

# RESTAURANT BUSINESS

## CONSUMER TRENDS

### 4 RESTAURANT IDEAS WE STUMBLED UPON

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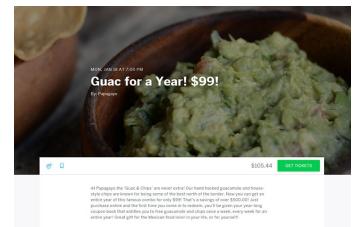


When the week starts with Olive Garden’s alleged ties to Satanism and ends with Red Lobster catching fire for refusing to seize the “F” word as a marketing opportunity, you know some unfamiliar ground will be covered in gathering the news. Fortunately for you, that meant we at Restaurant Business were sure to stumble upon some unusual ideas, none of which involve a pitchfork or anything you couldn’t say to your mother.

Here are some notions we bring to your attention for, um, inspiration.

#### 1. A guacamole subscription

Papagayo, the four-unit Mexican chain in Boston, has hit on an unusual way of avoiding the question of whether or not you charge for guacamole. Its solution is neither a giveaway nor a per-order charge for the meal starter. Instead, customers are invited to buy what amounts to a subscription. For a one-time \$99 fee, processed online, they’ll get a book of coupons on their first visit to the restaurant. Each of the 52 coupons entitles them to an order of guac and chips for a particular week. As Papagayo’s website points out, it works well as a gift for fans of the chain. And it’s a savings of more than \$500 a year.



#### 2. A point of distinction among better burgers

A new entrant in the crowded better-burger market is trying to cultivate a following with more than just the usual promise of a better burger made with fresher ingredients. Dugg Burger, which just opened its second store, has a palpable point of distinction. Staffers dig out the bread from underneath the top half of the bun, so it’s more of a hollow dome than the usual sandwich carrier. The space is then stuffed with condiments of the customer’s choice.



The Dallas-based concept says the result is a hamburger that doesn’t sport more dough than beef and is easier to eat because the toppings won’t slip out.

#### 3. A coffee honor system

Many quick-service restaurants now cut serving times by taking customers’ money for drinks, giving them the cup and having them draw the soda themselves. At a coffee outlet at Yale University, and at any number of train station concessions along major commuter train lines, the money-taking step has been eliminated to save streamline the process. Patrons help themselves to the coffee and leave the money. Even if an unprincipled customer decides to skip and sip, the added volume apparently more than covers the dishonesty.



#### 4. A raincheck-slash-reintroduction to Chipotle

When Chipotle decided to shut all 2,000 of its U.S. restaurants today to review the chain’s plan for winning back customers, headquarters hit on a way to console patrons who might have been annoyed to find their favorite unit locked up at lunch. Consumers were presented with the opportunity to get a free burrito at a future date by texting “raincheck” to a particular number before the restaurants reopened at 3 p.m.

The giveaway had the added advantage of being a pass-along deal; fans who would’ve bought a burrito if the stores weren’t closed could give the number and code to friends who might have been lapsed Chipotle regulars. It’s a start of the chain’s efforts to win back the customers it’s lost.

