



## CONSUMER

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### Denny's free-meal offer draws crowds

by Max Jarman - Feb. 4, 2009 12:00 AM  
The Arizona Republic

41 comments

With the economy in the worst shape in decades and more than 11 million people unemployed, Denny's Super Bowl offer of a free breakfast for everybody in America didn't go unnoticed.

It generated a landslide of follow-up publicity across the country and got millions of people to sample Denny's food and prices. And if the promotion helps the company lift its lagging sales and traffic numbers, it could be \$15 million well spent.

Hungry patrons descended on the chain's 35 Phoenix-area restaurants Tuesday for a Grand Slam breakfast served on the house from 6 a.m. to 2 p.m.

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They came by car, bus, light rail and on foot and cheerfully waited in line, sometimes for more than an hour, for the chain's signature breakfast of two eggs, two strips of bacon, two sausage links and two pancakes.

Denny's CEO Nelson Marchioli estimated the company gave away 2 million breakfasts. At the regular price of \$5.99, that's a \$12 million giveaway, on top of the \$3 million cost of the Super Bowl ad.

David Anderson, president of Off Madison Ave, a Tempe marketing agency, said the breakfast giveaway helped Denny's in its effort to get reacquainted with America. "It got people in and exposed them to the value its menu offers," he said.

"That's important in this economy."

Denny's fourth-quarter sales were off 6.1 percent and traffic was down 7.1 percent.

The giveaway was clearly a hit with customers in metro Phoenix.

"It's a great day," said Carolyn Mieritz of Phoenix, who, after a long wait, was about to be seated at Denny's Seventh Street and Camelback Road restaurant in Phoenix. "This is unbelievable."

Word spread like wildfire Tuesday to people who missed the 30-second spot during the third quarter of Sunday's Super Bowl.

Denny's and Grand Slam were the most-used words Feb. 3 on the Twitter social-networking site. The dennys.com Web site got so many hits in the morning that it was down sporadically in Dallas, Seattle and Los Angeles.

Tracy Blake heard by word of mouth at the CASS homeless shelter in Phoenix, where she is temporarily staying.

"I'm homeless and hungry," she said in line at Seventh Street and Camelback. "This is helping."



AP Photo/Jacquelyn Martin

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### Denny's Corp.

**What:** Restaurant chain.

**Founded:** 1953 in Lakewood, Calif., as Danny's Donuts.

**Outlets:** 1,546.

**Metro Phoenix outlets:** 35.

**Headquarters:** Spartanburg, S.C.

**Employees:** 21,000.

**Signature dish:** Grand Slam.

**Annual revenue:** \$795 mil.

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