

## The secret promotion

“Pledge allegiance to us, and we’ll make your name ours. Really,” proclaims the website of Smith and Wollensky, the New York City steakhouse established in 1977.

In a promotion that started Oct. 3, the restaurant is randomly selecting a name from the reservations list for each day, and changing the sign, cocktail napkins, wait staff uniforms and some of the silverware to reflect a lucky customer’s name.

Customers who want to be randomly selected have to sign a pledge on the site, vowing loyalty to Smith (or, as it was on Oct. 3, “Fleiss”) and Wollensky. The dedicated have to sign a pledge, including such vows as “if I am taken to another steakhouse, I will politely direct table conversation to the inferiority of the steakhouse to Smith and Wollensky,” “if my significant other wants to try a new steakhouse, I will try a new significant other,” “if I am hungry for steak and do not find myself in the vicinity of a Smith and Wollensky, I will build a new Smith and Wollensky,” and possibly most importantly, “I will not go to Del Frisco’s.”

(Fans of steak whose last name is already Smith are told to consider themselves lucky, because they’ve “already won.”)

But despite the daily name change, and the picture of the waiter extending his arm like Lady Liberty on the website, no one at the restaurant seems to want to actually promote the promotion.

The Associated Press Daybook, a daily list of newsworthy events, announced the signs at the restaurant would be changed at 9 a.m. Oct. 3. To get on the Daybook, someone has to e-mail the Associated Press the details of an event. It would stand to reason that whoever notified the AP thought the name change promotion was an event worth attending.

But at 9 a.m. on Monday, nobody was outside the restaurant to kick off the affair. The signs were already changed to “Fleiss and Wollensky, Est. 2011.”

A later version of the Daybook offered contact information, the office and cell phone numbers of Allison Good, the public relations representative for Fourth Wall Restaurants, which owns Smith and Wollensky and other upscale restaurants. Her outgoing voicemail message at work invites “reporters on deadline” to call her cell phone. If one calls her cell at a bad time, she promises to call right back.

The steakhouse’s staff is less friendly (although, possibly more honest, as three voice messages and an e-mail left for Good were unanswered). A gentleman who answered the phone at the restaurant on Monday night, upon being asked for the manager to get more information on the campaign, recited the information available from the Daybook and questioned the need for more details.

The weary-sounding manager on duty, Michael Jenkins, also repeated the already publicly available information, that the restaurant would change its name each day, that customers needed to take the pledge online before making their reservation.

Jenkins eventually said the names were pulled from a lottery about a week in advance, to both tell the customer and confirm the reservation and to replace everything with the name “Smith” on it. He added that customers who aren’t able to make their reservation will still get all the goods with their name, including a photo of the building.

Personalized cocktail napkins run from \$20 to \$80 for 100 napkins. Embroidered shirts for the wait staff could cost approximately \$20 each. Changing everything every day for a month could be quite costly.

And still, the most publicity for the occasion is a daily photo of the winning customer on the restaurant's Facebook page, the reservation section of the Smith and Wollensky website, an Oct. 4 story in Gothamist (which reads as if Andrew Fleiss himself contacted the publication's staff, as, aside from his quote, the rest of the article is pulled from public sources) and a Sept. 13 article in the New York Times.

Gothamist called the promotion a "publicity stunt" - but wouldn't that imply reaching out to the public?

[http://www.ballarddesigns.com/bd/12250?SourceCode=BDG006&cm\\_mmc=mer-\\_-cse-\\_-google-\\_-prod-feed&mr\\_trackingCode=9A8F6C2A-B1D0-DF11-A880-001B2163195C&mr\\_referralID=NA&origin=pla&mr\\_adType=pla&gclid=CJnvzPm406sCFQhN4AoduFcBRQ](http://www.ballarddesigns.com/bd/12250?SourceCode=BDG006&cm_mmc=mer-_-cse-_-google-_-prod-feed&mr_trackingCode=9A8F6C2A-B1D0-DF11-A880-001B2163195C&mr_referralID=NA&origin=pla&mr_adType=pla&gclid=CJnvzPm406sCFQhN4AoduFcBRQ)

<http://www.crateandbarrel.com/dining-and-entertaining/napkin/set-of-12-multicolored-cocktail-napkins/s489037>

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Smith-Wollensky-New-York-City/31807870562>

Amanda Good: 646-277-2379, 917-921-0728

Michael Jenkins: 212-753-1530

[http://gothamist.com/2011/10/04/area\\_man\\_sees\\_his\\_name\\_added\\_to\\_smi.php](http://gothamist.com/2011/10/04/area_man_sees_his_name_added_to_smi.php)

[https://encrypted.google.com/#sclient=psy-ab&hl=en&tbm=nws&source=hp&q=%22Smith+and+Wollensky%22&pbx=1&oq=%22Smith+and+Wollensky%22&aq=f&aqi=&aql=&gs\\_sm=e&gs\\_upl=8007113039121133091241211010101012611380410.11.912110&bav=on.2,or.r\\_gc.r\\_pw.,cf.osb&fp=2c10648c0a312a5&biw=981&bih=521](https://encrypted.google.com/#sclient=psy-ab&hl=en&tbm=nws&source=hp&q=%22Smith+and+Wollensky%22&pbx=1&oq=%22Smith+and+Wollensky%22&aq=f&aqi=&aql=&gs_sm=e&gs_upl=8007113039121133091241211010101012611380410.11.912110&bav=on.2,or.r_gc.r_pw.,cf.osb&fp=2c10648c0a312a5&biw=981&bih=521)