

FINALLY REVEALED

10 BEST KEPT SECRETS TO CREATE A CULT FOLLOWING AT YOUR CAFE

and a community of raving fans that keep coming back!



**"28 PAGES OF INSIGHTS FROM THE MOST SUSTAINABLE CAFES
AND ENTREPRENEURS WE MET ON THE ROAD"**

MARION, ALEXIS & THE COMPOST REVOLUTION BUS



Running a cafe is one of the most rewarding gigs out there. The smell of fresh coffee, the buzz of happy customers and the feeling of fostering a community - is the ultimate goal.

But let's be real, it's not all smooth sailing.

Attracting new faces and keeping your regulars coming back can sometimes feel like an uphill battle. That's why we've put together this guide, packed with insights from over 250+ cafe owners across Australia who've cracked the code.

But before we dive into the secrets, you might be wondering, who are we and why are we sharing this with you?

We're Marion and Alexis, the co-founders of Compostable Alternatives, a social enterprise dedicated to helping Aussie cafe owners like you make the switch to certified home compostable takeaway packaging.

We started this journey 5 years ago after being frustrated by the increasing number of “compostable” products that, in fact, do not compost as they require dedicated industrial composting which are not easily accessible in Australia. We knew there had to be a better way, and that’s how Compostable Alt. was born.

In April 2024, we took our mission on the road with **The Compost Revolution**, converting a 1998 school bus into a tiny home and mobile office (featured on the media **We Are Explorers**).

What started as a trip to meet the incredible cafes we work with turned into a full-blown exploration of what makes cafes successful - plus a lot of composting and compostable packaging education.



We’ve been chatting with cafe owners from regional South Australia to Queensland, learning about their challenges, and discovering the best practices that keep their customers coming back for more.

If you’d like us to swing by your cafe for a sustainability chat or some samples, drop us a message via [@compostablealt](https://www.instagram.com/compostablealt) :)

Now, let’s get to those 10 secrets!

1. SIGNATURE PRODUCT OR UNIQUE OFFERING

Having a standout item that's uniquely yours is a game-changer. Whether it's a special pastry, a signature coffee blend, or a cherished family recipe, make it your flagship product.

It's all about what your customers can't get anywhere else.

Play to your strengths - whether that's killer social media skills, an eye for baking, or something else entirely. Many of our cafes have found success selling their own creations, like house-made plant-based milk, homemade cookies, sauerkraut, pickles, or sauces, which not only adds to their unique offering but also boosts their profit margins.

Take Chloe and her team at The Gator Club in Adelaide (@thegatorclub.adl). They've nailed the art of plant-based treats, even creating their own blend of plant-based milk that customers rave about. They also sell house-made syrups and botanical latte blends - talk about genius!

Hannah from Coffee at KD (@coffee_kds) makes fantastic week's specials like Biscoff or Bueno milkshakes, Nutella iced latte or Mars Bar hot choc, and posts them on their socials!

Yum check it out!



Or check out the regional bakery in Port Elliot (@portelliotbakery) that's become famous for their creative donuts.

Their "Donut of the Month" is a huge hit, drawing lines of locals and travellers alike, not to mention thousands of likes on social media for their mouth watering photos.

2. EXCEPTIONAL CUSTOMER SERVICE

We all know hospitality is about more than just great coffee. It's about connection!

Remembering your regulars' names and their usual orders goes a long way.

Engaging with your customers, introducing them to new products and current initiatives fosters a sense of community that can set your cafe apart.

Salman from The Cafe Syndicate in Adelaide and Caleb from The Coffee Collective (@coffeecollectivecbr) in Canberra have this down to a science.

They know their customers by name, remember their orders and genuinely care about what's going on in their lives. It's more than just a quick chat - it's building relationships that keep customers coming back.

3. MASCOT OR PET-FRIENDLY ATMOSPHERE

Got a mascot or a pet-friendly policy?

These can be huge draws for customers. A friendly animal can become part of your cafe's identity, and catering to pet owners can make your spot a must-visit for the local dog-walking crowd.





Jackson from The Coffee Chief in Melbourne (@TheCoffeeChief) has built his brand around his little doggo, Chief.

By sharing their journey on Instagram, from the first trailer to the second, Jackson has created a community that's as loyal to Chief as they are to their coffee.



Some cafes even feature their customers' pets on a "dog wall," like Lou from Bond and Lane (@bondandlane) or Chloe from The Gator Club (@thegatorclub.adl).

It's a simple touch that makes pet owners feel at home (and come back!).

Adds on such as pet treats or puppyccino is a great way to impress pet owners by allowing them to treat their 'favourite child'.



4. LEVERAGE FREE MARKETING TOOLS

In today's world, if you don't have reviews on Google Business, you're missing out!

Free tools like Google reviews and niche platforms/accreditations like [Responsible Cafes](#) can help you attract new customers and get valuable feedback.

Make it easy for customers to leave a review by displaying a QR code at your counter.



It's a simple (and cheap) step that can make a big difference. So go order a customised display with your cafe's branding on it today!

The Coffee Chief (@thecoffeechief) has already racked up 100 reviews, and e10 Espresso has 204! Start collecting those reviews early to build your online presence and credibility.



Amy from Arch & Willow (@arch_willowco) has taken it a step further by regularly featuring her Google reviews on Instagram.

It's a great way to highlight customer feedback and draw in new visitors.



Bridie



"I'm a regular customer of Amy's and couldn't recommend her coffee more!! She has made a lovely space for people to enjoy their coffees, slices or toasties 🍌, and is always up for a chat. I wouldn't go anywhere else!"

5. CREATE A COMFORTABLE AND INVITING SPACE

The vibe of your cafe matters.

Cozy seating, unique decor, and a welcoming atmosphere can turn a quick coffee run into a leisurely visit. Think about how your space makes customers feel and what you can do to make it even more inviting.

Zanny from Zan's Van (@zans.van) has set up an inviting outdoor setup with retro tables and chairs in front of her mobile cafe, offering a premium experience and one of the best views on the Fleurieu Peninsula in South Australia.





Troppo in Adelaide (@cafe_troppo) has gone all-in on sustainability with a cosy indoor and outdoor terrace made from upcycled materials.

It's not just a cafe - it's an experience that fits perfectly with their eco-friendly ethos and grants them the title of 'Most Sustainable Cafe in Adelaide' by words of mouth!

6. STREAMLINED MENU AND SPECIALS

Keep your menu focused and avoid overwhelming customers with too many options. Highlight your best offerings and rotate specials based on the season. Use social media to build anticipation for returning favourites or to showcase something new.

Eilish from The What If Society (@thewhatifsociety) took a bold approach with her surprising and creative menu that keeps the surprise until the plate is in front of you. And it works wonders, they're just about to launch their second venue!



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15% SURCHARGE ON SUNDAY	

While Chloe from mobile cafe Later Gator's Mac Papis toasties are the stuff of legend (@latergator).

Sue from Boston Bean (@bostonbeancoffee) has partnered with a local French baker to offer 'voted 2023 South Australia's Best Croissants' that sell out daily (and they're exceptional, Frenchies speaking!).

Planning a limited menu or niche offerings like gluten-free or vegan treats can work wonders.

Creating a little FOMO (Fear Of Missing Out) by limiting quantities or closing early when stock has run out can drive demand and keep customers coming back for more.



7. SHOWCASE YOUR SUSTAINABILITY EFFORTS

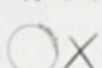
Transparency about your sustainability efforts can resonate with eco-conscious customers and build brand loyalty. Whether it's a display, a leaflet, or posts on social media, let your customers know what you're doing to minimise your impact.

The What If Society (@thewhatifsociety) has created a giant poster showcasing all their local suppliers, giving customers a clear picture of where their food comes from.

Two Before Ten in Canberra (@twobeforeten) has nailed this with informative leaflets on every table detailing their responsible sourcing, urban farming, and on-site composting practices.

t if
SOCIETY

Suppliers

-  The What If Society Exchange
Burrawang, NSW
0km
-  Duck Foot Farm
Moss Vale, NSW
4.5km
-  Rockaway Farm
Sutton Forest, NSW
8.2km
-  Red Leaf Farm
Fitzroy Falls, NSW
12.2km
-  The What If Society Studio
Moss Vale, NSW
15km
-  Moonachres Farm
Fitzroy Falls, NSW
12.2km
-  Robertson Potatoes
Robertson, NSW
24.3km
-  Mussett Holdings
Colo Vale, NSW
24.8km
-  Kangaroo Valley Eggs
Kangaroo Valley, NSW
33.2km
-  Carrington Meats
Carrington Falls, NSW
35km
-  Mothertree Farm
Thirlmere, NSW
56.4km
-  Double Roasters
Marrickville, NSW
126km
-  Little Big Dairy Co
Dubbo, NSW
479km
-  Wholegrain Milling Co
Gunnedah, NSW
507km

Nikkita from Little Frankies Van (@littlefrankiesvan) goes the extra mile with a dedicated page on her website outlining all her sustainability initiatives.

She also keeps her Instagram followers in the loop with regular posts about her efforts such as reusing plant based milk cartons as coffee cup carry trays!





Getting accredited as a Responsible Cafe will provide your cafe with FREE brand exposure, great tips and tools to promote your eco-friendly practices and belonging to a fantastic community of 5,000 like-minded cafes!

Responsible Cafes is an Australian grass-root social enterprise created in 2013 to support cafes reduce their waste and adopt sustainable practices. It is also one of Australia's most innovative, popular, & fastest-growing programs actively engaging cafes, councils and the community to improve sustainability and create behaviour change.



8. CONSISTENCY AND LOYALTY PROGRAMS

Consistency is key, especially when it comes to your coffee.

Regularly test your methods to maintain standards. You could schedule regular tasting and quality checks to ensure your coffee, food, and service maintain the same high standards. This can involve sampling your own offerings daily or getting feedback from trusted regulars.

Make sure your team is well-trained and knowledgeable about your products.

Regular training sessions on brewing methods, customer service, and even the story behind your beans or your cafe can ensure everyone is on the same page. Develop and stick to SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures) for everything from brewing coffee to encouraging sustainable practices or making your signature dishes.

This ensures that whether it's you, your barista, or your latest team member – every cup of coffee is consistently great.



Offer a simple, classic loyalty program like "Buy 9 coffees, get the 10th free." or "get 10% off on our retail section" This encourages repeat visits and gives customers something to look forward to.

Each time they bring their own cup, they get a stamp, and after a certain number of stamps, they earn a free drink or discount. You can also go beyond traditional loyalty programs and offer perks like access to special events, tastings, or discounts on other products you sell. This fosters a sense of community and deeper connection with your brand and your values.



Or even better, consider a Responsible Cafes loyalty program that rewards zero waste such as customers who bring their reusables.



Vivianne from Bean There Drank That Coffee (@beantheredrankthatcoffee) offers a reusable loyalty program that rewards customers for BYO (Bringing Your Own) cups. It's a win-win for the planet and for customer retention. Caleb from The Coffee Collective (@coffeecollectivecbr) has a fun twist on loyalty cards.

His customers get to find and stamp their own cards (he keeps all of them in an alphabetical order box), making the process a bit more interactive and engaging!





Boston Bean (@bostonbean) goes beyond just offering great coffee.

They host regular events where customers can learn more about the process and the people behind their favourite brew, creating a deeper connection with their customers.

9. ENGAGE WITH THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Being an active part of your local community is one of the most effective ways to boost your cafe's visibility, reputation, and customer loyalty.

Whether it's participating in local events, supporting community initiatives, or collaborating with nearby businesses, staying engaged locally can build strong relationships and make your cafe a beloved part of the neighbourhood.

Troppo (@cafe_troppo) has teamed up with the Uraidla Sustainability Fair, a South Australian market focused on sustainability, to promote eco-friendly practices and behaviour change. By aligning their cafe with the values of the fair, they attract like-minded customers and strengthen their reputation as Adelaide's most sustainable cafe.



Nicola and Warrick from the Watervale Hotel (@watervalehotel) in the Clare Valley organise farm tours and six-course degustation menus using produce grown on their own biodynamic farm.

Not only this immersive experience connects their hotel, kitchen, cafe and store with the land. It also educates customers about sustainable farming, and creates a memorable dining experience that keeps customers coming back and tell their friends.





What If Society (@thewhatsociety) hosts workshops on pickling, fermenting, and cooking classes, all of which resonate with their foodie community.

These events not only attract new customers but also deepen the bonds between their brand, the cafe and its customers by offering valuable, hands-on experiences.

Responsible Cafes' 'BYO and SAVE' campaign, amplified by the ABC TV show War on Waste in 2017-18, saw over 5,000 businesses encouraging customers to BYO cup (Bring Your Own) for a discount. A great way to engage eco-conscious consumers and strengthen community ties.



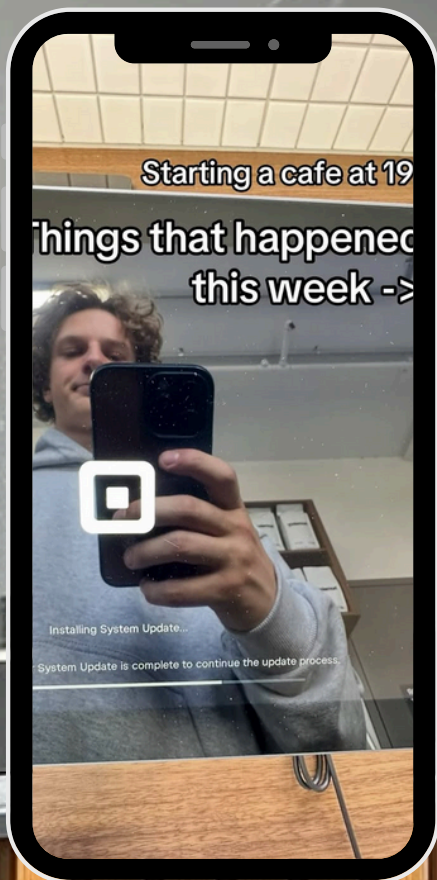


10. USE SOCIAL MEDIA TO DOCUMENT YOUR JOURNEY

Sharing your story through social media is one of the most powerful ways to connect with your customers. Behind-the-scenes (BTS) content, day-in-the-life videos, and authentic posts give your audience a glimpse into your universe. Let them see the highs, the lows, and everything in between. It's not just about promoting your cafe; it's about inviting people into your world.

Amy from Arch & Willow in regional Victoria does daily stories and content on her Instagram (@arch_willowco), where she shares business news, wins, challenges, and moments that make her community laugh.

Tom from @homeboy.co in Hahndorf and now Adelaide has harnessed the power of TikTok and Instagram to create a strong following of 538K people in under a year (!), by sharing his entrepreneurial journey at just 18.





By focusing on these initiatives, you'll create a cafe experience that not only draws in new customers but keeps them coming back, all while staying aligned with your values.

Through The Compost Revolution roadshow, we've had the privilege of witnessing these strategies in action - and let me tell you, they deliver! These cafes are bustling with activity, have built thriving communities of loyal coffee lovers, and enjoy incredible visibility on social media - some achieving this in under a year of operation!

If you're thinking about opening a cafe or are in the early stages of running one, take these 10 strategies to heart and commit to implementing them with passion and consistency.

Running a small business is deeply rewarding, but it takes dedication and persistence. At its core, it's about serving your community with authenticity and care.

There's nothing quite like hearing how you've made someone's day, or receiving a love note from a regular. That's the real joy of being a coffee entrepreneur.

So dive in, work hard, and don't forget to celebrate the little wins along the way. They're important. You've got this!

Marion and Alexis
Cofounder Compostable Alt. and leading The Compost Revolution in regional Australia.

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"THECOMPOSTREVOLUTION"

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