



Ian's Pizza Stickers and a Slice

Ian's Pizza is a late-night ritual in Madison, Wisconsin. When the bars close, partiers in this college town head to Ian's for a slice. There are always 30-40 flavors of pizza ready to serve – including Ian's signature, Mac & Cheese Pizza.

Since its first shop opened in 2001 near University of Wisconsin dorms and Kohl Center stadium, Ian's has become a staple of the university scene. It's a rite of passage for students: Older classmen bring in freshmen to introduce them to the Ian's experience. "Ian's is the place to meet and make friends," says Ian's marketing director Adam May.

Late-night dining put Ian's on the map. "When the bars close, we get lines around the block as people continue to party," May says. Stickers reinforce the fun atmosphere, spreading Ian's catchphrases "Pizza Slut" and "Get Your Mac On" in bars, on campus, across



laptops and notebooks, on the backs (and butts) of folks standing in line for a slice.

Stickers fit with Ian's brand personality three ways: "We're visual, we're fun, we're local," May says. "Stickers help push our cultish following."

Ian's prints up 10,000 stickers at a time and keeps a big bowl of free stickers on the counter. "It's a huge branding tool for us. When someone takes 15 stickers and sticks them on 15 different people and it grows from there, it's like going viral online," May says.

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Ian’s merchandising and menu presentation are very visual – and lively. There’s no menu board; instead, servers rattle off 40-odd menu items at a crazy pace. “The people behind the counter are the menu,” May explains. “It’s a little bit of a show.”

Young, high-energy staff is core to Ian’s personality, he adds: “We try to hire really outgoing people who are willing to be silly, to sing behind the counter and joke with customers.”

Street teams of Ian’s most out-going staffers hand out stickers at Madison’s famous Farmer’s Market and local events, bringing Ian’s personality into the streets. Stickers carry different motifs and catchphrases for different audiences. Ian’s creates special stickers for three tent-pole events unique to Madison: A huge block party the last week of school; Freak Fest on State Street for Halloween; and Ian’s Eating Contest, a Madison tradition.

Ian’s stickers end up everywhere. “I saw a ‘Pizza Slut’ sticker on the bathroom ceiling in a bar that obviously took a lot of effort to get there,” May recalls. “And one on a pole at the Madison Zoo. I’m sure the city of Madison hates us that we do so much stickering,” he laughs.

For the first eight years Ian’s did no marketing at all, concentrating instead on perfecting the product and the dining experience – and turning customers into evangelists. “We made sure everyone left with a smile, and had a great story to tell,” May says.

“Once we built this great grassroots brand, we added social media, which doesn’t cost much, and leveraged people’s reviews and recommendations,” he continues. Then Ian’s began bartering with a local indie radio station, trading pizza for on-air mentions, and took out ads in some hotel guest directories – keeping Ian’s local, casual vibe.



5 tips to letting customers endorse you

- Make your stickers fun, and make them free. People will be happy to spread them around.
- Speak in an authentic voice. Stickers should match the experience people have with your brand.
- Make it fun for employees. Happy staffers make great ambassadors.
- Change up your message, but keep branding consistent.
- Be nice to your neighbors: If stickering gets out of hand, clean it up. “When we cater events, the first thing we ask organizers is how they feel about stickers.”



For a marketer, stickers are a real-world version of the Like button on Facebook. People want to belong; if you have a cool brand, they want to be part of it. Stickers are an easy way for people to wear your badge – and in the process, endorse your brand.

Sticker strategy depends on the permission customers give to your brand. Where does your brand fit into their life? At what level are they comfortable endorsing your brand? Consider how – and where – your typical customer will use your sticker. Back of a laptop? Bumper of a truck? (Barroom ceiling? Someone else’s back?) Make your sticker fit their personality – the way your brand does.



Ian's started stickering to get the most impact on its shoestring budget, says May: "We pay a few hundred dollars for 10,000 stickers and it spreads organically among our fans."

At first, Ian's put its phone number and address on stickers, plus "Like us on Facebook, follow us on Twitter" – but dropped it in favor of simpler branding. "Now we just have the Website on our stickers, because they're not about information, they're about branding and fun," says May. "People aren't looking at our sticker to order a pizza. They aren't putting our sticker on their fridge." Instead, stickers whet the appetite.

"The best thing that could happen for us is when you're out on a Friday night not thinking about Ian's at all, and someone walks by with a sticker on his back and you think, 'I need to go to Ian's. That's where the party's at. I need to get a slice and a sticker.'"



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FOUR STOREFRONTS, ONE BIG PARTY

Ian's flagship store on Frances Street is near the heart of UW's campus. Ian's State Street shop serves the business and banking crowd that flock to Madison's pedestrian-friendly bar district. Its Milwaukee shop caters to UW students there, plus late-night hospital staff. The fourth Ian's is located near Milwaukee's Bradley Center, home of Bucks baseball and Admiral's hockey.

WHY YOU KNOW IAN'S NAME

Remember not so long ago when hundreds of thousands of people flooded the streets of Madison to protest Governor Scott Walker's proposed budget bill? Well, those protesters had to eat, and by some strange series of events Ian's became the center of a worldwide movement to feed them, and people from all over the world called in to donate pizzas to the protesters. Ian's used a chalkboard to track where all the donations were coming from.