

TAKEOUT & DELIVERY MARKETPLACE FORCES CHANGES IN RESTAURANT STRATEGIES

The pandemic has ravaged the restaurant and food-service industry. However, where it has burned away many established practices, the virus has also created room for the industry to grow and evolve as new protocols come into play. Demonstrating safety to consumers has become a mandate, while enabling consumer demand for great takeout and delivery is more critical than ever before. Although many restaurants had takeout and delivery options before the COVID outbreak, their primary focus was always on-premise service in their dining room. The surge in off-premise dining due to official mandates and customers' reluctance to dine in a restaurant has revealed flaws in many of the existing systems that restaurants have in place. This is because, in many cases, it was previously considered a secondary revenue source.

Business owners must recognize that food safety and the risk of spreading infection have taken on a level of importance that is well beyond anything experienced previously. Following the new CDC guidelines has become an imperative, and it is essential to recognize that consumers are now far more informed about these guidelines. In the past, many establishments had utilized durable menus and permanent-ware

dishes for their dine-in customers. Recently, the CDC advised operators to avoid the use of sharable or reusable items, advocating instead for disposable or contactless options. This way, restaurants don't risk spreading contamination among consumers. Some restaurants have gone even further by replacing permanent-ware dishes with disposable options for dine-in customers to reduce risk and signal their commitment to safety to their customers.

Within the area of Maintaining a Healthy Environment, there are specific recommendations to:

Packaging has taken on a much more strategic role with the increased importance of signaling safety and serving more consumers via takeout and delivery; Paper-based packaging simply can't hold up to the new challenges.

- Discourage the use of items that are difficult to clean
- Avoid the use or sharing of reusable items. Instead, use disposable or digital menus, single-serving condiments, and no-touch trashcans or doors.

- Use disposable food service items (e.g., utensils, dishes, napkins, tablecloths)

- Avoid the use of food and beverage containers brought in by customers

In the current environment, packaging has taken on a much more strategic role with the increased importance of signaling consumer safety, while serving more consumers via takeout and delivery.

When diners choose to utilize a takeout/delivery service, they are looking for an experience that is as close as possible to dining in their chosen establishment. Business owners can accommodate this by optimizing how they package food that leaves their restaurant. Aspects such as presentation, the

performance of the packaging, and the degree to which the menu item is conducive to transit, all affect the off-premise dining experience.

To improve operational efficiency and reduce waste, operators should consider the modification of menus and the execution of cooking lines. In addition to dish preparation in the kitchen, restaurants now need to devote workers and space to packaging food for transit and to accommodate the various delivery services. Consequently, a very different cadence is required to cook, package, and then deliver with success.

To mitigate this strain, many restaurants have pared down their menus considerably. The new focus is only on items that can be prepared efficiently and maintain their quality during transit. Doing this allows restaurants to maintain their level of output while simultaneously protecting the quality of the dishes they send out. This approach enables them to continue to deliver an experience that matches that of dining on-premise, as closely as possible.

If menu reduction is not feasible, an alternative approach is to devel-

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op a packaging strategy that enables the inclusion of all menu items that will remain. Rigid plastic packaging can maintain heat and temperature longer and more consistently than alternative options. Secure closures eliminate spills during transit, anti-fog lids prevent errors before the food goes out and present an appealing meal when food is delivered. Additionally, the performance of vented packaging, notably the Crisp Food Technologies line by Anchor Packaging, can maintain texture, even for fried foods, for over 30 minutes, which exceeds the duration of most deliveries. Making these packaging options part of your plan can quickly put more items back on the menu, including many signature items that drive repeat consumer traffic to your restaurant.

Some rigid plastic packaging options can add additional value to the customer as well. Polypropylene containers are dishwasher and mi-

crowave safe, making them genuinely reusable for the consumer. Many options are available that are produced using less plastic, and polypropylene is curbside-recyclable through most US waste collection services.

With the recent spikes in COVID-19 cases across the country, it is clear that takeout and delivery will continue to reign supreme. Although for many operators, the revamping of off-premise services appears expensive, it will be well worth the investment, as takeout and delivery continue to grow as significant revenue sources. One only needs to look at the two mergers in that space with GrubHub being acquired by Just Eat and Uber Eats teaming with Postmates in deals that valued at over \$10 billion for confirmation of the phenomenon.