



Downtown Sioux Falls, Inc.

INNOVATION

Downtown Sioux Falls, Inc. (DTSF) conceived Burger Battle in 2012 as a way to generate foot traffic and drive sales for restaurants during what used to be the slowest month of the year – January. Often, restaurants struggled during this time of year. DTSF wanted to flip that narrative and make it one of their strongest months.

How does it work? Restaurants craft burger recipes of their choosing and feature it on their menu for the entire month. People then rate each burger they try based on five categories: patty, bun, toppings, creativity, and customer service.

In the early years, people filled out ballots. Restaurants would turn in completed ballots to DTSF on a weekly basis. It became a significant time commitment for staff, however. So, we innovated.

DTSF secured two sponsors, AARP of South Dakota and Avera Health, to fund a progressive web app called the Digital Passport to automate voting for Burger Battle. Of course, it does a lot of other great things too! The Digital Passport not only saves time, it also has made for a better customer experience, provides more fairness, and has helped as a marketing tool.

OUTCOME

Burger Battle has grown from 12 participating restaurants in 2019 to 16 in 2020 to 24 in 2021! The numbers speak for themselves. This past Burger Battle resulted in 31,000 burgers sold and generated \$436,606 in sales for participating restaurants – an increase of 63% from the previous year. The estimated total economic impact was \$940,850, based on the Arts & Economic Prosperity Study for Sioux Falls.

Burger Battle has become a cultural phenomenon throughout the region, as people drive to downtown Sioux Falls for weekend getaways centered around Burger Battle. Surrounding towns have copied Burger Battle with their own versions of the promotion. One local bakery crafted a cupcake fashioned as a burger. Families get in the action too, with kids taking notes to determine strategies for crafting their own burger recipes to cook at home. One woman even got her nails done with the Burger Battle logo. We even have our own cult following – the Burger Brawlers!

This event has engaged the public and visitors, and has benefited restaurants, retailers, and even a nonprofit. A local businessman and philanthropist got involved by pledging \$1 for every burger sold to Call for Freedom, which generated \$31,000 for their cause to support victims of human trafficking.

DTSF has benefited too from this month-long promotion as it has grown each year by being able to command top sponsorship dollars. This has led to DTSF being able to command more in sponsorships for other events and promotions, making for a more financially sustainable organization.

EXECUTION

The process for executing Burger Battle is well honed. DTSF provides an annual event calendar with each newsletter so businesses can plan well in advance which promotions they wish to participate in. Then, a call to participate is sent to restaurants and spotlighted in the October and November newsletters. Restaurants sign up by December and submit their participation fees. Then, menu listings and photography are entered into the Digital Passport.

The marketing plan then gets executed. Event listings are created on DTSF's website and Facebook page. This past year, a special landing page was created on DTSF's website to highlight the restaurants' burgers, linking to their websites, with information about how people can order take out. A media toolkit with branding files is sent to each participant so restaurants can cross promote Burger Battle through their social media channels. DTSF places eleven large scale banners for the promotion in key locations throughout downtown. Table tents and print material are delivered to restaurants. Then the fun part – we launch our social media and PR campaign!

After eight years of putting on Burger Battle, it's become a well-oiled machine that has become the standard for how to execute promotions in downtown Sioux Falls.

REPRESENTATION

Downtown Sioux Falls is for everyone, every day. Collaboration and inclusion are high priorities in the planning, marketing, and execution of Burger Battle. Burger Battle continues to grow exponentially thanks to a variety of stakeholder groups, including the restaurants, a statewide sponsor, and the support from the thousands of people in the community.

This unique promotion brings different audiences to the area that may perceive the downtown dining experience as out of budget or inaccessible. We found that many demographics participated, engaged, and completed the challenge by eating and voting at all 24 restaurant locations.

While marketing and promoting Burger Battle, we uplifted the voices of business owners of color and women-owned businesses. We made intentional efforts to include one of the Black-owned businesses, called Swamp Daddy's Cajun Kitchen, that has participated in the promotion for multiple years.

After an extremely challenged year, the Burger Battle provided a shared experience that wasn't so divisive and brought our community closer. Whether you scrolled through social media or had a casual conversation during the month of January, it always turned to Burger Battle. This promotion has become an integral part of life in Sioux Falls and surrounding communities.

REPLICATION

Burger Battle is a promotion that can be easily replicated – both as a format for other food-themed promotions and as a model for other business improvement districts.

The voting aspect can be difficult to scale if done by paper ballots. Developing the DTSF app, the Digital Passport, addressed that challenge rather easily. There are ways to scale that by using other forms of technology, however. For other organizations that would want to launch a similar promotion, there are cheaper alternatives, such as using QR codes to link to hidden web pages with embedded forms.

Prior to the DTSF app, the Digital Passport, some questioned whether or not others were gaming the voting system. The app took care of that, though, and other types of technology can do the same, such as QR codes. It's important to remember, however, that it is not about winning the trophy. It's about crushing your sales from the year before!

Whether it's burgers, pizza, tacos, whatever – there's nothing like a friendly food-themed competition to drive sales and grow foot traffic.

COMPLEXITY/SIMPLICITY

Burger Battle is a rather simple promotion. Specially crafted burgers are available at participating locations for a limited time. People try the burgers, rate them, and the restaurant with the highest rated burger at the end of the promotion wins the trophy. DTSF markets it and draws customers downtown.

The biggest challenge had been the amount of staff time needed to process ballots. DTSF solved this issue by developing a progressive web app, the Digital Passport, which became a digital asset by adding functionality to other DTSF programs and promotions.