

Campaigning To Fill Seats

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Central to the initiative is an interactive Web site created and maintained by Shamrock, www.dine4az.com, where restaurants get exposure and can post specials to drive traffic. Operators control information posted about their deals. From the site, consumers can print coupons. Any Arizona restaurant—chain or independent, Shamrock customer or not—can participate at no charge. As of October 1, Rob Ahrensdorf, corporate director of marketing at Shamrock, said some 9,000 restaurants were listed on the site with roughly 3,000 actively participating by promoting deals or specials. "The majority of those at this point are our DSRs' accounts. The reps have been hugely instrumental at getting the program going.

A three-month multi-media campaign of print, radio and TV advertising supports the program and drives consumers to the Web site. The Arizona Restaurant Association, which signed on as a co-sponsor, is helping to fund the campaign. "If all goes well, we hope to continue to budget funds for media beyond the initial three-month buy," Ahrensdorf says.

In announcing the program, Shamrock's Chairman and CEO Norman McClelland noted, "The Dine4AZ program is really about reaching out to our customers and Arizona's consumers. Restaurants are the bedrock of our economy, and right now, they need more customers. We felt the situation was a real opportunity to encourage Arizonans to make the connection between eating at a restaurant and stimulating our state's economy."

Three weeks into the program, Ahrensdorf said customer support and interest is high. "Small businesses right now need any help they can get. When times are good and we step outside the box with a program like this, few people get too excited. It's, 'You're our distributor; just get the goods here ... and we'll take it from there.' Now, customers appreciate that we're their business partner. No one's done this for them before, and they're excited about the opportunity to participate."