

Free Taste-Tests: The Genius Behind the Little Pink Spoon

What does a small business have in common with an international franchise like Baskin-Robbins? The answer is simple – the little pink spoon.

If you've ever been to a multi-flavor ice cream emporium, you've probably had the opportunity to sample the wares. Just ask and you'll be handed a little spoonful of whatever exotic flavor you're considering. Free samples are not new or particularly creative. They're just good marketing sense. But Baskin-Robbins takes the sample spoon to new dimensions... and it's a lesson for all of us.

First, the spoon is pink. Not baby-girl pink, not cotton candy pink, we're talkin' hot pink. And it sits, very obviously waiting for you, in the middle of each freezer case. That spoon is practically begging to give you a sample. In fact, the pink spoon is so synonymous with free samples that, in Las Vegas, pink spoon cards were recently distributed in busy areas. The cards, bearing the familiar icon, could be redeemed at Baskin-Robbins stores for a free scoop of their new frozen custard.

So you ask to sample the new Mocha Mint Fudge Fantasy and you get that spoonful. And it's ever-so yummy. And you buy a scoop... or two... or a quart. Now they've got you! But if it wasn't a flavor you savor, that's okay too. The B-R folks are just as happy that you

didn't pay for a bad experience. And therein lies the secret of a true win/win.

So what tasty sample can you give away to a potential customer? What nugget of information or helpful tip can you make readily available for anyone who wanders in? Don't wait to be asked – offer your version of the pink spoon right upfront. Here are some suggestions for pink spoons you can use:

- A quarterly newsletter – either print or electronic – filled with really useful tips, not just self-promotional stuff.
- A short presentation that's open to the public. This could include a tour of your site if you have a site that's worth touring.
- A tip sheet or booklet. Offer tips that make your product or service more valuable.
- A great FAQ section on your Web site will not only answer a prospect's questions, but may solve problems they didn't even know they had.
- A free, abbreviated visit. Massage therapists are great at this. You see

them everywhere doing on-site, complimentary, five-minute chair massages. Talk about yummy!

Now make sure you're only giving away a little bit. This isn't pro bono work (although that's also a good marketing tool). This is a freebie that everyone can have. So you want to be certain it's something you can afford to give, both financially and time-wise.

Here's an interesting fact – the most popular B-R flavor is vanilla. Go figure. Still, I don't think that a store called Baskin-Robbins One Flavor would have been very successful. And that's another valuable question to ask yourself: Do you offer enough flavors so that a variety of customers will be able to find the one they want? If not, can you broaden your selection a bit?

Whatever your "pink spoon" looks like, don't ever give the impression that you're worried about someone coming in for mega-dollars worth of free little samples. As long as you're using the right size spoon, it just doesn't happen.

Your expertise is valuable and you have every right to expect appropriate compensation for it. By giving small taste-tests to prospects, you're assured that they'll end up buying just the right flavor... and coming back for more next time they're hungry.

