FREE GUIDE

If Not Happy Hour, Then What

kate · 15 years · six bars · seattle

12 ways to fill your bar on a slow night without discounting a single drink.

the premise

happy hour rewards people already coming. it's not a strategy. you just trained your regulars to show up at 4 instead of 7 and spend less.

discounts don't create demand. they move it.

if you want tuesdays busier, give people a reason to come on tuesday that isn't just cheaper drinks. here are 12 things i've actually done across my six bars.

1. themed nights that are events, not discounts

- a weird wine night. a pickleback special. a dj who only plays b-sides.
- the key is it has to be a thing, not a price.
- people plan around events. they don't plan around discounts.

2. collaborate with other local businesses

- host pop ups, carry local products, throw an event together.
- the more cross promotion the better.
- community good will and word of mouth is free marketing that actually works.
- i've turned slow wednesdays into a local maker pop-up night and it became the busiest night of the week.

3. the add-on effect

- have a specialty that guests order in addition to their drink.
- a chambong. a pickleback. a jell-o shot. a retro throwback.
- life is serious, being out doesn't have to be.
- that one silly drink is your best marketing and people will associate it specifically with your bar.

4. private events during dead hours

- you pay rent 24/7, why not make all of those hours work for you?
- a night time business can host baby showers, wedding showers, birthday parties, corporate mixers.
- your slow tuesday at 4pm is someone's perfect shower slot.

5. consistency over novelty

- we are open seven days a week, nearly every holiday and open late.
- always until the closing time posted, never close early.
- if you close early you break the one promise a customer can actually count on.
- people come back because they know you'll be there.

6. a reason to stay late

- keep the kitchen open later than the bar next door.
- be the place people know they can grab a real meal at 11.
- that's not a discount, that's a competitive advantage.

7. staff personality nights

- let your bartenders build their own night.
- a guest bartender who brings their following. a cocktail competition night.
- give your best people a reason to invite their network on a slow night and give them a cut of the bar.

8. the regular email

- i know, i know. but a simple email list that tells people what's happening this week at your bar is more effective than any instagram ad.
- your regulars want to know. make it easy for them to show up.

9. a seasonal menu pivot

- don't change your whole menu. change one section seasonally.
- a summer spritz list that becomes a fall hot cocktail list.
- it gives regulars a reason to come back and try something new without you rebuilding the whole program.

10. a late-night food partner

- team up with a food truck or a late-night kitchen.
- you become the bar that has food when nobody else does.
- that's not a discount, that's a destination.

11. the door charge that works

- a small cover charge for a specific event (live music, a known dj, a viewing party) works better than discounting drinks.
- you're charging for the experience, not cutting the price of the product.
- people who pay a cover are committed. people who come for half-price drinks are not.

12. know your numbers and adjust

- if you don't know which night is actually slow, you're guessing.
- check your sales by day of week, by hour.
- you might find tuesday isn't your problem, it's the 4-6 window that's dead everywhere.
- fix the specific gap, not the whole night.

the rule

> every one of these creates a reason to come. none of them cut your price.
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> if you fill the room by discounting, you taught people your bar is only worth what you charge at 4pm.
>
> if you fill the room with an event, you taught people your bar is the place to be on a tuesday.