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## THE Happiest Hours

Happy hours have become a fourth daypart for restaurant Operators and an opportunity to fill up traditionally slow periods with traffic. For patrons there are many reasons why they find happy hours alluring, but who are these patrons and what are they looking for during happy hour?

Traditionally happy hours fill up the usually slow period between the lunch and dinner rush from 4 to 6 p.m. with a variety of drink and food specials to attract patrons. However, a new trend is taking hold in reverse happy hours, which are usually around 9 p.m. to midnight. Reverse happy hours are being used by casual-dining restaurants to draw crowds back in the late night when traffic often dies down after the dinner rush. This fourth daypart can provide opportunities to drive additional traffic and increased check averages.

Happy hours are about more than low-priced drinks and food – 43% of consumers state that they attend happy hour to relax and unwind after a long day at work. And they are not going it alone. More than 50% attend happy hour with friends and just under half go with their spouse or significant other.



As shown in the above graph, most patrons are strongly attracted by the discounted pricing on drinks, as reported by American Express. Value pricing on food also ranked high as consumers report being drawn in by lower-priced food to go with their drinks.

Although happy hours are offered Monday through Friday, most consumers (57%) feel that happy hour is best-suited for a Friday. Yet 64% of consumers say they would patronize a Saturday happy hour if one were offered. This interest combined with consumers' interest in moving from the bar to the restaurant after happy hour may present opportunities for Operators to offer an incentive for patrons to come for the drinks but stay for a meal.

There are definitely gender differences in the places that women versus men prefer to enjoy happy hour. Most women would prefer to attend happy hour at a casual-dining restaurant, yet more men are drawn to sports bars for happy hour. Local bars are a neutral place for both genders.

### 'What'll You Have?'

Drink specials are the very definition of happy hour, and overall consumers like any type of discount drink deal. The most popular happy hour specials are drinks for 50% off and two-for-one offers; both are favored by 90% of consumers.

There is also demand for other types of drink specials that might be easier for operators to maintain, such as line-priced cocktails where all well cocktails are \$3, for example. As the chart below illustrates, many types of drink specials appeal to consumers so there is room for creativity when designing happy hour features.



### Snacking Desires

Overall, 98% of consumers said they desire some type of food while they are enjoying their drink specials. A majority (53%) favor typical bar bites such as nachos and chicken fingers, while more than 40% cited sliders, pizza and small plates as their preference.

How an operator presents these food specials is also important. Consumers are split nearly evenly with the No. 1 preference being a free or low-cost buffet (38%) and an across-the-board half-off on all appetizer menu (31%) while 28% preferred the simplicity of specially priced items such as \$1 pizza slices or 25-cent wings.

## Key P.A.T.R.O.N.® Segments

### Social Butterflies

- Ages 21-34 and 55-65
- Single with a moderate income and living in large metropolitan areas
- Love a lively atmosphere and want to have a good time with friends, family and new acquaintances
- Less health-conscious, desiring more adventurous, trendy and craveable foods
- Restaurants can be like a second home

### Sophisticates

- Age: 35+
- Married couples without children or with grown children
- They have moderate incomes and live in large metropolitan areas
- Focus on gourmet dining experiences
- Care about having fun, having new experiences and bonding with friends
- Less health-conscious and desire adventurous, sophisticated foods

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Source: ConAgra Foodservice  
Proprietary Food Away  
From Home Study, 2009

## Patron Key Takeaways

Happy hours are popular both in the after-work window and at late night, and all signs point to the continued growth of this daypart. Consumers want to continue dining out, but affordably and often beyond the boundaries of traditional meals and meal times.

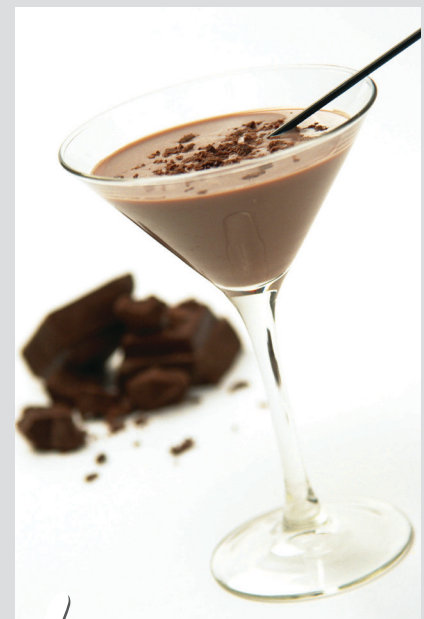
Restaurants that offer and promote happy hours with attractive food and drink specials have a key opportunity to bring patrons in and enhance revenues during what would otherwise be a "dead" time of day.

For more targeted recommendations to grow your business, ask your ConAgra Foodservice representative for a customized P.A.T.R.O.N. profile report.



## Top 5 Actions

1. Advertise happy hour specials through social media outlets such as listing them on your Yelp profile, featuring them on your website and promoting them daily on your Facebook page or in the local newspaper's entertainment section.
2. Promote your happy hour specials in your restaurant so they are clearly differentiated from your main menu and traditional pricing.
3. Utilize happy hour food specials to test new items/flavors to gauge consumer reaction before placing permanently on the menu.
4. Create "special event" happy hours. For example, promote a Monday Night Football extended happy hour with food and drink specials to draw consumers in on a traditionally slow night. Or build a happy hour special event around key days like Tax Day or Black Friday.
5. Consider including some sweet treats on your late-night happy hour menu to satisfy after-dinner sweet cravings such as mini desserts in shot glasses or dessert-oriented alcoholic beverages such as chocolate martinis.



to go...

Source: American Express Market Brief,  
February 2012

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