Instagram is an efficient way to make sure the brand is getting the most out of what social media has to offer. Another way to get potential customers interested is to make the Strange Brew website more accessible. Instead of having the link to just purchase online gift cards, putting the main Strange Brew website in the Instagram bio — or a link tree — will allow potential customers to see the menu, read information about the shop, and place online orders. In addition, more consistent posting such on both Instagram stories and main page posts will also increase customer engagement. When followers see consistent stories and posts, they're more likely to interact with the brand and be involved.

Lastly, there are several ways to help increase customer engagement. For a future showcase, possible incentives could be to follow Strange Brew accounts on social media and tag friends to enter. By doing this, followers will tag their friends which helps spread awareness and therefore reaches more people. It will also help the Strange Brew Instagram and Facebook to gain more followers by leading potential customers directly to the Strange Brew accounts. These takeaways are potential ways to further grow the Strange Brew name for the future.