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How Club Chefs Use Social Media

By Joanna DeChellis | July 11th, 2017

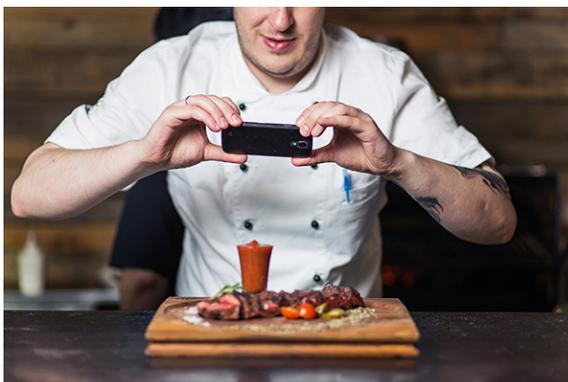
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Taking to platforms like Facebook and Instagram is helping culinarians market themselves, and their clubs.

Food photography dominates digital feeds—from a perfectly composed amuse-bouche, to a panorama of new grills, to a beautiful wine dinner on the course. Ditto for culinary blogs, recipes and videos that are being shared, “liked” and linked. If the content applies, club chefs tend to click.

“Sharing experiences, pictures and ideas on Facebook or Instagram allows us to nurture our passion in a way that isn’t so formal or serious,” says Philippe Reynaud, Senior Director of Culinary Operations for Ocean Reef Club in Key Largo, Fla.

Indeed, club chefs are learning to leverage social platforms in a number of savvy ways to truly bring their operations—and themselves—to life.



Why Farmington CC Embraced Instagram

In 2015, Michael Matarazzo, CEC, Executive Chef of Farmington Country Club (Charlottesville, Va.) decided to leverage his Instagram aptitude and launch a dedicated account for the club’s F&B team. Operating under the handle @farmingtonchefs, the account currently has over 500 followers.

Matarazzo strives to post regularly—daily, if not more so—depending on what’s going on at the club and what truly seems “Insta-genic.”

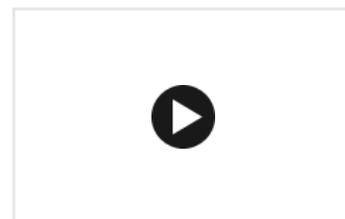
“When I created @farmingtonchefs, I wanted an outlet to show our membership what we do every day behind the scenes,” says Matarazzo. “I also wanted a way to showcase the culinary team’s work.”

Two years later, the account has not only been hugely successful as an outlet to show the skill and ability of Farmington’s chefs, it has also become an important tool in Matarazzo’s management strategy.

“It’s been a great recruitment tool for prospective members and staff,” he says. “I tend to use hashtags like #clubchef, #countryclub, #farmingtoncc, and #cville, so that if someone is searching those terms, they find us.”

Instagram, compared to Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn, has been especially helpful with recruiting, because no posts can be made without a photo. “Culinary students are extremely visual,” says

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Matarazzo. "When they pull up our account, they tend to get pretty excited about what we have to offer. We've hired a number of interns this way."

To shine a brighter spotlight on the staff, Matarazzo recently started posting mini-profiles of each F&B team member. For example, over Memorial Day weekend, he showed a photo of Dave Palmer manning the grill during a busy picnic. The caption read: "This is Dave Palmer chillin' and grillin' at the 2017 Memorial Day Picnic. Dave has been with the FCC Culinary Team for 7 years and has mastered the art of grilling. He is also known throughout the county for his signature mashed potatoes!"

"It's a small way to show our appreciation for our staff and to allow our members to meet and connect with them," says Matarazzo, who shares posting duties with the club's Executive Pastry Chef, Michele Fox. "Social media isn't meant to be formal, but it must always stay professional."

When Chefs Connect

At Ocean Reef, Reynaud has been using Facebook, Instagram and Twitter for nearly six years. He generally posts what he calls "chef-life moments," which include food photos, videos of a busy service, links to relevant blogs, or even photos of new equipment as it's being installed.

By posting and following others, Reynaud feels less isolated in his daily challenges and more excited about his successes.

"Social media brings people of like-thinking together," he says. "Especially club chefs. It's an excellent tool to share and compare. It also helps us illustrate what we do and the challenges we face."

Reynaud likes to leverage Facebook to connect with members, too. "Our members are proud to see the things we do at the club," he says. "They often go on to share these posts within their own social networks."

Visual Marketing

Similarly, Fred Ramsey, CEC, Executive Chef of Long Cove Club (Hilton Head Island, S.C.), uses social media to market his club's F&B operation and to connect with members. His rule of thumb, however, is to only accept "friend requests" from members, and never to seek them out himself.

"I would rather a member make the choice to connect with me than the other way around," Ramsey says. "When we do connect, I get the unique chance to see the club, and the world even, from their point of view.

"One of our members, for example, travels all over the world and when he does he takes pictures of menus, posts them and tags me," Ramsey adds. "It's a wonderful way for me to understand what my members experience when they aren't with us, so that I can better serve them."

Like Farmington, Ramsey also uses social media as a tool to connect with his staff and other chefs, and as a means of recruitment. "In the early stages of any interview with a potential new hire, I always direct him or her to our social platforms, so they can get a better sense of what we do, the kind of food we create, and the environment we foster here at Long Cove," he says.

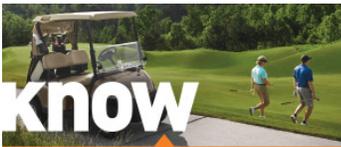
LinkedIn and Facebook, he adds, are his two preferred platforms. "LinkedIn tends to be more professional, with professional headshots and industry related posts and content," he notes. "Facebook is more casual and laid-back. Each has a purpose, and both have been useful."

Three Rules of Social-Media Success

Post often, but only if it's relevant, interesting and attractive. "If you don't post regularly, you don't rank as high in certain feeds," says Philippe Reynaud, Senior Director of Culinary Operations for Ocean Reef Club in Key Largo, Fla. "Try to make it part of your daily routine."

Get approval from the club. "FCC has been extremely supportive of our social-media efforts," says Michael Matarazzo, CEC, Executive Chef of Farmington Country Club (Charlottesville, Va.). "As long as we keep it professional and relevant, they're excited about the reach and traction it gives us. In fact, they're hoping other departments will open dedicated accounts much like ours."

Have fun with it. "Use social media to stay connected to friends and colleagues," says Fred Ramsey, CEC, Executive Chef of Long Cove Club on Hilton Head Island, S.C. "Use it to get ideas, be inspired, and learn more about opportunities to better yourself."



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