

COVID-19 SPECIAL EDITION

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Cover Photography
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Feedback

We welcome your comments.

Contact Food Fanatics at:
Jasmine.Jones@usfoods.com

Contact Bite This Media at:
info@bitethismedia.com

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Advertising Information

For rates and a media kit, contact Jasmine Jones, (847) 720-2578 or email
Jasmine.Jones@usfoods.com.

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US Foods is one of America's great food companies and a leading foodservice distributor, partnering with approximately 300,000 chefs, restaurateurs and foodservice operators to help their businesses succeed. With nearly 28,000 employees and more than 70 locations, US Foods provides its customers with a broad and innovative food offering and a comprehensive suite of e-commerce, technology and business solutions. US Foods is headquartered in Rosemont, IL., and generates approximately \$28 billion in annual revenue. Visit usfoods.com to learn more.



9300 W. Higgins Rd.
Suite 500
Rosemont, IL 60018
(847) 720-8000
usfoods.com



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We're All In This Together

The word unprecedented has been used consistently to describe the current environment and while that is certainly true—for those in the foodservice industry you can also add heartbreaking, tumultuous and life changing.

You've had to change the way you run your business and make exceedingly difficult decisions in order to weather this storm. All while doing your best to keep yourself, your families, your communities and your employees safe and healthy.

We, too, have had to make modifications to how we do business. Modifications that ensure our associates are safe and that we're able to deliver the food and support our customers and communities need most.

No one can know exactly what the new normal for restaurants and foodservice operations will look like, but the one certainty is that it will look and feel different than it did a few months ago.

With this special edition of Food Fanatics Magazine, we explore what we've learned, what experts are predicting and how we can all leverage the best of what is working today to emerge from the post-COVID period stronger, healthier and ready for what is next.

What gives me not just hope, but confidence, that our industry will rebound better than ever is the outpouring of support we've seen restaurants, chefs and businesses large and small provide. The sense of community, adaptability and desire to help each other throughout the food industry has never been stronger and we're right next to you in this.

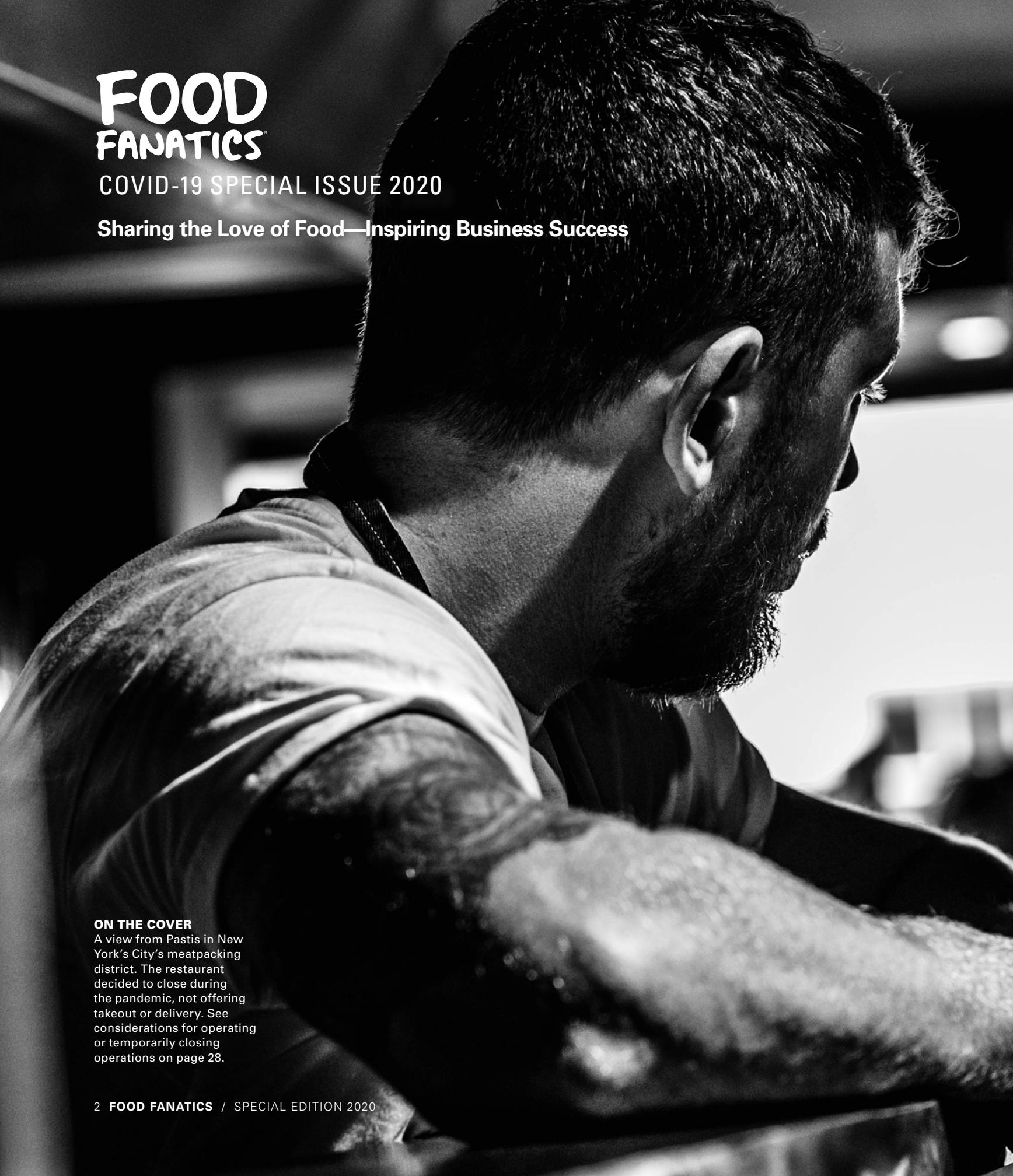
Now more than ever, we stand behind our promise to help you "Make It." Whether it be through the pages of this digital publication, a webinar on navigating the CARES Act or a consultation with one of our experts, helping the industry—and each of you—return to full strength is a high priority.

We will get through this. And we're here to help.

Stay safe and be well,

Pietro Satriano

Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, US Foods



FOOD FANATICS[®]

COVID-19 SPECIAL ISSUE 2020

Sharing the Love of Food—Inspiring Business Success

ON THE COVER

A view from Pastis in New York's City's meatpacking district. The restaurant decided to close during the pandemic, not offering takeout or delivery. See considerations for operating or temporarily closing operations on page 28.

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A VERY SPECIAL THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS.



WE'RE HERE TO HELP YOU MAKE IT

As we face the challenge of the COVID-19 crisis, we're here for you every step of the way. Discover a wealth of resources to support your business. Find webinars on relevant topics, tips and tools for takeout, one-on-one discussion with our restaurant consultants and more.

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FOODS® WE HELP YOU
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TAKE COMFORT

A STRATEGIC
TO-GO MENU CAN
SEE YOU THROUGH
A SHUTDOWN
AND WIN OVER
REGULARS ON
THE OTHER SIDE



By Amber Gibson

IN TIMES OF UNCERTAINTY, PEOPLE CRAVÉ COMFORT FOODS.

This was true after 9/11, during the 2008-2009 financial crisis and prevails today. At some point, everyday diners will seek meals that can transport them back to less-stressful times or provide relief from the constraints of sheltering in.

But not just any kind of comfort. Offer a complex mix of ingredients for dishes they can no longer find or offerings that demand kitchen skills beyond their reach. Soon, old friends and perfect strangers can become future regulars.

Different concepts can fill these needs in different ways. Some independent fine dining restaurants are surviving by abandoning tasting menus in favor of to-go dishes with an aura of exclusivity, like beef Wellington and coq au vin. Others are offering meal kits that provide a mix of customer favorites and at-home kitchen entertainment. Familiar comfort foods such as pasta Bolognese, pizza or pancakes—which blow away store-bought sauces and grocery store alternatives—are also popular.

“We never did delivery before,” says Simon Kim, owner of the Michelin-starred Korean steakhouse Cote in New York City. “I would have laughed if you told me a year ago, but we immediately launched our steak package (see photo, right) to sell off inventory. I’m keeping all of my salaried employees at full pay and coming up with different avenues to do that.”

Here are some examples of how operators are fighting to stay alive.



New York City's Cote is serving bestsellers to-go for the first time, including steaks with a salt blend, ssamjang and assorted banchan for \$105, and sweet and tangy chicken nuggets with gochujang glaze for \$14.





Roots Pizza's lasagna, made with fresh pasta, and Funfetti cheesecake became popular items among returning guests who initially ordered its namesake pies.



Build a menu that encourages repeat orders

After Illinois issued shelter-in-place orders in March, The Fifty/50 Group closed 10 of its 13 restaurant locations in Chicago. Its three Roots Pizza locations could stay open because the restaurant group had an established infrastructure in place, which included drivers, online ordering capabilities and apps for delivery. Co-founder Scott Weiner says his delivery business more than tripled, but they're still not making much money. "All I'm trying to do is make sure we're relatively cash-flow neutral," he says, a sentiment echoed by every chef and operator interviewed.

He says his initial wave of orders centered on popular items, especially pizzas and mozzarella sticks. But

returning guests, some of whom place multiple orders a week, are diversifying toward pasta and sandwiches. "People are ordering five sides of ranch (dressing) like they're stocking up," he says. Plus, more people are ordering dessert, too. "We sold out of pies on Sunday at all locations," he says. "Our pies are really good and have always flown under the radar, so I've been happy to see that."

Weiner reports that GrubHub has been "pretty much worthless because everybody is on them," which is why he's relying on email blasts to his 22,000 subscribers and those who've ordered from Roots Pizza in the past. "I think social media has a small part to play," says Weiner, "but it's been going to our lists and reengaging people that we've collected over the years."

▲
"... MORE PEOPLE
ARE ORDERING
DESSERT, TOO.
WE SOLD OUT
OF PIES ON
SUNDAY AT ALL
LOCATIONS."

—Scott Weiner, co-founder of
Roots Pizza

Deliver Everything

Before COVID-19, George Chen, owner of China Live in San Francisco, restricted selling items that might not taste as stellar at home as fresh out of the kitchen in his restaurant. But now, his staff is making small alterations and providing instructions for items that don't typically travel well. He's seen a direct benefit: Much of the \$5,000 a day in takeout and delivery orders comes from Peking duck pockets and sheng jian bao dumplings to-go, nibbles that allow diners to sample a portion of the large feasts they once enjoyed inside his restaurant.

For his duck pockets, he serves housemade hoisin sauce and kumquat glaze on the side and suggests toasting the sesame biscuits at home before

assembling. "We torch the duck skins a bit more just before packing and punch holes in the box top so it doesn't steam up and ruin the texture," he says. "We suggest folks at home use a creme brulee torch if they have one and touch it up a bit to get it even crispier."

Instead of serving soup dumplings, which would collapse during transit, Chen switched to sheng jian bao, which are traditionally warmed in a cast-iron pan. He's adjusted the recipe so they can be warmed in a microwave for 15 seconds if diners lack a cast-iron pan. "I've cut down the gelatin part that's made from pork stock," Chen says. "When you bite into it, you want that juiciness, but I've reduced that down a little bit, because when it gets cold it can be less enjoyable."

Pasta Sisters in Los Angeles made its apricot pie available for delivery and pickup.



One-Minute Read

How to Build a Shelter-in-Place Menu

Until a vaccine is widely available or shelter-in-place measures are uniformly enforced across the country, most experts predict Covid-19 hotspots will continue to pop up and force foodservice closures or abbreviated hours. To be better prepared, operators can benefit from their peers' early efforts:

- ▶ Offer comfort foods, especially desserts, that most people don't have the expertise to make at home.
- ▶ Sell meal kits that are unexpected or encourage participation.
- ▶ Package exclusivity, a to-go tactic that works for special occasion restaurants and places with hard-to-score reservations.
- ▶ Make alterations and provide instructions to improve the taste and experience for menu favorites that don't travel well.
- ▶ Offer prepped items from the menu that customers can make at home.
- ▶ Ensure that abbreviated menus still offer vegetable main dishes and high-protein options to accommodate specialty diets, such as vegan and keto.



Sheng jian bao available for delivery and pickup at China Live in San Francisco.



Bravocado Toast and Pancake Party Pack meal kit from Snooze A.M. Eatery.

Make It A Meal Kit

Netflix, puzzles, games, books and virtual meetups can become repetitive. That's why meal kits that allow for engagement are so appealing and potentially profitable for restaurants, especially when customers cannot source the same level of ingredients. The contents are prepped, ready to mix and cook.

BRUNCH IT OUT: Snooze A.M. Eatery offers pancake party kits for \$45 with 32 ounces of buttermilk batter, chocolate chips, seasoned pineapple, blueberries, candied pecans, maple syrup and butter so diners can do brunch at home. The kit also comes with ingredients for Bravocado Toast, which pairs smashed avocado with red onion honey jam and roasted tomato atop rustic bread with some additional fixings. It feeds four to six people, which helps diners to see

the kit as a real value. Snooze's bravocado toast is \$13 and pineapple upside-down pancakes are \$9 on its dine-in menu.

STRETCH IT OUT: Farmhouse at Roger's Gardens in Corona del Mar, California, offers a kid's \$6 take-and-make pizza kit that includes dough, mozzarella and housemade marinara sauce. Pepperoni or fresh veggies can be added for a \$2 upcharge.

MEAT UP: Maple & Ash, a steakhouse in Chicago, sells a daily meal kit for \$160 that includes a Little Gem Caesar salad with lemon, Parmesan and savory sprinkles; four 6-ounce filet mignon steaks, a bundle of asparagus, a bottle of its signature steak sauce and a bottle of Cabernet Sauvignon Frank Family, Napa Valley 2017. New York City's Cote also offers a beefy kit of four 1-pound premium rib-eye steaks, four pints

of assorted *banchan* (Korean side dishes), house seasoning salt and *ssamjang*, a chili-based Korean condiment for \$105.

BIG BOX: Dan Barber of Blue Hill at Stone Barns in Tarrytown, New York and Stone Hill in New York City, is selling out of a build-your-own hotpot box stuffed with ingredients from his farm, some of which are ready to eat and others to be prepared, all for \$160. They include eggs, vegetables, locally raised meat and charcuterie, turmeric broth, yogurt, granola, jam and heirloom grain bread. All the proceeds go to paying staff.

ONE NOW, ONE LATER: Pho Bac in San Francisco is offering \$10 pho to eat upon delivery and for another \$10, ingredients to make another at home—an approach that any ramen or noodle place can offer.

Stick With What You Do Best

With 41 locations in six states, Snooze A.M. Eatery had begun experimenting with delivery at a few of its locations before the Covid-19 crisis hit. “Instead of testing systems, we just had to go,” says regional chef Jon Schwartz. His advice? Stick with your beloved brunch staples. His pineapple upside-down pancakes and green chili-smothered burrito were top-sellers before and continue to be top-sellers now. “Our guests are eating more comfort foods than thinking about healthy foods,” says Schwartz. “People are looking for something familiar and safe that’s going to sustain them.”

Grandmother’s Bolognese is still a best-seller on the streamlined takeaway and delivery menu at family-owned Pasta Sisters in Los Angeles. Burrata and bottarga have become impossible to import, but they’re still making fresh

pasta daily. “The secret is our Bolognese simmers for more than nine hours,” says CEO Francesco Sinatra. “It’s always been a comfort food for me, and I think our customers feel that same comfort during these times.” Sinatra is also encouraging guests via social media posts to buy fresh pasta to cook at home or order an extra lasagna to freeze for later, which has bolstered to-go check averages.

Export Your Bar Menu

Many Michelin-star restaurants have opted for family-style prix fixe menus while others, like Acadia in Chicago, are serving lobster rolls and burgers from their bar menus. Cote is serving updated bar favorites, like sweet and tangy chicken nuggets, along with rice bowls for the first time. The butcher’s cut bowls feature three different cuts of steak served with kimchi, pickles and rice, a condensed



CALL IT OUT

Get tips on broadcasting meal kits on page 48.



Fine dining temple Acadia in Chicago is selling bar menu favorites, including its burger on brioche that features an 8-ounce hand-formed patty griddled in clarified butter.



Fresh pasta and sauces are available online at Pasta Sisters in Los Angeles.

single-serving version of Cote’s best-selling butcher’s feast.

“Our customers aren’t just ordering Cote to fill their stomachs,” Kim says. “They’re at home, kind of bored, and I want to give them something to look forward to.” Kim was surprised their \$48 steak and eggs—hand-cut filet mignon tartare with golden Osetra caviar and milk toast—has been such a hit, but he assumes it’s allowing people to splurge at home. Cote is also offering a \$200 wine package that includes a rare bottle that would normally be priced for \$400. Beverage director Victoria James selects a bottle to pair with the meal along with tasting notes and descriptions, which provides the restaurant a way to liquidate their wine inventory at retail prices.

To show his appreciation, Kim has been tagging regular guests on Instagram posts, thanking them for their orders and including extra dishes on the house, a fine dining hallmark. “They’ll tag us back, and we’re able to engage with our customers in a real way,” he says. “It’s become a fun communication tool, almost like a love affair.” ■

ONE MEAL FITS ALL

8 Ways takeout family-style options can cushion the blow of dine-in shutdowns

By Jackie Raposo

► Family-style meals

may not jump off the Richter scale of innovation, but they can be the difference between perishing or persisting when governments shut down restaurants, caterers and other foodservice operations over public health concerns.

A variety of restaurants across the country chose this practice or included an option for takeout when efforts to flatten the curve of the novel coronavirus ended on-site dining.

This move allowed restaurateurs to keep some workers, pay operational costs, reduce inventory and provide free meals to communities in need. In some cases, they outsold individual options, which happened at Chicago restaurants Maple & Ash and Etta, according to chef Danny Grant.

To determine whether family-style offerings are a viable choice after stay-at-home orders are lifted or social gathering bans are removed, gain insights from those who leaned on family meals when the country faced the most crushing human and economic blow in modern history.





Takeout family-style from Etta, left, and veggie paella from Xiquet, below.



XIQUET PHOTOGRAPHY BY JENY BENITEZ

1

STREAMLINE

Ensuring ease and simplicity is crucial, operators say. At Alon Shaya's Safta in Denver, six cooks—a reduction from 32—handle three family meals to provide variety, but they remain consistent day-to-day. The Meatball Shop in New York added a family-style meal option to its robust delivery and pickup menu, but the service needed only four staff members to execute.

To accommodate staff cuts and balance labor costs, high-labor items can't be a part of the mix. And ingredients cannot be hard to source. "We want to make sure we have a core menu of things that we can get readily, that won't spoil, and that are used based on our current pars," says Adam Rosenbaum, The Meatball Shop CEO.

2

PRIORITIZE SEASONALITY

The flexibility of a changing family meal menu helps minimize food waste. At Ralph's on the Park in New Orleans, Chip Flanagan and other chefs first put out dishes that used perishable inventory. Then, they looked to their local purveyors.

Because business losses—85% for Shaya—extend to purveyors, seasonality becomes even more important. "The person growing radishes for the restaurant is just as affected by this," Shaya says. "If we can put them on a dish, then we're helping everybody." Flanagan's prioritized collard greens and beef reserved for him. "We're trying to keep locals going, even though we're cooking less variety," he says.

3

BE TRANSPARENT WITH COSTS

A family meal for two can be subjective, which is why it's wise to add qualifiers and advice, such as, "For larger appetites, consider sizing up." Diners won't balk at costs if the prices are in line with the restaurant's regular price points. Until shortages of premium products arise, menu costs shouldn't increase.

"Right now, we haven't had to make that sacrifice," notes executive chef Harley Peet of Bluepoint Hospitality Group in Easton, Maryland. "If that changes, we absolutely will reflect the price directly to the customer."

4

LOVE REGULARS HARDER

Social media and emails to established customers have greatly helped word get around, chefs say. "I'm not discounting community," says Danny Lledo of Xiquet and Slate Wine Bar in Washington, D.C. "But from what we see of people actually buying, 80% are people that have been here before." Third-party delivery aggregators can help if they reduce or eliminate fees, but Rosenbaum notes that The Meatball Shop's new family meal orders largely come from its current customer base.



"Food is a big part of healing," says Alon Shaya, who comforted New Orleanians after Hurricane Katrina and now guides his community at Safta in Denver. On top of a la carte items, he's added family meals to his to-go menu. "Families can use them as a starting point to discuss what's happening. Is the hummus making you feel better? Is the hot broth helping your sore throat?" he says. "We can still provide some sense of normalcy through all this."



Family meals from Safta's to-go menu.

THE CHEFS AND THEIR OFFERINGS:

CHEF: ALON SHAYA

Restaurant: Safta, Denver

Menu: Three family meal options include a variety of Israeli appetizers, salads and entrees, and generally do not change.

Cost: Four to six people; \$60 vegetarian, \$100 for meals with beef or lamb.

“The menu came together based off of stuff that we felt like people really loved at Safta and that they would want when not at the restaurant and at home,” Shaya says.



CHEF: DANNY GRANT

Restaurant: Etta, Chicago

Menu: Changes nightly with items that include fire-baked focaccia, fluffy greens, cavatelli pomodoro, spice-roasted chicken thighs and dessert from its bakery, Aya.

Cost: Two people, \$45. To expand for larger families, \$10 add-ons include pizzas and second proteins.

“In the beginning it was, ‘We have all this extra inventory and product and how do we use it? Now it’s more, ‘What do we want to cook? What do we want to eat?’ It’s much looser and more playful than our normal restaurant menu,” Grant says.



CHEF: ADAM ROSENBAUM, CEO

Restaurant: The Meatball Shop, New York

Menu: Two ball and sauce combos, a large salad, a large side, four pieces of focaccia and four cookies.

Cost: Four people, \$75.

“The ethos of The Meatball Shop has always been this tribal community sharing. We’ve always had that version of a family meal; it’s just never been available to go. It just seemed fitting to release it to a broader net,” Rosenbaum says.



A variety of Israeli appetizers, salads and entrees from Safta, top, cavatelli pomodoro from Etta, middle, meatballs and broccoli from The Meatball Shop, below.





A fish fry with coleslaw and hush puppies from Ralph's on the Park, top, leg of lamb with spring vegetables from Xiquet and lasagna from Sunflowers and Greens.



CHEF: CHIP FLANAGAN

Restaurant: Ralph's on the Park, New Orleans

Menu: Publishes a new menu weekly, offering dishes like grilled steak frites with steamed asparagus bearnaise and cheddar-garlic rolls or a fish fry with coleslaw and hush puppies.

Cost: Two for \$25, four for \$50, with a la carte add-ons, like turtle soup and dessert.

"We were thinking comfort food, family-style," Flanagan says. "Customers didn't want our \$28 redfish dish—they wanted something more accessible. Family-style keeps costs low and gets the food sold."



CHEF: DANNY LLEDO

Restaurant: Xiquet and Slate Wine Bar, Washington, D.C.

Menu: Large-scale roasted dinners with varying levels of charcuterie, salads, side dishes and dessert.

Cost: Various, averaging \$25 to \$60 per person.

"We worked backwards: What can we do that's different? We're spending so much time with our families at home. It's an important time to relish," Lledo says. "Having something special and unique makes sense."



CHEF: HARLEY PEET

Restaurant: Bluepoint Hospitality Group, Easton, Maryland

Menu: One family meal changes every Friday, such as lasagna with housemade pasta, garlic bread and housemade ice cream.

Cost: Four people, \$85.

"To keep all the people putting in hours, down to the bakery doing viennoiserie and laminating and breads every day, we've decided to offer a little bit of each venue out of Sunflowers and Greens. It's very fresh. It's very alive. It changes all the time."

5

MAKE PRE-ORDER A MUST

When customers pre-order, operators have better control over inventory while ensuring products are used responsibly. “The beautiful thing about the family meals is that 80% have been fully committed and pre-ordered,” says chef Danny Grant of Maple & Ash and Etta, both in Chicago. “It created an efficiency that lets us do it without waste, focusing our energy on that meal rather than other items when costing things out.”

Be sure to email menus to customers in advance. Follow up with reminders and update your website so the most recent family meals can be viewed.

6

GO BIG ON FORMAT

Chefs can experiment with family meals, but it’s best to go with familiar items that reflect the brand, which can include full meals from start to finish.

Lledo had just opened his Basque restaurant, Xiquet, before dine-in came to a halt, but he determined that its state-of-the-art rotisserie and wood-fired plancha could make a mark thanks to the unique experience of offering a “feast”—choices of whole-muscle roasts, robust charcuterie spreads, fire-roasted sides and desserts.

For those overseeing multiple concepts, multi-course family meals keep more staff involved. Grant’s menu includes treats from their partner bakery, Aya. With several boutique eateries under his watch, Harley Peet of Bluepoint Hospitality Group combines items from its salad bar, fine dining restaurant, bakery and sweets shop. “It keeps my staff busy, and it’s important to offer a full meal,” he says.

7

SELL BOOZE

States that allow restaurants to sell alcohol should consider offering wine and alcoholic drinks to justify keeping some bartenders and sommeliers on staff and to round out family meals, but understand it’s not a panacea.



The Meatball Shop’s cocktails are pre-mixed, complete with garnishes. Get more insight on alcohol programs on page 18.

Safta offers Israeli wine to pair with its Israeli cuisine; Etta delivers carafes of cocktails and wine; and The Meatball Shop’s new large-format cocktails come pre-mixed in Ball Mason jars, complete with garnishes and instructions. “Allowing booze to go has certainly been a great value-add for the guests,” Rosenbaum says. But Lledo points out that, with liquor stores bustling, only 25% of his customers order alcohol, and he’s had to make deep discounts to compete. Flanagan’s discounted its wine more than 50% just to compete with other restaurants. Delivering alcohol helps move inventory but doesn’t necessarily move the financial needle. See page 18 for details.

8

THINK GOOD WILL OVER PROFIT

No matter the model, making normal profits during a shutdown isn’t likely. The family meal model helps cover food costs, move inventory and keep a few staff on payroll. Purchasing to-go packaging and

donating to community outreach efforts can actually increase costs, which Grant experienced firsthand. That 10% increase was not passed on to customers, but he needed to factor it into operations.

Discounts from purveyors can go toward a profit and loss statement, but in uncertain times, putting them toward good will can deepen relationships. Savings go to feed staff at Safta and some 300 furloughed hospitality workers each day through the Restaurant Workers Relief Program created by Makers Mark and chef Edward Lee; Peet dipped into personal funds to buy product deals for his staff. Lledo is applying for grants so that he can plan for his second opening and bring back staff.

“Every penny is going to save the business and save people’s opportunity to make a paycheck during this time. It’s either staying even or in the red—there’s no bottom line,” Shaya reiterates. “But if it’s helping our team, then we’re happy to do it.” ■

03 /

That's the Spirit

Alcohol to-go is a lifeline to hospitality staying afloat

By Blair Hopkins



Restaurants are nothing if not creative,

especially when operating within the narrow window created by the recent COVID-19 shelter-in-place orders.

To mitigate the effects of these shutdowns, liquor control boards in some of the hardest-hit states, from California to Illinois and Washington to New York, have eased regulations to allow alcohol pickup and delivery. Many restaurateurs are jumping on the opportunity to leverage these allowances to bring in much-needed revenue.

While offering bottles or cases of wine can help with backstock and infuse some cash into an operation, restaurateurs say customers are showing varying degrees of interest. About 25% of orders include wine at discounted prices of up to half off depending on value, varietal and the restaurant concept. Cocktails, however, are getting more traction, likely because they can't be purchased at a grocery store.

For Richard Mead, chef/owner of Farmhouse at Roger's Gardens in Corona del Mar, California, adding a cocktail option to takeout has been a vital part of efforts to stem the tide of staff reductions and revenue loss.

"I've got to go forward, keeping in mind how to help (staff) out," Mead says. "We had over 100 people employed, and now we're down to 15 to 20."

Mead and his bar staff developed a line of cocktails with tongue-in-cheek names like "COVID and Chill" made with limoncello, Oro Blanco grapefruit, Bimini, simple syrup and lemon juice. It's available with meal purchases at two



Clockwise, Kuro's gin and tonic, Jigger and Pony's Lobster Mary and San Juan Cooler, and the San Francisco from Seven Reasons in Washington, D.C., are available for pickup.



CALL IT OUT

Turn to page 48 for ideas on publicizing offerings, engaging customers and deepening loyalty.



Navy Strength cocktail kits include ingredients and instructions, top. Assorted bottled cocktails are ready for delivery from Silver Julep in Portland, Oregon.

for \$20, down from the restaurant's usual price of \$16 to \$18 per cocktail.

Navy Strength bar owner Chris Elford gives his Seattle customers the opportunity to get creative with him, offering to-go kits of their most popular Tiki cocktails with or without the spirits included. Garnishes are vacuum-sealed and include ingredient recommendations as well as directions on constructing the cocktails. It's a 50-50 split between customers who order kits with booze and its ingredient-only offerings, as some prefer to use their own liquor or supplement with nonalcoholic spirits such as those produced by Seedlip. Ingredient-only kits go for \$36. Booze-included kits start at \$60 for the Saturn (passion fruit orgeat, lemon juice and falernum) and an optional 750 ml bottle of gin, and up to \$75 for the mai tai, which includes lime, toasted almond, Curacao, a liter of rum and snacks, such as Spam sliders. Choices change each weekend, allowing for some creativity and stress relief.

"I never in a million years would have thought to do this before," Elford says. "It's one of those 'necessity is the mother of invention' type scenarios. But I would like to continue to interact with them once we do reopen."

Elford is also taking advantage of the practical bonus of clearing shelves of less-used inventory.

"Every bottle in the cabinet, every can of something on the shelf that I see, I'm thinking of that as money on our shelf instead of in our bank account. It's kind of scary; essentially what we're doing is liquidating, but in hopes that we get some sort of stimulus and are able to open back up. It's not a fun way to think about it, but that's the way it is."

New York City, for example, has not been clear about rules for restaurants, says Paradise Lounge owner Austin Hartman. "It feels kind of like the Wild, Wild West out here right now."

Governmental responses to COVID-19 are mercurial and often hyper-local. Also, state liquor laws vary, so it's important to consult guidelines regularly to maintain compliance as the situation evolves.

"There is no way of knowing if, how or when the newfound freedoms will be rolled back, but for now, the overall message has been, 'Do what you've gotta do,'" he says.

Hartman has been keeping it simple by batching the bar's popular Paradise Punch (rum, guava, lime juice, cinnamon/vanilla syrup, and demerara), selling shots of Jameson and Fernet and offering wine by the bottle. "We changed our wine price point by (close to) 50 percent," he says. "And we priced down the cocktails so people could have access without going

through their dwindling bank accounts if they can't work."

Hartman says the transition to a delivery-only model has also given him the opportunity to test a product he'd been thinking about for a while: frozen daiquiri pops, which he intends to keep making and selling once the dust settles.

"I was like, 'We're sitting on a lot of products; let's get creative and see how it goes.' And it's gone really well! I've already had to order more (plastic) sleeves (for the frozen pops), and we're getting tagged in a lot of Instagram stories showing people enjoying them."

Paradise Lounge relied on social media—along with texting friends and regulars—to get the word out. "Right now, it's just me, and I'm going through eight to 12 quarts of punch a day."

By servicing different customer bases in far-flung corners of the country, Mead, Elford and Hartman point to one major shared experience: All have seen a tremendous outpouring of appreciation for their efforts, and tons of support for their staff. For all three operators, no-contact delivery gratuities are exceedingly generous (up to 50% of the check), the majority of which have been distributed to waylaid staff in hopes that layoffs will be temporary.

"There's no predicting anything," says Elford. "But it's not like we're going to reopen and suddenly the bars are going to be flooded with people. People are still going to be practicing some social distancing. We're probably going to have a cap on how many people we can let in at a time."

Adds Hartman, "We're keeping a positive mental attitude and rolling with the punches. It changes every day. Once people feel comfortable going outside again, it's going to be like the end of World War II with confetti flying from balconies and people on the street going to every bar they can." ■



—Paradise Lounge owner
Austin Hartman



Paradise Lounge is testing the appeal of daiquiri pops, which are garnering plenty of Instagram attention.

04 /



A partnership
with Maker's Mark
allowed the Lee
Initiative to expand.

URGENT CARE

Resources for chefs and hospitality workers surge in a show of unsurpassed solidarity

By Naomi Tomky

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOSH MERIDETH





► **The public turns to chefs to feed them, but at the end of the day, foodservice is about caring for people, says Edward Lee, the chef at 610 Magnolia, Milkwood and Whiskey Dry in Louisville, Kentucky.**

That belief explains why chefs, such as Lee, were among the first to jump into action, quickly organizing creative ways to care for their communities and industry employees to deal with the disruption wrought by Covid-19. As unemployment started to climb, passing 22 million by mid-April, the hospitality industry donated food to the masses, centralized resources for those seeking help, provided relief checks and offered new employment opportunities.

The Lee Initiative, left, started with Edward Lee in Louisville, Kentucky, but has been adopted in numerous other cities.

Restaurants might serve food, says Lee, but the other products it provides are care and service.

Care, says chef Chris Shepherd of Houston's Georgia James, One-Fifth and Underbelly, "is what we do for a living."

"Everyone tells us to slow down. But we're the most stubborn and the most heartfelt and loving," says Shepherd. "You can't tell us to stay home, we're going to stay (at our restaurants)."

Such deep-seated commitment ignited numerous Covid-19 relief efforts across the country. A sampling:

The Lee Initiative: Restaurant Workers Relief Program

LeeInitiative.org

When Lee's restaurants closed, he consolidated leftover food into one kitchen and started feeding his staff and neighbors. That night, after his team served 400 industry folks in Louisville, he knew he needed to keep the program running. His nonprofit, the Lee Initiative, had already developed a model for when they fed TSA employees during last year's government shutdown.

All he needed to do was tweak it slightly to serve larger numbers of people and offset his lack of an open restaurant. Funds donated by Maker's Mark, a Lee Initiative partner, allowed his team to replicate efforts in 14 kitchens around the country. "None of us slept," says Lee.

Each served 250 to 300 laid off restaurant workers hot meals, as well as other necessities such as diapers, baby formula and personal hygiene items.

"We're all scared, panicking," says Lee, who hopes his team's efforts prove to be a coping mechanism to assuage their own worries. "We're doing this for our peers because we have the means, and it keeps our mind off other things ... the mentality of giving comfort and joy bleeds into wanting to help."



More Chef-led Organizations Offering Relief to Foodservice Workers:

Chris Bianco of Pizzeria Bianco is among the chefs supporting the Southern Smoke Emergency Relief Fund.

Southern Smoke Emergency Relief Fund

southernSmoke.org/fund

Shepherd started Southern Smoke five years ago, using the power of good food, drinks and parties, to raise money for multiple sclerosis. But in 2017, it evolved into an emergency relief fund for restaurant workers who needed extra cash in the wake of Hurricane Harvey. In the last few weeks, they've received almost 9,000 applications for help compared to 300 since the storm.

Some \$160,000 has been provided to 100 people in March. The organization is also hiring laid off industry workers to screen and process applicants, especially those with urgent medical needs. The fund is supported by donations from the NFL's Houston Texans and Tito's Handmade Vodka, as well as the public. "Putting money in people's pockets—that's what we have to do right now," says Shepherd.

Restaurant Strong Fund from chefs Ming Tsai, Ken Oringer and Chris Coombs in Boston, which led to a \$2 million donation from Samuel Adams beer that kick started fundraising efforts in 20 more states. restaurantstrong.org

Another Round, Another Rally is a non-profit offering hospitality workers \$500 relief grants. anotherroundanotherally.org

Frontera Grill Partnership between US Foods and Rick Bayless will bring free grocery boxes to restaurants in Chicago for distribution to their laid off employees.

Restaurant Workers COVID-19 Emergency Relief Fund offers direct relief to individual restaurant workers, as well as donations to organizations helping restaurant workers, and zero-interest loans for restaurants to get back up and running. restaurantworkerscf.org

Restaurant Relief America from Guy Fieri and the National Restaurant Association Education Foundation, offering financial assistance to restaurant workers. rerf.us

One Fair Wage, which fights for service workers rights and minimum wages, has created an emergency fund to make cash gifts to workers. ofwemergencyfund.org

CORE, which works to assist the children of restaurant employees, has assistance available for workers diagnosed with COVID-19 or have family members who have contracted the virus. coregives.org

The Plate Fund, started by the Schultz Family Foundation (former Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz), is giving King County restaurant workers immediate \$500 no-strings grants. theplatefund.com



The Fight Continues ...

As the long-term financial effects of COVID-19 shutdowns materialize, many operators will need additional financial assistance. Monitor these two sources.

Education: The National Restaurant Association's interactive Restaurant Act platform offers a state-by-state catalogue of resources, including information on relief programs, tax updates, disaster loans, changing regulations regarding food, alcohol delivery laws and more. restaurantsact.com

Advocacy: Restaurant industry advocates continue to seek changes and extensions to the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP). Initially launched as a \$349 billion program but exhausted after two weeks, the PPP was designed to provide forgivable loans to small businesses that employed less than 500 people. Continued dialogue with state and federal legislatures is needed to ensure the industry receives the support it needs. Monitor continuing developments and make your voice heard. sbc.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/paycheck-protection-program

Food and workers from the Lee Initiative, opposite page, The Migrant Kitchen, right, the Musang Community Kitchen, middle, and the Seattle Community Kitchen Collective.

The Migrant Kitchen

TheMigrantKitchenNYC.com

Nasser Jaber's Migrant Kitchen in New York City, the hardest hit by COVID-19, had already established itself as social impact catering company by creating dinners that empowered immigrants and refugees to join the culinary industry and share their own experiences. When Jaber's organization was left with 1,000-plate catering cancellation in March, he sprang into action. "I grew up in Palestine. We didn't have a pandemic, but I knew insecurity," Jaber says. His team started donating food and struck a deal with DoorDash to allow drivers to keep all of the money from his deliveries.

Jaber hired struggling restaurant employees to work in his kitchens. They started out serving 1,000 plates each day, including hospital workers; media attention raised daily meals to 1,500. "Our goal is to showcase that migrant workers of America are feeding America," says Jaber, who hopes to increase meals with additional donations. "People looked at us as nonessential, but we are keeping the city alive."

Musang Community Kitchen and the Seattle Community Kitchen Collective

MusangSeattle.com/communitykitchen

In March, Melissa Miranda closed her new Seattle restaurant, Musang, just two months after it opened. "It wasn't a lack of people coming in," she says. "We were packed." But many of her staff live in multi-generational homes, and she valued their safety above all else. A day later, she reopened to provide food for those in need and raise relief funds for hospitality workers. It was the special sense of community that Miranda had built within the restaurant, she says, that drove her to think bigger and join others' efforts, including That Brown Girl Cooks, Guerilla Pizza Kitchen, Sugar Hill, Hood Famous Bake Shop and Feed the People.

"We couldn't sit back; there were so many laid-off employees, families without food for their children."

This new group divided up its work, leaning on donations from the public, food from shuttered restaurants and Instagram to publish schedules and offerings. While Musang offered curbside free food pickup, others prepared free food for medical workers and organized designated food pickup spots for the elderly. ■



05 /





SERVICE, INTERRUPTED

Considerations
for staying in business
amid a crisis

By Kate Bernot



To serve or not to serve?

That's suddenly the burning question of the moment—a dilemma that's likely to reemerge if COVID-19 proves to be a seasonal threat. Although restaurants are considered “essential businesses” in states with shelter-in-place or social distancing protocols, a complex calculus needs to be performed in terms of balancing health issues, labor expenses, inventory costs and bottom-line revenues.

Foodservice is essentially facing what operations in hurricane-prone regions do yearly: Map out an emergency plan. But in this case, they're steps for what to do if—or when—the next shut down strikes. During the initial wave of the virus, three general models emerged: shutdown completely at the first sign of danger, remain open until health considerations demanded a temporary closure or muscle through by altering traditional business strategies. Analyzing these experiences may help others survive or reopen tomorrow.

CLOSED FOR NOW

After Illinois issued a statewide shelter-in-place directive on March 21, eight restaurants within the Chicago-based One Off Hospitality group—including The Publican, Pacific Standard Time, Big Star and Violet Hour—remained open for delivery and takeout with new safety protocols in place.

One Off's initial moves may be a template for others moving forward. The organization took employees' temperatures at the start of shifts and consolidated all concepts, except for Big Star, into its largest kitchen. Big Star, which has two locations, consolidated to its commissary, ensuring each kitchen area only produced one item. One

Big Star, a concept under One Off Hospitality group, centralized operations as a safety measure for takeout and delivery but ultimately closed all restaurants.

Sandy's Tavern employs a skeleton crew to handle its downsized menu.

station assembled fish tacos; another assembled pork tacos; another assembled chips and salsa. This reorganization—as well as bans that prevented workers from traveling from one restaurant to another—streamlined processes and ensured staff came into contact with as few ingredients and surfaces as possible. Alexander says he's been especially impressed by how bar managers adopted more standardized methods of sanitizing equipment and tools between each cocktail.

“Restaurants and bars will be five times safer than they once were,” he says. “All those procedures we put in place for the virus will likely become standard practice.”

But as local coronavirus cases grew over the next eight days, making Chicago a hotspot, One Off closed all of its operations. “That really forced our hand,” says One Off partner Terry Alexander. “We thought it was best for the safety of the staff and guests to pause operations until it was a little safer out there.”

Although One Off wanted to continue serving food and providing some workers a paycheck, Alexander says a “to-go only” model wouldn't have made sense financially in the long-term. Business, he says, was “busy but not necessarily successful.” So the group distributed remaining food inventory to staff and locked its doors for now.

STAYING OPEN: SMALLER KITCHENS, TIGHTER MENUS

In the wake of the coronavirus, it's possible that the number of restaurants with large urban footprints and expansive menus will shrink. Don't be surprised if operators who reenter the market prioritize smaller spaces and more limited menus. Consider Sandy's Tavern, a compact 38-seat restaurant in Richfield, Minnesota, which has been slinging burgers for 87 years. Owner Matty O'Reilly, who took over the tavern in November, closed his other Minneapolis-



area restaurants, including Republic and Bar Brigade, but felt he could modify Sandy's operations enough to keep it safe and afloat.

He downsized to a skeletal crew. He kept just one person in the kitchen and one person to handle phone and online orders, just enough to execute Sandy's menu of burgers, sandwiches and fried appetizers. “The factors came down to this: It has an economical price point, it has a parking lot for pickup orders and it's on a busy corner,” says O'Reilly.

It all comes down to basic cost-benefit analysis. “Do the simplest of break-even analysis without your fixed costs. If you're doing \$400 in sales and spending \$420 in labor, shut it down. You're going to need that money in 90 days (to reopen),” he says. “Your employees will need a place to come back and work. That's as important as you hustling now.”

If there's a downside to social media,

**“THE FACTORS
CAME DOWN TO
THIS: IT HAS AN
ECONOMICAL PRICE
POINT, IT HAS A
PARKING LOT FOR
PICKUP ORDERS
AND IT'S ON A BUSY
CORNER.”**

—Sandy's owner Matty O'Reilly

he says, it's that looks can be deceiving. Just because a restaurant posts images showing stacks of orders or packed drive-thru lines doesn't mean they're raking in money, as labor and ingredient costs can often outweigh incoming revenue. And he's concerned that projecting exuberant images—including photos of staff high-fiving and hugging each other—sends the wrong message and can put staff at serious risk.

“There's no way a one-cook operation can handle a 25-item menu. Why wouldn't you just scale it down to have fewer people in the room?” he says. “You really have to take a step back and look at your whole system and ask: Is this even safe?”

THE STRATEGIC REOPEN: BREAKING EVEN

After initially closing March 22, Funkenhausen, a German-Southern restaurant in Chicago, spent nearly a week poring over public health recommendations to determine whether it should reopen for takeout and delivery. Partner Dan Boyd and chef/partner Mark Steuer discussed it extensively with their managers but ultimately took a democratic approach and left it up to the staff to decide.

“They told us (reopening) was something they wanted to do to keep the team together with some purpose,” Boyd says, so Steuer reopened for curbside takeout and third-party delivery. “It's to keep the team engaged. We are able to pay the salaries of those people still working and a to-go business does help offset some of the expenses.”

Funkenhausen employed new safety measures—spreading three kitchen workers out between its two large kitchens and stepped up sanitizing procedures. Plus, it reworked the menu to make it easier to deliver. Instead of pork chops, schnitzel and ricotta dumplings, offerings now include a chicken dinner for four and a breakfast burrito on weekends. Plus, chefs have streamlined ingredients so they



Funkenhausen
chef/partner
Mark Steuer.

“I'VE BEEN MAKING IT A POINT TO ASK (OUR EMPLOYEES) EVERY DAY: **HOW ARE YOU FEELING**, NOT JUST PHYSICALLY, BUT MENTALLY AND EMOTIONALLY? **ARE WE STILL INTO THIS?** I MAKE IT CLEAR THAT WE CAN PAUSE OR STOP THIS AT ANY TIME.”

— Dan Boyd, partner at Funkenhausen

only require one delivery from one vendor once a week. The restaurant is also selling its wine and beer inventory with to-go orders, and has stopped accepting cash.

Takeout orders have mostly come from repeat orders from regular customers, which may point to the future benefits of opening neighborhood restaurants instead of high-traffic, high-rent urban-center locations. Although revenue is down 90%, this income stream is just enough to defray the salaries of the remaining staff—with payroll now roughly equivalent to rent.

Still, Boyd says, staying open isn't about making money; it's about doing what can be done to keep its core staff employed and emotionally healthy. In the long run, Boyd believes that will put Funkenhausen in a better position to reopen for onsite dining.

“I've been making it a point to ask (our employees) every day, ‘How are you feeling, not just physically, but mentally and emotionally? Are we still into this?’” he says. “I make it clear that we can pause or stop this at any time. If we need to close for a day because physically, mentally or emotionally you're not into it, we can.” ■



FUNKENH
WINE & STEIN
TAKE AWAY AND
MENU
AVAILABLE DAILY -
\$

Veggies and Sides

A BIG GARLICKY PRETZEL
cumin cheese, olive oil, onion
5

CHARRED BROCCOLINI
nutritional yeast, olive oil, almond
milk, white cheese,
hazelnut, chili oil
8

CHEESY SPÄTZLE
top spätzle, cheese, sauerkraut,
pickled onions
8

HAUS SAUERKRAUT
our recipe, house fermented and aged
cabbage
5

GARLIC WHIPPED POTATOES
garlic butter, mushroom gravy,
chives
6

Family Supp

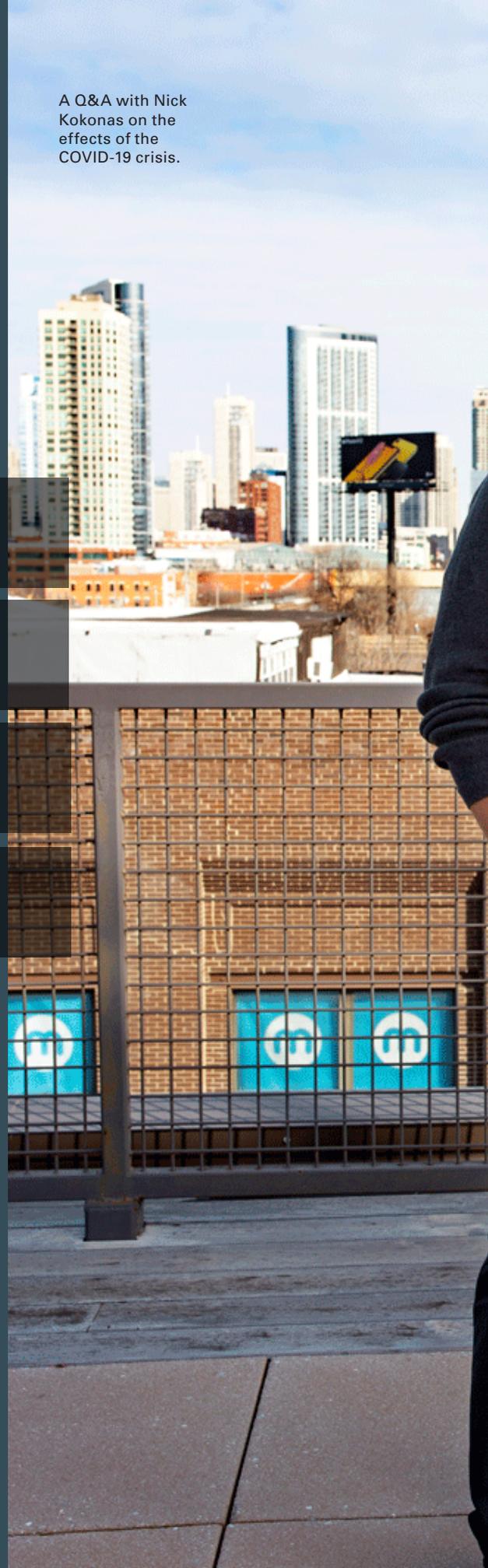
SUPPER FOR TWO
half smoked meat chicken, any two sides
25

SUPPER FOR FOUR
whole smoked meat chicken, any three sides
40

Takeout helps offset a 90% revenue loss at Funkenhausen.

A Q&A with Nick Kokonas on the effects of the COVID-19 crisis.

THE FUTURE
IS NOW





PHOTOGRAPHY MONICA KASS ROGERS

The Alinea Group's Nick Kokonas charts a path forward

By M. Jane Johnson

► While huge swaths

of the foodservice world started to crash and burn in March, Nick Kokonas was well-armed and ready to fight. The founding partner and co-owner of Chicago-based The Alinea Group (TAG) and CEO of the reservation booking site Tock had been closely analyzing the potential fallout of Covid-19. Without quick action, he knew his world and TAG's team members would be deeply, perhaps fatally, fractured.

In an insanely short amount of time, he had his restaurants churning out carryout meals, previously an impossible idea for Alinea, the only three-star Michelin restaurant in the Midwest. He also launched Tock To Go to ensure the platform's restaurant users could begin contactless selling of ready-made meals.

A rare, unscheduled slot in Kokonas's jam-packed schedule allowed for a conversation (edited for length) about the inspiration behind his emergency action plans and how operators can plan for the future.

Q. You seem to have an infallible sense of what to do, way before others. How do you so aptly identify problems and quickly cobble together solutions?

A. Well, I don't know if that's true. My training as a trader taught me to see things as they are, not as I wish them to be. Daily business is, well, pretty simple. You run, you refine, you iterate. (You make) thousands of small improvements and then keep doing that. But once in a while—in my life, it's been about once every 10 years—you see something that's very lopsided in terms of risk. Before Covid-19 was a pandemic, it represented one of those risks. As the booking data started changing, slowly at first, I could see that it was potentially disastrous. So you hope you're wrong in the outcome, but the decision to plan is actually quite easy.

Q. The first reported Covid-19 case in the Chicago area was in late January. As things heated up, when did you start formulating contingency plans?

A. Late February, basically, when I saw what was happening in Seattle.

Q. As soon as on-site dining shut down, you transformed the highly experiential 18-course meals at Alinea into three courses of carryout comfort food. Roister, Aviary and Next were similarly distilled. How'd that happen so fast?

A. It was a way to keep people working. (The restaurant staff has mostly been furloughed, unpaid but eligible for unemployment with benefits still intact from Alinea Group; immediately prior to furlough, full-timers received a \$1,000 payment, part-timers half that amount). They can come back to work and help us with this if they want, and most of the kitchen staff has. The chefs were instantly on board and came up with the menus. At first, everyone was trying to be super creative as usual, which is great but not now. I had to keep telling talented people to dial back the creativity. Maybe we do that in week three or four. For now, just get up and running with delicious food. Don't cut corners; make it perfect.

**“WE OWNED
OUR SITUATION
AND OUR
FUTURE.”**

—Nick Kokonas on how he's handling the COVID-19 crisis



Q. You've removed titles, ranks and pay differentials. (Those with an ownership stake, including Kokonas and Chef Grant Achatz, receive no pay.) How is that working out?

A. Fine. Everyone gets it. The roles haven't changed. Leaders are leading. Young cooks are learning what “the push” is.

Q. When more normalcy returns, will you be able to revert to a more structured system?

A. Of course. That's just execution. That's easy.

Q. Early in the crisis, you were selling about 700 meals per night. Above or below what you had projected?

A. No, we've ramped up to much more than that. For the coming week (first week of April) we have a little over 7,100 meals sold.



Aviary's margarita, left, Avec, top, Roister chicken to go, middle, and Next's beef Wellington.



n/naka restaurant in Los Angeles is using the Tock To Go service.

CREDIT: N/NAKA VIA INSTAGRAM

Q. You’ve posted lots of documents on Twitter, including internal memos about processes and procedures. Why is it important to be so open and communicate what you’re doing?

A. My dad used to tell me that you can have a great idea and shout it from the hilltops, but people either won’t listen or won’t get up at 5 a.m. to work hard on executing the idea. Ideas are great, but they are absolutely worthless unless you act on them willfully and diligently. So I lose very little, competitively speaking, by sharing. And frankly, it’s the right thing to do. I want others to succeed, and in turn, they help me succeed. It’s about 50-50 being helpful and ‘greedy’. And I’ve met some amazing people that way.

Q. Let’s go back to March 1 when Covid-19 was spreading but still an abstract problem. What should operators have done to prepare?

A. Go even further back. Operators need to be questioning everything ... and “own” their own customer relationship. Then, in times like this, you can quickly monetize that by serving those customers. Beyond that—cash reserves. If you are running 5% margins, not paying any benefits, only relying on tipping, not offering any retirement plans and you consider that “well run,” then you’re apt to go out of business anytime demand lags even a bit. The unfortunate thing that I tell many chefs who want to open their own places is that if they didn’t love doing HR, spreadsheets, food-

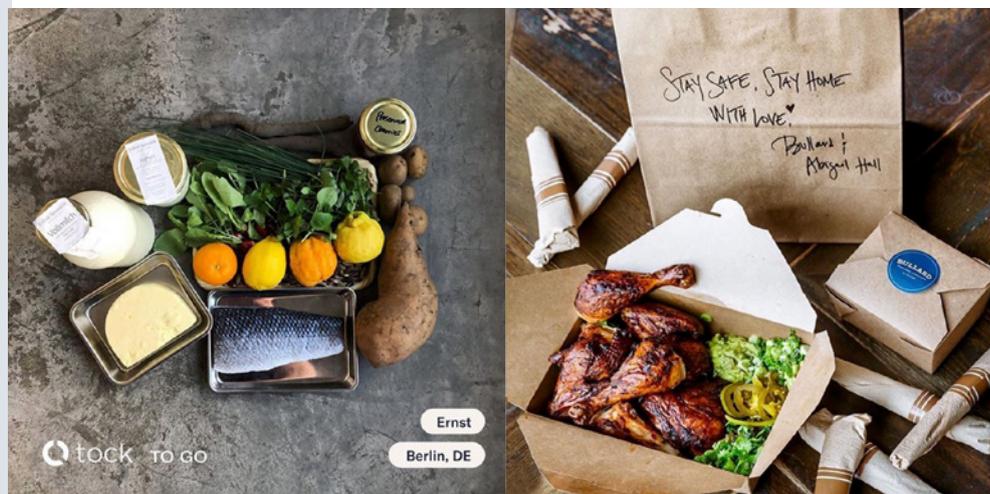
“IT’S THE RIGHT THING TO DO. I WANT OTHERS TO SUCCEED, AND IN TURN, THEY HELP ME SUCCEED.”

—Kokonas on why he shares internal memos on social media

“TOCK IS HELPING OUR RESTAURANTS COMMUNICATE WITH CLIENTS, RESCHEDULE AND REFUND DINERS AND, OF COURSE, BUILD NEW TOOLS.”

—Kokonas on why he shares internal memos on social media.

Tock To Go meals, meal kits, and delivery, opposite page.



cost analysis and purchasing negotiation while working for someone else, well, they're unlikely to enjoy that in the future. If you don't learn to love it and do it very well, you won't survive.

Q. Tock has roughly 3,000 clients. How are you supporting them?

A. We gave back all the monthly fees to restaurants and wineries for April. That's a big dollar amount, but it's also symbolic: a show of our commitment to them. We also are helping them communicate with clients, reschedule and refund diners and, of course, build new tools to help them pivot operations in the next few months.

Q. You put the “go” in Tock To Go pretty quickly. How many people hours were required to build it?

A. We haven't done the post-operations document for it yet, and we keep improving and iterating on it. We had about 15 people working on it—engineers, designers and senior-level management—for about a week, more or less constantly. We utilized existing data structures of “tables” to convert to “inventory” time slots. We built it to resemble how a kitchen works in a sit-down restaurant instead of just slinging burgers out the back door. We're using it for TAG, and it's working like a charm. It's

definitely something that will be part of the product, albeit in a more refined manner, forever.

Q. How many Tock client restaurants are using Tock To Go?

A. About 215 restaurants are online and actively selling right now (in late March/early April) approaching \$1 million in sales per day. We have over 850 in the queue around the world that are either in process or have expressed interest. Many of them are realizing that it will likely be months before they are able to reopen, and even then, it will be at a lower demand level and they may need to keep curbside pickup as an option to stay viable.

Q. How many meals need to be sold per evening to be profitable?

A. Define “profitable.” We are doing a ton of sales compared to being closed, but revenue is of course a lot less than normal. We are paying everyone who comes in and expanding that. We are working with our landlords to defer rent. One of them is being obstinate and does not see the scope of the issues. But yes, day to day, we are making money, and we will build a reserve of cash to reopen, pay obligations and distribute the rest across the team. I'm super proud of how we have responded.

Q. At present your restaurants are carryout only. Any plans to add delivery service?

A. No. I don't trust the timing or quality of the delivery services, and I don't want our people driving their own cars for insurance reasons. Plus, the pickups have been fast and smooth.

Q. Regarding the pandemic, what are you most afraid of for TAG and for yourself personally?

A. For individual employees of TAG, we've let them know that we have their back and that money from our operations will flow to them. We will reopen. My biggest concern is that if demand is very low when we do reopen that we will not be able to keep everyone on staff. That's a terrible feeling. Me? I'm just tired but doing what I always do.

Q. What has been the hardest part for you?

A. It definitely has been emotional. I almost cried getting a package from our UPS guy at home because he's just such a nice person and still had a smile on his face. I feel very appreciative of the small things, as I think many of us do. I know some big-name folks who are basically broke and trying to save their own asses instead



ON THE MENU at two restaurants of The Alinea Group

Alinea, an 18-course experiential menu, starting at \$210 per person

CARRYOUT: Coq au vin, 50-50 mashed potatoes, salad dressed in mustard vinaigrette and dark chocolate pot de creme, \$39.95 per person.



Next, a modern interpretation of a global or regional cuisine, such as Tokyo, starting at \$155 per person.

CARRYOUT: A nod to Mexico City with pork belly mole, rice and tortillas, an esquites salad and a tres leches cake for \$24.95 per person.



of leading. And, frankly, I'm more worried about the future of our country and what that means for my kids. This has been an exercise in terrible leadership, but with some really striking examples of people who have stepped up, too.

Q. How do you make yourself available to team members during these stressful times?

A. Same way as always—email. Everyone has my direct account and of the support team in HR and business development. My email is a 24/7 operation. If employees need something, I'm personally ready to help, and that's before, during and after this.

Q. What do you anticipate will be some of the fundamental changes in a post-Covid restaurant industry?

A. It all depends on how Covid-19 ends. If it's a long, slow process getting back then I think all of those lessons will be learned for

a while at least. If an antiviral cure is found that is safe and effective, it's likely that not much changes at all. Just look at (the market crash of) 2008-9 and where the bond markets are today. Everyone conveniently forgot those lessons.

Q. What would you have done differently or better in the earliest days of the pandemic?

A. We didn't do everything perfectly, by any stretch, but I'm content with what we've done and continue to do. We saw the situation clearly, came up with plans and worked to implement those plans.

And we did it under a lot of stress and terrible circumstances. We owned our situation and our future. Honestly, it feels great. I had a conversation with Grant (Achatz, co-owner/chef) and he was like, "Man, it feels bad to say it, but I feel very alive right now." I knew what he meant. ■

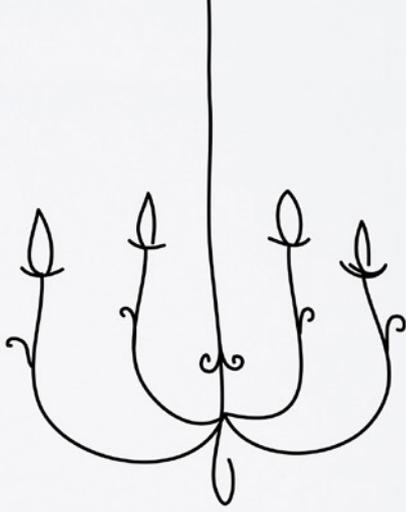
07 /

Welcome
TO THE NEW ABNORMAL

What diners
want in a post-
shutdown world

By Lisa Arnett





“Needing to feel normal again”

is the top reason people want to return to bars and restaurants, according to a 1,000-customer survey conducted by Datassential in March. Yet a return to normalcy isn't likely.

“Anyone who thinks things are going to go back to the way they were in February or early March, it's just not going to happen,” says Steve Greer, chief marketing officer for Urban Plates, which has locations in Washington, D.C., and throughout California. “Things are fundamentally different.”

The global pandemic has altered diner habits and desires in a lasting way. Balancing the demands of the post-COVID-19 diner—chief among them, increased safety measures—will be a careful dance. But what's known for certain: Post-shutdown diners will reevaluate, with unprecedented scrutiny, who deserves their dining dollars.

The window for regaining customer confidence will be short yet critical to rebuilding loyalty. Those who can foresee what diners missed most during the shutdown and how they've redefined hospitality will possess an indispensable business advantage during the days and months to come. Read on:



The needs
of the post
COVID-19 diner
is like no other.

“PEOPLE ARE GOING TO WANT TO REBOUND TO MORE NUTRITIOUS EATING.”

—Steve Greer of Urban Plates

Healthier options will be in higher demand, such as Beet + Avocado bowl, and sweet potato, carrot, red curry soup from Urban Plates.



▶ PROVIDE NUTRITIOUS OFFERINGS

Early in the pandemic, viral photos revealed grocery store snack shelves stripped bare while produce bins remained stocked. At some point, diners will focus on rebalancing their diets. “People have been eating a lot of processed foods,” Greer says. “Right now, people are also out of their routines. They can’t go to the gym. People are going to want to rebound to more nutritious eating.”

A few weeks into the pandemic, Wolfgang Puck Fine Dining Group managing partner David Robins started to see off-premise orders at one of the group’s locations in Las Vegas shift from more indulgent items to healthier choices. “We are already seeing the desire to order more healthy to-go items because people are more sedentary than they were prior to the pandemic,” Robins says. “When we reopen, we are going to be focusing on healthy food because people will have been inside for a very long time.”



PHOTOGRAPH BY URBAN PLATES



PHOTOGRAPH BY WOLFGANG PUCK FINE DINING GROUP

▶ GIVE THEM SPACE

After weeks of cooking at home and ordering carryout or delivery, diners will crave social experiences, predicts Grant Gedemer, corporate director of food and beverage for Oxford Hotels and Resorts. “(Customers) will want to be around other people, see other people and hear other people,” Gedemer says. “I’m sure they will want to hear good music but more importantly, want to hear people laugh, talk and even yell.” To ease fears, operators should consider reducing the number of tables, eliminating communal seating and expanding space between tables, he says, while also determining how best to limit capacity in bars.

Post COVID-19 diners will crave human interaction over a meal, such as this one from Cut By Wolfgang Puck, but restaurants will need to allay safety fears.

► PAIR FOOD PLUS ENTERTAINMENT

Stepping up service to match diners' enthusiasm will be essential, says Dan Conroe, marketing director for Chicago restaurant and concert venue City Winery, which also has locations in Atlanta, Nashville and Philadelphia among others. "We really anticipate people being so eager to come out of hibernation and get out again when the time is right," Conroe says. "We will be embracing that excitement by making sure we are looking good, showing empathy toward guests and really showing them they are welcome." Conroe predicts smaller venues will likely open before larger venues, especially if they publicize their offerings online and outline any new safety guidelines so guests will know what's coming. "We expect that venues that offer live music while also serving food and drinks will be especially popular as one-stop-shops where guests can get a full 'night out' experience without having to visit multiple bars, restaurants or venues," he says.

People will want food and entertainment like at City Winery but with distancing measures.



Expect to put cleanliness on steroids.

► CLEAN AND SAFEGUARD

"Consumers we've surveyed say they will be looking very closely at how the restaurant is handling safety and sanitation, especially seeing workers regularly wiping down surfaces," says Jackie Rodriguez, senior project manager for Datassential. Consider making your sanitation efforts more visible to customers through email communications and signage. Operators should also consider displaying their cleaning schedules in similar way to how cleaning reports are shown in restrooms, says Rodriguez.

Unless safeguarded beyond reproach, buffets and open food stations may need to go on hiatus, a move that had already begun at colleges and universities before students were sent home in mid-March. The same may be true for tableside preparations.

"We do tableside service for a drink cart and a dessert cart (in Las Vegas)," says Robins. "I probably will be halting those experiences until we figure out how are we going to do this at a level where the guest can be comfortable and the staff member can be comfortable also."

Customers will want tamper-proof and safer packaging.



70

PERCENT OF CONSUMERS WOULD NOT FEEL COMFORTABLE ATTENDING EVENTS WITH LARGE CROWDS, SUCH AS SPORTING EVENTS OR CONCERTS.

—Datassential March 2020 survey



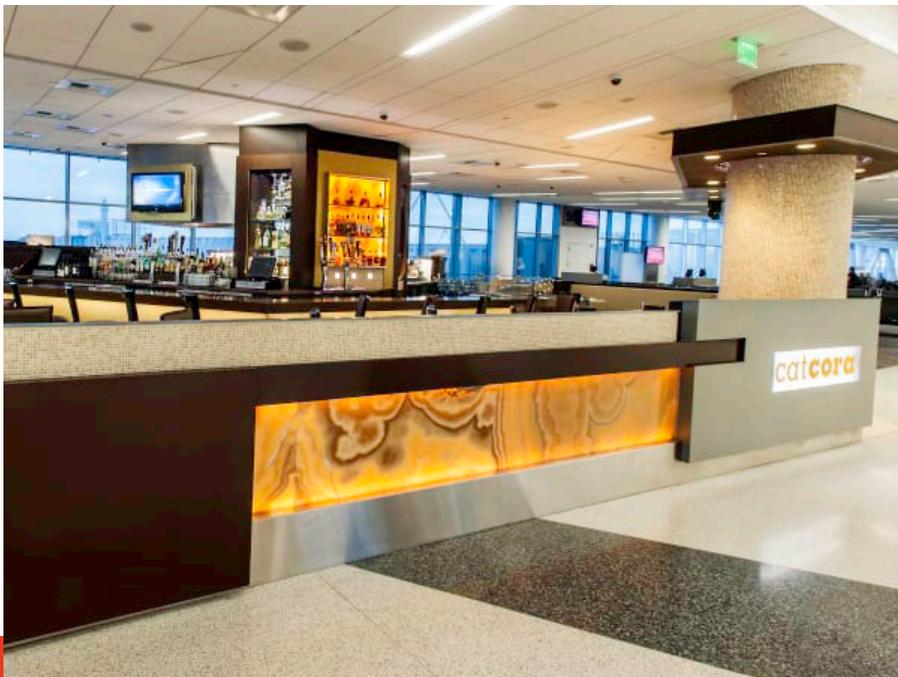
▶ SAFE PACKAGING MAY TRUMP SUSTAINABILITY

Safety will also remain important for off-premise orders. Although there's been a push to reduce packaging waste in the recent past, that will likely take a backseat to diners' demand for security. At Urban Plates, staffers seal packaging for each individual menu item and put them in a larger to-go bag that's also sealed. "You have the confidence of knowing that nothing has changed from the time our kitchen made it to the time you get it to wherever you are eating it," Greer says. "That creates more packaging, more seals, more waste and more trash. But I think people are going to be OK with this because of the immediate safety risk." Customers won't want family-style catering set-ups but will want more individually wrapped items.

▶ CUSTOMIZE YOUR CURBSIDE

Not all diners will be ready to return to their regular dine-in habits immediately. "We are calling it 'stranger danger' right now," says Greer. "We, as a society, are thinking differently about our fellow members of the public and strangers we come into contact with ... especially the older demographic."

So consider adapting customization models that proliferated before the shutdown and adapt them to pickup operations. Establish unassailable best practices—inform diners where to park and offer clear instructions on what to do when they arrive—but allow them to determine how they want to receive their food. "We changed the training so team members can ask, 'What are you driving?' and most importantly, 'Where do you want the food?' Do you want it in the trunk or do you want it in the backseat?" says Greer. "People are looking for minimal contact."



RECOVERY MODE

In a post-pandemic world, noncommercial foodservice and specialty sectors may face different obstacles than traditional restaurants to win over customers.

► **CORPORATE FOODSERVICE** will likely resume operations when people can return to offices. “However, it’s likely that people have become used to working remotely, so there may be a traffic drop or slower recovery,” says Jackie Rodriguez of foodservice research firm Datassential. “Operators might be interested in offering delivery or pickup stations if many employees are located closely together; for example, there could be a dozen people in the same neighborhood.”

► **ENTERTAINMENT CONCESSIONS** may be among the hardest hit. “It’s unlikely that large gathering places like stadiums or theaters will be opening as soon as restaurants,” Rodriguez says. When they do reopen, not all fans will be eager to return.

► **AIRPORT RESTAURANTS** need to be ready to work closely with airline authorities to adapt to new guidelines or even reinvent their service model—perhaps even shifting permanently from dine-in to takeout models. “Probably half (our restaurants in airports) will close, based on the fact that air travel is an unknown at this point,” says David Robins, a managing partner with Wolfgang Puck Fine Dining Group, which has restaurants in more than 20 airports internationally. “Will they reopen as new concepts or new ways of doing business? Absolutely. But it’s a big unknown.”

To allay customer fears, airport restaurants will likely reinvent their service model, left, while food and drink options will change more frequently to keep diner interest.



► ENTICE WITH NOVELTY

Sharing at-home cooking tips and recipes on social media was well-received by The Langham’s followers during Chicago’s shelter-in-place order, says Christina Boyd, director of food and beverage at the hotel. But “diners still believe in the magic of restaurants and bars,” she says. “(They) are going to want something that cannot be replicated at home.”

That means changing your menu more regularly—perhaps a barbecue-focused menu one week, followed by Mediterranean or Asian the next—as one Wolfgang Puck location in Las Vegas did during the shutdown. Also focus on handmade cocktails and seasonal dishes prepped with ingredients diners can’t easily source.

“People are going to be tired of cooking at home if they aren’t already, so they are going to splurge on experiences that mean a lot to them,” Gedemer says. “We anticipate our chef-driven cocktails to outsell wines by the glass and other spirits, too.”



“WHEN WE DO REOPEN, WE WILL CONTINUE TO SUPPORT THE COMMUNITY.”

—Christina Boyd, director of food and beverage at The Langham Chicago

▶ **BE A GOOD NEIGHBOR**

“Support of community will be vital when we emerge from this pause in business,” says Boyd. “We are seeing tons of support for restaurants by customers ordering takeaway or delivery to keep restaurants alive. When we do reopen, we will continue to support the community through menu offerings, donations through proceeds, and programming events.” ■

A worker delivers food to first responders and displaced service staff as part of the Lee Initiative. Masks are donned upon delivery.

08 /

A VIRTUAL LIFELINE





Social media should drive your post-pandemic offense

By Food Fanatics Contributors

► For all the shortcomings of social media

—foreign interference, data breaches and channels to sow misinformation—the networks that connect the world in real time established themselves as indispensable tools during the coronavirus pandemic.

The COVID-19 crisis underscored social media's value across all sectors, especially in the hospitality industry, as it became a lifeline restaurants leaned on for survival. Operators used social media to stay in contact with their followers by sharing delivery information, recipes, cooking classes, cocktail demos, wine seminars and charitable efforts.

As states begin lifting stay-in-place mandates and operations start to reopen, the industry will need to rely on social media to connect and rebuild its rapport with customers.

“Social media, at its best, is about meaningful connections and trust,” says Edna Morris, a senior adviser for financial advisory firm PJ Solomon and CEO/owner of CityRange. “Trust will be more important than ever as cautious consumers decide where, when and how to gather and dine.”

Turning experiences into opportunity, such as knowing what to do and avoid,

is critical for rebuilding that trust as well as preparing for future shutdowns, a possibility until a vaccine for coronavirus is available.

DO Join Groups

Beth Shepard, who heads a literary and spokesperson agency in western Massachusetts, proved Facebook groups can be effective. She launched Kitchen Quarantine on March 13 and amassed 6,900 members, including chefs, food media and home cooks, who posted daily. It encouraged members to post photos of their meals that evolved into requests for recipes.

DO Customize Hashtags

Are they in or are they out? Hashtags during a pandemic or a promotion are in. Teriyaki Madness, a fast-casual chain with locations nationwide, used the hashtag #thegreatamericantakeout as part of a nationwide effort to increase takeout orders, which earned 24,000 mentions on Instagram during the first Takeout Tuesday. Business significantly increased, according to Jodi Boyce, a Teriyaki Madness executive. Customized hashtags, which should be attention-grabbing, can take on a life of their own but have to be included in posts regularly with relevant information. But don't overdo it; too many would be spam.

DO Master Social Media Tools

The ability to post live on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram has been a game-changer. Chefs created their own videos using iPhone and Android platform devices perched on tripods that can be inexpensively purchased online. They used self-made videos to connect daily with customers to share their daily routine, restaurant promotions, menu updates and cooking lessons. You can do the same.

DO Spread the Love

Share posts that your diners tag you in and tap the thumbs-up icon on a Facebook comment or the heart on Instagram or Twitter. It sends the message that you have acknowledged a customer, which is the digital equivalent of stopping by a table and saying hello.

DO Work Your Stories

Posting stories on Instagram (tap the + sign) and Facebook (tap Your Story) allows you to promote limited time dishes since stories disappear after 24 hours.

DON'T Forget to Tag

Tagging on Facebook and Instagram creates an instantaneous sharing mechanism that should continue post pandemic. It's also a way to give credit to others who are trying to build community and loyalty. Tag those with large followings but don't forget individuals on



Give videos a try. They garner more views than other types of posts.

Instagram who aren't "verified" for their massive audience. They have value, too.

DON'T Keep Recipes to Yourself

Because recipes can require a lot of space and characters, posting them on social media hasn't been considered a best practice—until now. Users aren't likely to return to a post that may get buried in their newsfeed so include the recipe with a photo. On Twitter, provide a link to

your website or even a shortened URL to a rudimentary Google doc.

DON'T Let Your Memory Slide

Time has a way of shortening memory. When you return to your new normal, don't allow connecting with customers to fall to the bottom of your to-do list. When staff return, get their feedback on how they stayed in touch using social to glean ways to improve efforts.

Janet Isabelli, M. Jane Johnson and Liz Logan contributed to this article.



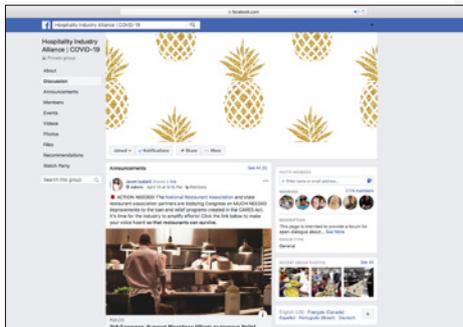
READY, SHOOT, POST

When chefs and restaurateurs are following stay-at-home orders like everyone else, it makes sense to connect with fans and customers on social media—just like megawatt chefs Daniel Boulud, Rick Bayless and Michael Symon who posted photos and videos of cooking from their home kitchens. Those who form and tighten bonds with customers now will be uniquely positioned for success because they've continued to engage—and expand—their fan base.

Post daily on all channels but specifically where your audience is active, whether it's Facebook, Instagram or Twitter. It can be a video of a simmering dish, a photo of a meal or as simple as a thought for the day.

- ▶ Offer recipes with photos.
- ▶ Conduct a simple cooking class or demonstrate a technique.
- ▶ Ask for what followers want to learn or see.
- ▶ Offer tips or a video on creating cocktails.
- ▶ Discuss food and wine pairings.

Hospitality Industry Alliance | COVID-19 on Facebook



A simple Facebook group united an industry in the worst of times

By Janet Isabelli

There was an unusual chill in the Chicago air on the morning of Friday, March 13.

A few days earlier, the International Housewares Show canceled its annual event, which normally draws 56,000 attendees. It proved to be a warning sign as similar scenarios played out across the entire country. No James Beard Foundation awards gala and no National Restaurant Association Show sent a clear message to the restaurant industry: COVID-19 was launching an attack, not only on our country but our entire economy as well.

I woke up that Friday—appropriately enough, Friday the 13th—knowing in the pit of my stomach that our lives were about to forever change. I decided, in that moment, I wouldn't go down without fighting for the industry that has been so good to me for more than two decades.

I had a simple idea: Quickly launch an informative and supportive digital space that would allow others to share timely news and updates, from coast to coast, that could be of value to people in the restaurant industry. So I popped open my laptop and, within minutes, created a private Facebook group called Hospitality Industry Alliance | COVID-19, inviting every relevant person I knew. Within a week, we had amassed over 5,000 members; today, the group has more than 7,000 hospitality owners and workers, industry-adjacent marketers, human resource professionals, financial and legal whizzes and journalists nationwide.

Our group has become an around-the-clock forum for information-sharing, posting questions, brainstorming, encouraging solidarity and directing calls to state and federal representatives. They have asked questions and raised pertinent issues that have broadened our collective knowledge of both direct and indirect advocacy points related to the COVID-19 crisis (topics such as business



Janet Isabelli founded Isabelli Partners, a strategic marketing collective for the hospitality and lifestyle segments, in 2011.

interruption insurance, taxes and employee relief programs) and motivated me to think strategically about how we will all reemerge on the other side of this crisis. The Hospitality Industry Alliance has generated near immediate responses to numerous topics, from filing for unemployment and navigating the CARES Act to best practices for delivery/carryout and questions specific to individual city and state regulations. It has also become a place for media to connect with sources and share their work.

It's more evidence that restaurants are the heartbeat of America—and that the industry will surely thrive again. Times of necessity breed innovation, and as they return, restaurants will have a better understanding of what works for their business as it relates to delivery; the dissemination of information (perhaps via new easier-to-navigate websites), modified dining room floor plans, comprehensive marketing strategies and stronger teams. A special magic lies in uniting others over mutual passions.

Above all, the Hospitality Industry Alliance has taught me how truly remarkable the human spirit can be. It's heartening to know that in times of crisis, there is an indomitable willpower at this industry's collective core. It perfectly illustrates the meaning of living hospitably, whether that involves someone lending an ear, tackling a new advocacy point (here's looking at the farmers), providing a few free meals (sometimes thousands of them), or simply checking in. Despite the uncertainty the industry at large faces, its members choose to be good, giving citizens hope in the face of fear. ■

09 /

ON THE SAFER SIDE



New health
precautions
will drive
foodservice

By Alison Grant

AS SHELTER-IN-PLACE ORDERS FORCED COUNTLESS RESTAURANTS TO CLOSE AND OTHERS TO EXPERIMENT WITH NEW TO-GO MODELS, DAVE MILLER WROTE A FACEBOOK POST ON APRIL 4 TO ANSWER A QUESTION WEIGHING ON DINERS' MINDS: IS IT STILL SAFE TO ORDER FOOD FROM A RESTAURANT?

Miller, who owns a breakfast-lunch restaurant in Chicago with his business partner wife, Megan, outlined the extra safety precautions they were employing. It reads like a posting from the future—an all-encompassing safety checklist that restaurants may find themselves adopting in some form in the months to come. After reaching out to hospital and medical professionals, Miller launched the following safety initiatives:

- All outside vendor deliveries are sanitized before entering the front door.
- Rather than enter the restaurant, customers receive orders through a newly designed pickup window.
- Employees undergo regular temperature checks, wear gloves, change shoes upon entering and refrain from taking public transportation during the crisis.
- A towering air fan, positioned by its counter, generates negative air flow, thus blocking customer's airflow from reaching its staff.
- A commercial ozone generator is run for eight hours every day when the shop is

empty, which some studies suggest may eliminate superbugs and viruses.

Miller estimates he's spent over \$3,000 dollars on his new safety measures and is willing to spend up to \$10,000.

"So it isn't cheap," says Miller, "But it's worth it for my own sanity and to know I went way above and beyond to protect our team, ourselves and our customers. And our guests have loved it. The social media posts we've done about our safety techniques are actually some of our all time top-performing posts. To me, that means people care and want to know that we're paying attention."

In a post-shutdown industry, diners will expect restaurants to practice heightened sanitation that convey safety and psychological reassurances. Most operators agree that contactless delivery—widely practiced by operators that are staying opening during statewide stay-in-place orders—will become the norm. But what else? Here is what public health experts and restaurant owners anticipate to resume full operations:



Virus information

Restaurants and other face-to-face businesses need more data on the biology of the coronavirus to safely reopen, says Michael Mina, an infectious disease epidemiologist at the Harvard School of Public Health. "We need to have a better understanding of the true individual-level risk of becoming infected and how it may differ depending on age."



Protective barriers

Aside from removing tables, restaurants may need to erect barriers, such as screens or walls, between diners, Mina says. Restaurants in Asia are already practicing such measures.



Masks

Some restaurants are following the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's recommendation that everyone wear masks. Anti-fogging, transparent plastic masks that let servers easily breathe and talk while blocking the spread of germs may also come into use, says Eojina Kim, assistant professor in the Department of Hospitality & Tourism Management at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. "Customers can still see staffs' faces, so it won't generate any hostility," she says.



Gloves

Mighty Quinn's Barbeque owner Micha Magid says it isn't clear yet how food handlers will be outfitted when dining rooms reopen at his three restaurants in Manhattan and New Jersey. "Let's just say everything is on the table," he says.

While some operations already require gloves, it's likely to be a point of debate whether servers and other workers wear disposable gloves or need to change between each table they wait on.



Relentless cleaning

"We are wiping down surfaces as often as possible," says Magid. "This includes doorknobs, doors, handles, counters—anything and everything that comes in contact with an employee or guest."



Sanitizer gel stations

Alcohol gel and hand wipes may be available for people entering and exiting restaurants. Hand sanitizing stations could be scattered throughout dining areas.

Review the latest updates on food safety from the National Restaurant Association's servesafe.com



Service tweaks

Restaurants might begin offering single-use cups, end reusable straws and remove condiments from tables. Temperature-controlled food from vending machines, such as the chicken wings and sandwiches from Jones



Signage

Posted alerts may urge customers not to congregate and, if social distancing advisories are still in effect, to maintain at least a 6-foot distance from others.

"(We're) readying additional signage such as floor decals to encourage social distancing," says Maisie Ganzler, chief strategy and brand officer for Bon Appetit Management Co., a food service company for universities and corporations. "We do also anticipate fewer self-service stations to allow for better control over serving utensils and crowding of guests."



Temperature checks

Eateries may stand ready with a thermometer to make sure guests and staff (which some restaurants have started) aren't showing signs of illness. Sichuan Impression in Los Angeles announced in January that it would check customers' temperatures before letting them inside.

It's a common practice in parts of Asia and would be a good short-term policy in the U.S. while concerns about the coronavirus are still top of mind, says Kim, who served for 10 years as a senior researcher at the Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs.

Over the long run, however, checking patrons' temperatures would slow down operations and potentially alienate customers, she says. A better measure could be to monitor employees' temperatures before they start work.



A national safety protocol

While the FDA and state health departments will likely address new safety measures, some prominent chefs are calling for action now. Celebrity chef David Chang was among the first to vocalize that a national protocol needs to be developed. "... everyone needs to be working off the same playbook," Chang tweeted on April 8.



Training and rule changes

Safety, sanitation and personal hygiene practices will be rewritten to address the coronavirus. "Everyone from executive management to team members will need to be properly trained and educated on these new protocols," says Francine Shaw, CEO of Savvy Food Safety. The pandemic may drive changes to the FDA's advisory Food Code. Culinary schools will revamp hygiene education as well.



Transparency

Seeing is believing, and transparency is essential, Kim says. Customers will want to see staff, especially in open kitchen set-ups, practicing maximum personal hygiene to reduce anxiety about eating out.

Make sure you explain to customers what you're doing and how it minimizes any risk, says Seth Feuerstein, assistant clinical professor of psychiatry at Yale University.

But restaurants themselves will have the main role in showing they're still places where you go to be fed, nourished and safely taken care of.

"No question, we are all going to be enduring a new normal," Shaw says. "It's going to take a bit to establish what that will be, especially when we don't completely understand what we are up against." ■

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CRISIS TECH

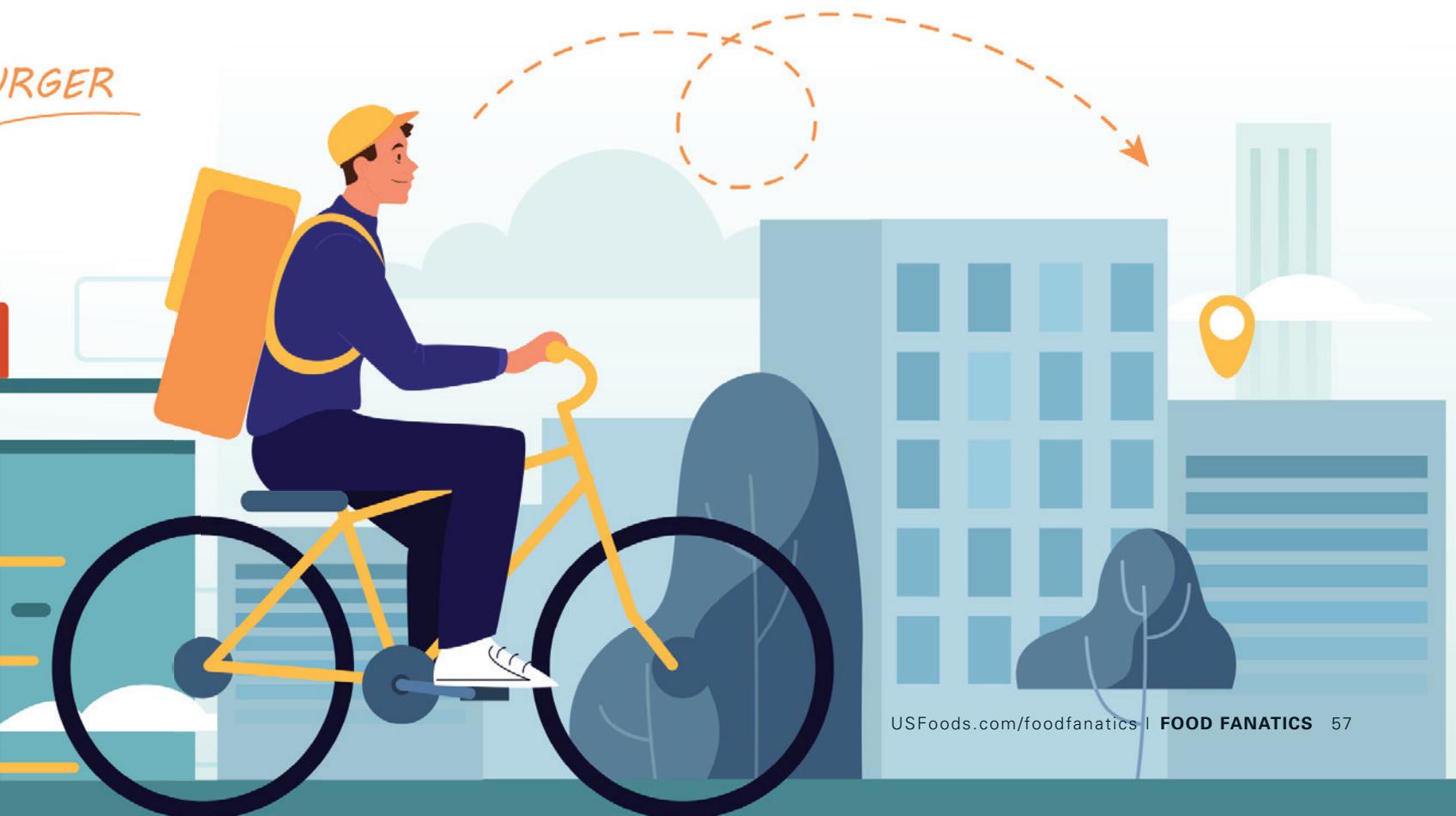
Digital tools that flatten the curve
and help rebuild business

By Liz Logan



If you've ignored or overlooked improvements in technology, it undoubtedly reared its ugly head during the COVID-19 crisis.

Tech that allowed operators to quickly reach customers and pivot just as fast to curbside pickup or delivery models positioned them to better weather the storm. As the industry continues to fight for its survival, improving technology is an undeniable necessity even after operations restart.





Technology has allowed ClusterTruck to operate seamlessly.

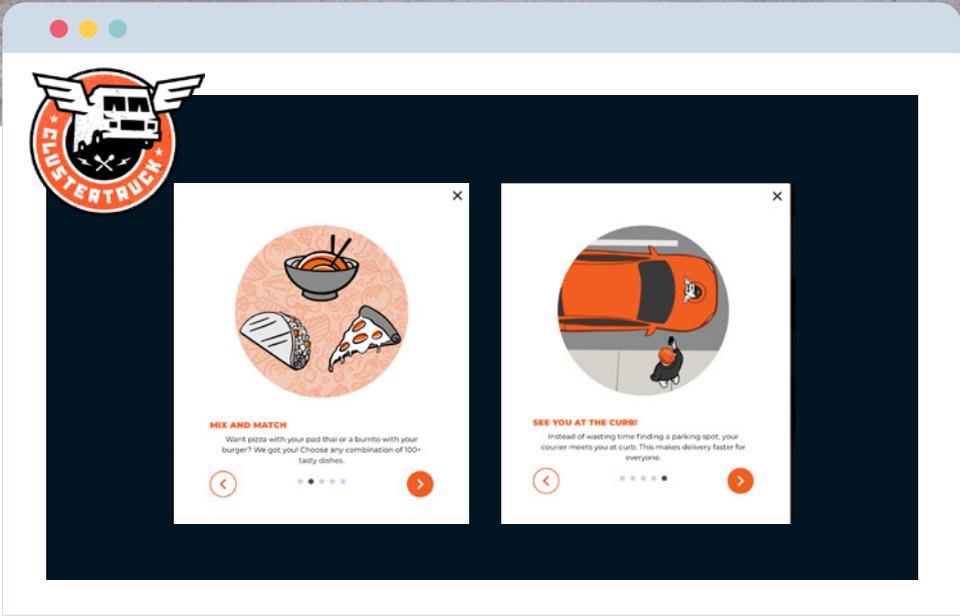
Own (and Borrow) Your Own Tech

The pandemic amplified the frustrations operators already felt about third-party service commissions. A potential hedge? While you're shuttered, develop a proprietary website and app—or better yet, lease tech from those who've already developed their own.

Proprietary websites and apps allow operators to launch their own advertising campaigns, rewards programs and special promotions that can forge direct relationships with diners.

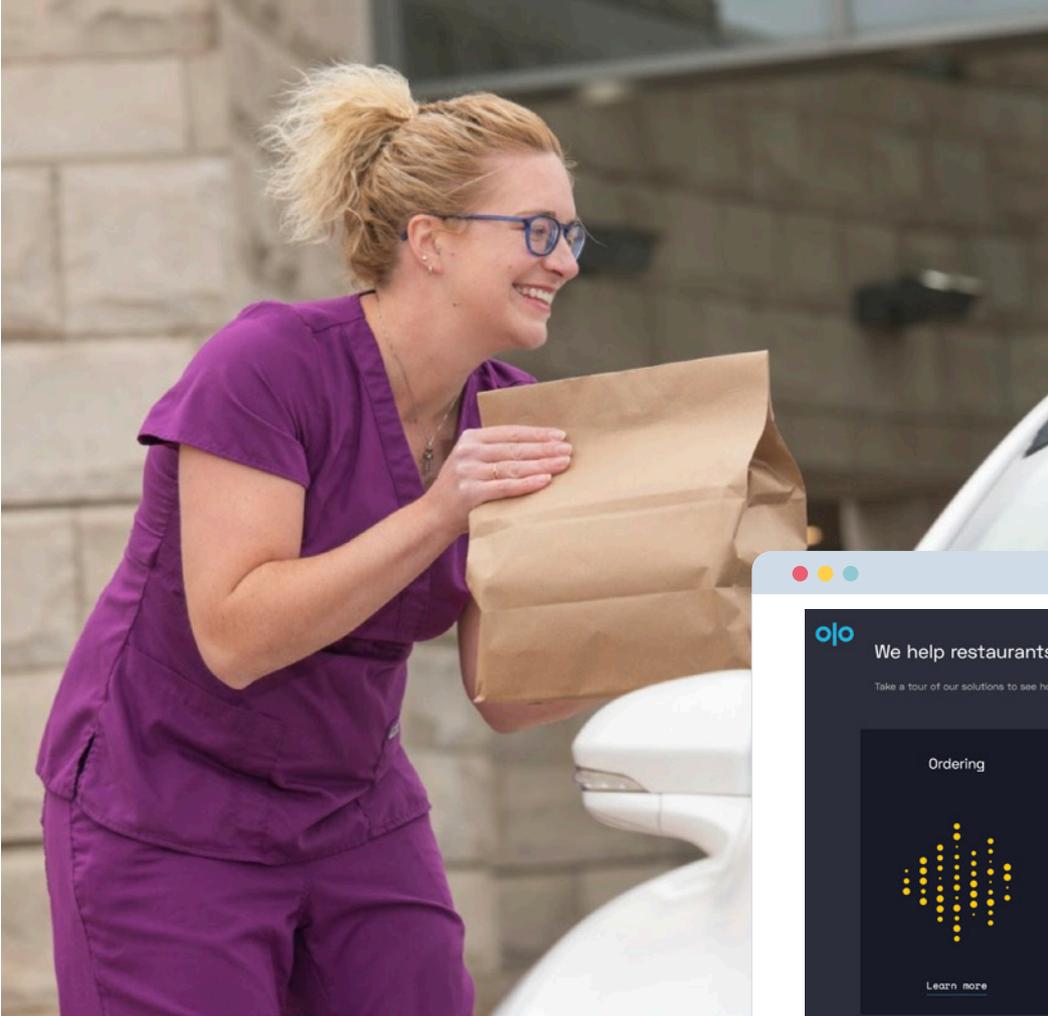
Jodi Boyce, executive vice president of marketing at Teriyaki Madness, a fast-casual chain with more than 60 locations nationwide, followed that strategy. But taking an additional step and developing a way to handle your own delivery can further retain revenues and staff.

"It's always (optimal) to do the deliveries yourself," says Chris Baggott, CEO of ClusterTruck, a delivery-only restaurant

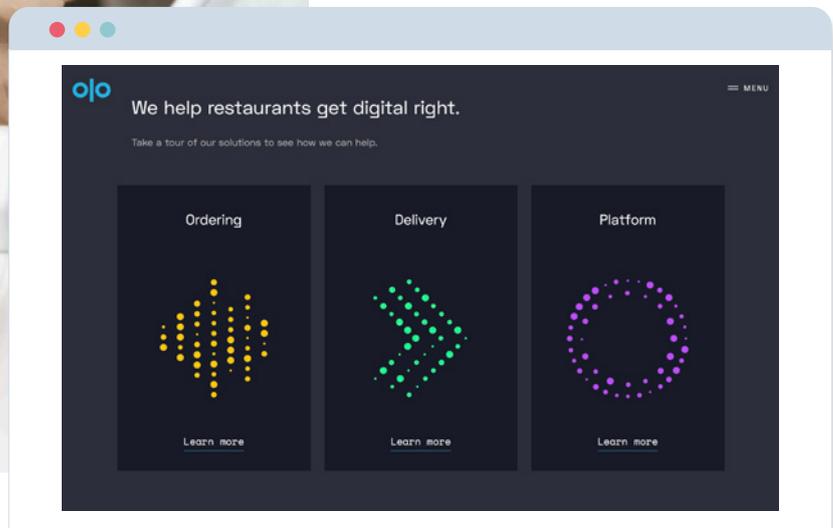


with locations in four states. Baggott's company has its own proprietary software that uses machine learning to ensure food is cooked and delivered in under 30 minutes. His restaurants only deliver within a six-minute drive, allowing drivers to make four deliveries in an hour, at an average of \$6.70 per delivery. The

system results in hourly wages above \$23, so it's easy for Baggott to retain drivers. Clustertruck's model is profitable, and they are beginning to partner with individual restaurants who want to use their software and systems, such as the fine dining restaurant Stone Creek Dining Company, in Zionsville, Indiana.



ClusterTruck curbside delivery helped the medical community, left, while Olo offered technology to adjust to delivery changes.



Curbside Pickup 2.0

During a shutdown, curbside pickup operations should become de facto host stands, as slow or error-ridden orders can hurt return business as much as an overbooked dining room or sloppy service. The goal is to shift the flow, timing and accuracy of one's interior operations to an outside space.

When the coronavirus hit, Teriyaki Madness used Olo, a food-ordering platform, to elevate its curbside operations. Knowing that diners preferred to stay in their cars, customers could enter the make, model and color of their cars before they arrived. Then, customers simply popped their trunk while their orders were carefully placed inside, thus ensuring a “contact-free” pickup. But the chain also integrated Flyby, a location-based technology from Radius Networks, to alert the restaurant when a car was nearby so customers wouldn't have to call while outside.

“It's seamless, a better experience for the customer, and more efficient for us when we have fewer employees working,” Boyce says. With such technology, Teriyaki Madness mitigated the dramatic sales drops experienced by most fast-casual chains. By April 1, the chain was enjoying steady business. “I thought, ‘We're going to get through this,’” Boyce recalls.

A cloud-based POS by Revel also allowed the company to create makeshift drive-thrus, with orders taken on iPads. Clustertruck's drivers deliver curbside, never leaving their cars, which has been a key contributor to the company's profitability, Baggott says.



Starbucks is using data to help gauge safety and determine which locations will be the first to reopen.

Data as tools

Expect data to play a larger role in tracking outbreak preparedness. Starbucks, for example, recently began reopening locations to enable contactless pickup or takeout, as states develop protocols for lifting stay-at-home orders.

“We have developed a data-rich dashboard to provide comprehensive information, including government data on confirmed cases and trends about COVID-19 and how that may influence decisions at the individual store level,” Starbucks CEO Kevin Johnson said in a statement on April 16. “As the ability to test for COVID-19 cases increases, we’ll be able to continuously enhance our monitoring capabilities.”

The New Symbiosis

Businesses that intentionally align for growth and exposure will be a boon for the hospitality industry. ChowNow, an online ordering platform, recently partnered with Instagram to allow diners to order food they see from restaurants on the social media channel. ChowNow’s new tool allows restaurants to take orders from its restaurant profile as well as stickers on Instagram stories. Followers can also reshare stories with the food-ordering stickers.

“During this unprecedented pandemic, ChowNow has mobilized all of its resources to help local restaurants survive and ultimately thrive, launching new products and services in record time,” says Chris Webb, ChowNow’s CEO and co-founder. “This Instagram feature is yet another valuable tool we’re offering our restaurant partners—at no cost to the restaurants—to help them drive more revenue and boost order volume.”

Some restaurants allow customers to order from their Facebook page, but it’s a clunky process.

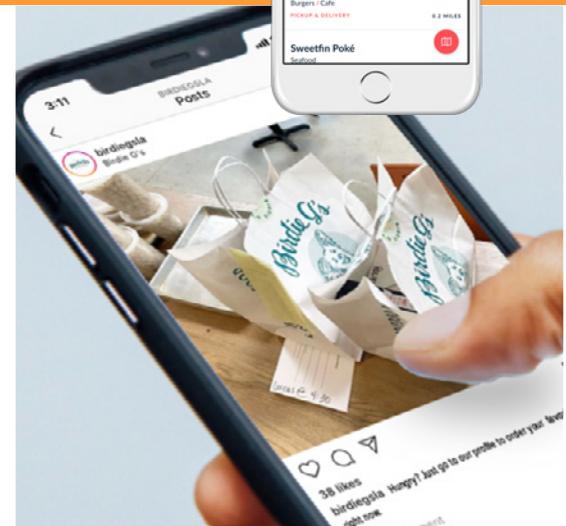
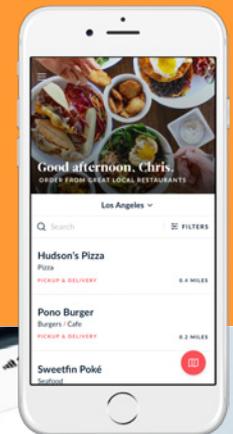


“DURING THIS UNPRECEDENTED PANDEMIC, CHOWNOW HAS MOBILIZED ALL OF ITS RESOURCES TO HELP LOCAL RESTAURANTS SURVIVE AND ULTIMATELY THRIVE, LAUNCHING NEW PRODUCTS AND SERVICES IN RECORD TIME.”

—Chris Webb, CEO and co-founder of ChowNow

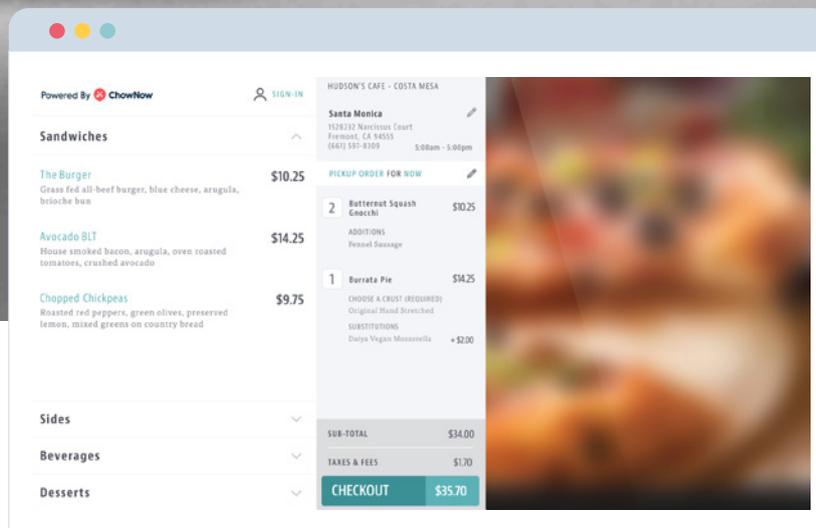
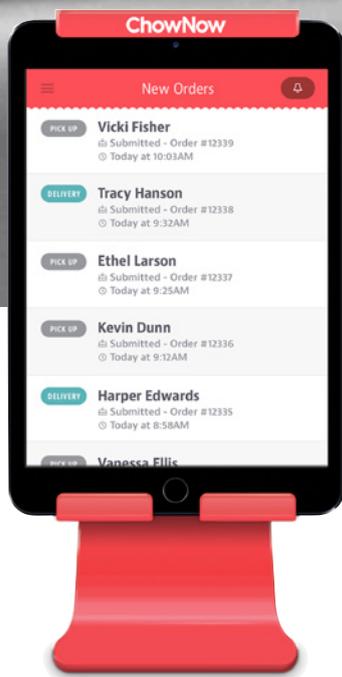
Regardless of the platform, the effectiveness of ordering from a social media channel depends on the restaurant’s following. For example, it’s making a difference for chef Jeremy Fox, who owns Birdie G’s (16,000 followers) and Tallula’s (12,300 followers), both in Los Angeles.

“We’ve had to quickly pivot to delivery and takeout only, and this has been a huge challenge for independent restaurants across the country,” Fox says. “With ChowNow seamlessly linking to our Instagram accounts—and not charging any commissions on orders—we’re able to promote all the new things we’re offering while ensuring that more dollars go directly back to our restaurants and beloved staff.” ■



Birdie G’s can post photos of dishes on Instagram that allow customers to order from the social media channel.

The new normal
at the drive-thru.



11 /

THE RESTAURANTS



PHOTOGRAPHY BY AUBRIE PICK

By Novid Parsi

OF TOMORROW

When Americans finally go out again, restaurants can't be the same if they want to survive





Canlis delivers a family-style dinner and wine with zero contact.



one step further and calming customers' fears by offering heatable containers. "Consumers believe hot foods are safer than cold foods, so give them a box of food that can be put in an oven so they feel they're sterilizing the package," Li says. "You have to think that when you're giving people food, you're giving them a live hand grenade, so here are ways to defuse it."

THE RESTAURANT INDUSTRY WILL NOT BE THE SAME, SAYS SEATTLE RESTAURATEUR MARK CANLIS, WHOSE FAMILY HAS BEEN IN THE BUSINESS SINCE 1910.

Few would disagree. Over just two weeks in March, nearly half of the 15.5 million people employed in the industry lost their jobs as the COVID-19 pandemic shuttered bars and restaurants. Some data suggest that 75% of those restaurants won't open again.

But the pandemic will have an even more lasting impact. "We can go back to business as usual. We can't repeat the same business patterns," says Daniel Shein, co-founder of Agnoris, a New York startup that helps restaurants use data to run more efficiently. "We have to be much more efficient," which means the industry will have to be more reactive to and predictive of diners' behavior—and

respond to it far more quickly.

The industry's future probably will look a lot more like this moment of crisis—and less like the world that preceded it. "We now live in a time when viruses happen; it's not a one-time event," says Alice Julier, director and professor of the Food Studies Program at Chatham University in Pittsburgh.

Though opinions vary, industry experts, from chefs and owners to designers and other foodservice insiders, offer plenty to think about when the business emerges post-Covid-19.

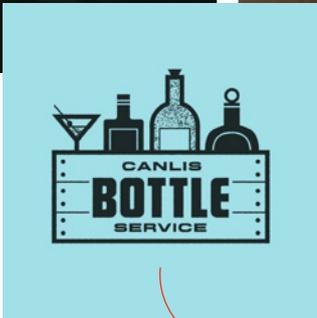
Easing fear will be a major differentiator. Last year, analysts predicted 2020 would be the first year Americans would spend more on delivery and takeout than on-site dining. Thanks to the pandemic, that trend has quickly accelerated and solidified. Contactless delivery will be expected, but restaurants can win over regulars by using sealed, tamper-resistant delivery bags or compostable and reusable delivery materials. Jack Li, the managing director of Datassential, a food-focused market research firm in Chicago, suggests going

The return of the milkman model.

"Delivery and takeout are here to stay," says Scott Landers, co-founder of Figure Eight Logistics, a New York food-delivery consultancy. As delivery spikes, so will environmental concerns about throw-away packaging. He wonders if some restaurants might start picking up used containers from people's homes. "I love the milkman approach: You put out your old bottles and get new ones that have been washed," Landers says. "Restaurants could do the same with reusable plates." In doing so, they'll also need to decide if it makes more financial sense to rely on third-party driver networks or build their own fleet of drivers instead.

Restaurants will take a page out of Amazon's playbook.

A longtime Seattle fine dining institution, Canlis first responded to the pandemic by opening a wildly popular bagel shop and burger drive-thru, then delivered prepared dinners and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) boxes. Its nimble pivots prevented Canlis from laying off



The Canlis CSA box features favorite farm goods home-delivered. Different growers and producers are highlighted daily.





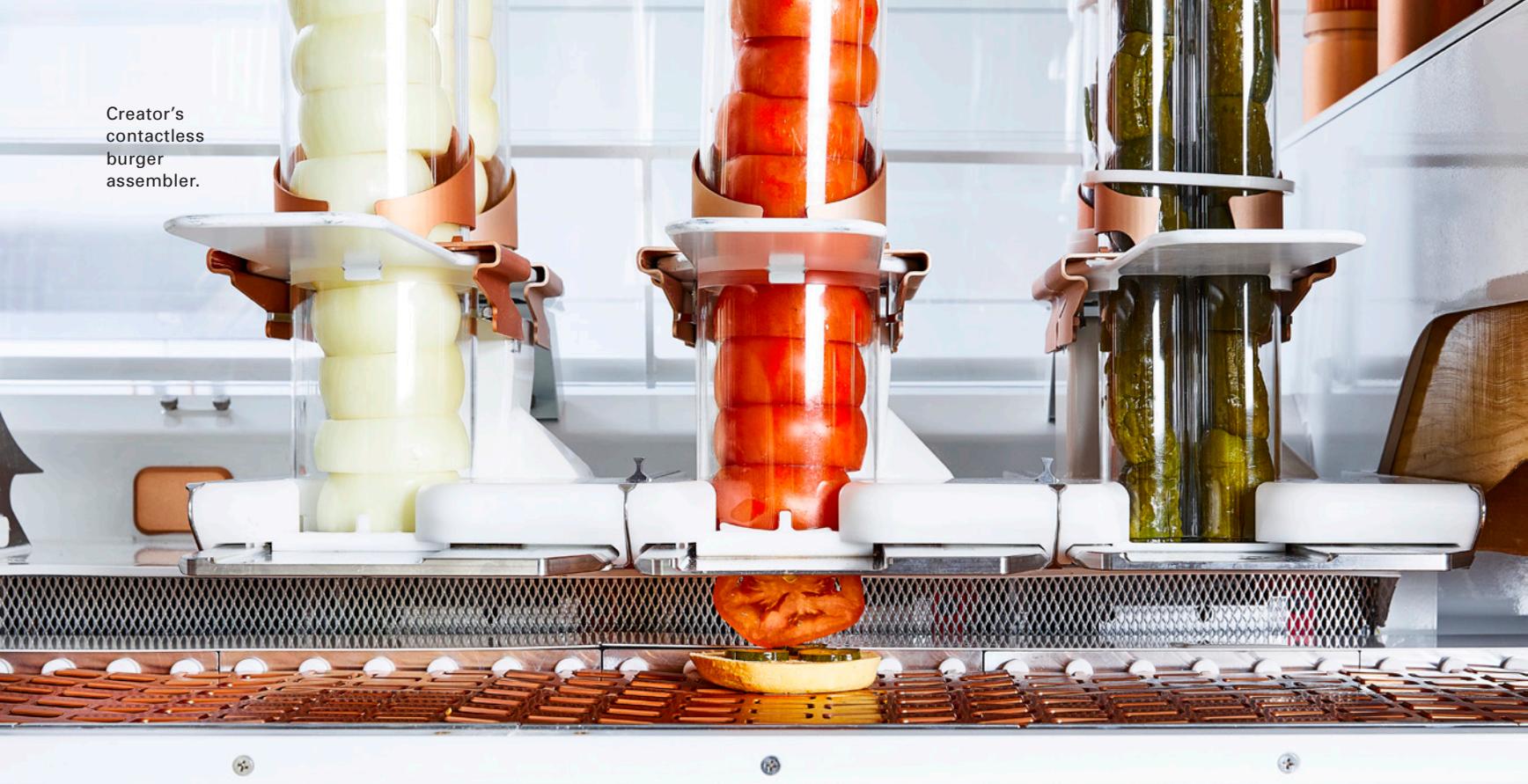
**INSTRUCTIONS TO SAFELY
ENJOY YOUR MEAL**

1. Find a flat surface in your home, ensure it is easy to clean and that the bags will not touch any other objects in your home on the way to and at this location.
2. Open bags then wash hands.
3. Remove containers without letting them touch the outside of the bags.
4. Dispose of bags without letting them touch any other objects in your home.
5. Wipe concrete surface(s) you placed the bags on with bleach or laundry soap.
6. Wash hands.
7. Open food containers and enjoy!

©2020 Creator's Chamber
creator

Creator's transfer chamber in action.

Creator's
contactless
burger
assembler.



its 115 employees. That's what the future holds, Canlis says. "More restaurants will deliver."

It's also possible restaurants can gain a competitive advantage by delivering handcrafted and specialty goods, including fresh produce, seafood, pantry staples and cleaning supplies. "Restaurants and grocery stores will meet in the middle," Landers says. To stay ahead of the trend, consider a strategy that moves beyond simple meal kits toward delivering a complete dining experience in a box—whether that's an entire birthday party meal for 10 or a date-night dinner with candles and expertly curated wine.

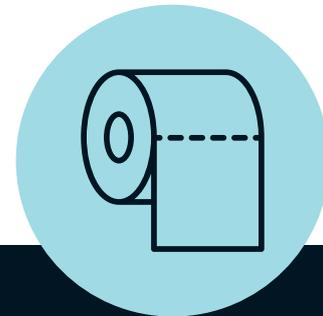
The new face of automation

Contactless delivery may evolve into contactless food prep sooner than predicted if masks, gloves, social distancing and sanitation don't cut it. San Francisco's Creator, where robots cook and assemble burgers that never get touched by staff has responded to the pandemic with a "transfer chamber."

It's an airlock takeout window that safely delivers hermetically sealed to-go meals to customers and delivery workers outside via a conveyor belt that dips into a sanitizer bath as it turns. "We made this barrier to keep both our staff and customers safe," says founder Alex Vardakostas. Creator also open-sourced the chamber's design, so others can make and customize their own versions.

Restaurants will become chameleons. Facing a serious economic downturn and wary clientele, restaurants will no longer be able to offer just one type of cuisine. "The singular-concept restaurant that does one thing will go away," predicts chef Eric Rivera.

In Seattle, one of the first U.S. cities hit hard by the pandemic, Rivera's restaurant, Addo, quickly adapted—shifting entirely to delivery and takeout, using his own staff to deliver orders, and selling constantly changing experiences that ranged from \$9 bowls of food to \$350 seven-course meals. He tracks social media to see what people want so he can



**"THE SINGULAR-
CONCEPT
RESTAURANT
THAT DOES ONE
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AWAY. WE SELL
EVERYTHING
FROM BREAD
FLOUR TO
TOILET PAPER."**

—Chef Eric Rivera of Addo
in Seattle





THE GLASS HALF FULL: AN OPTIMISTIC TAKE

While many industry insiders say the post-pandemic foodservice industry will look irrevocably different than before, Jack Li begs to differ: “At its core, the industry is not going to be fundamentally different,” says Li of Datassential, a Chicago-based research firm for the food industry. He bases that prediction on roughly a dozen reports that Datassential published from early March to early April that surveyed 4,000 consumers each week. Datassential found that people’s concerns peaked in late March—with about 60% very concerned about the virus and about two-thirds definitely avoiding eating out—but then remained flat. Li points to some relatively positive news: In mid-April, the projected U.S. death toll improved over early estimates, from over 200,000 to around 60,000, and the country’s epidemic approached what may be a peak. Barring an “extraordinary event,” Li says, “we’ll see a shift in consumer sentiment.”

From the ashes could rise a stronger industry—one where employees get treated (and paid) better. After cooking for themselves for many weeks, American consumers could emerge with a newfound appreciation for restaurants and their workers—and their worth. Where to start? As the first wave of diners return, establishments will need to figure out the wants of their immediate communities and neighbors because the commuter and tourist crowds won’t return right away. “My hope is that people will go back to eating out with a renewed sense of the value of restaurants and the service they provide,” says Alice Julier, the director of the food studies program at Chatham University in Pittsburgh. “They will recognize food is worth more.”

But the key may be for restaurants and local eateries to start gearing up now for when consumers’ pent-up demand gets unleashed. Those who are ready for this far more welcomed “surge” may well reap the biggest rewards.

get it to them fast. “We sell everything from bread flour to toilet paper,” Rivera says. Addo’s business from mid-February to early April doubled year over year.

Rivera has little patience for restaurateurs who responded to the pandemic by laying off staff or closing their doors, rather than changing their business models. “If your creativity can’t extend past what’s on the plate, you shouldn’t be in this business,” he says.

The algorithm will rise again.

“Most restaurants update their menus sometime every quarter,” Shein says. That old-school mindset will no longer work. Instead, operators may need to analyze data like amateur quants and respond to it on the fly. For instance, Shein says, in the old world, a pizza chain might struggle to keep up with deliveries at peak hours and frustrate customers with long waits. In the new world, it will need to analyze which kinds of pizza tend to get ordered at which times and start preparing them before orders come in.

Forget high touch service. The future is no touch service.

Jack Li says operators who begin setting up contactless payment methods now may have an advantage later, especially technology that allows consumers to pay their bills just by waving their phones, without touching pen, paper and screens.

Roomy will rule design trends.

Goodbye, communal tables. Hello, spread-out tables with comfier chairs. “There will be more physical space inside restaurants,” says designer Caroline Grant, co-founder of New York’s Dekar Design.





Restaurant design will space out tables more and encourage hand washing.

Anxious diners will want to feel comforted by the design. “People will gravitate toward restaurants that give them a feeling of home away from home and not cold, commercial environments,” says Dekar co-founder Dolores Suarez. As restaurants do more takeout, she adds, they will have separate pickup rooms with their own entry doors, thus creating mini fiefdoms and operations within one space.

Closed kitchens and small footprints will make a comeback.

While the open kitchen trend has been strong for years, diners won’t want a visual reminder of the risks involved in food preparation, Grant predicts. “Mentally, people will want a break from that concern,” she says. And as fewer people eat out, restaurants’ square footage—and thus their rents—will go down, Landers predicts.

Tomorrow’s hot look: Modesty

When Karen Herold of Chicago’s Studio K Creative designed Stephanie Izard’s

Girl and the Goat in Chicago a decade ago, she purchased relatively inexpensive dining room chairs from a national furniture chain. In recent years, clients wouldn’t even consider doing that. “Everyone had to top everyone else,” she says. Restaurant designs “became about what will look good on the cover of magazines.”

The pandemic will put an end to that, Herold predicts. “It will remind us that we can create great spaces that don’t have to be over the top,” she says. “Design is successful if it makes the restaurant successful.”

Hands will be washed—and watched.

With all the hand washing worries, “I wouldn’t be surprised if we start designing beautiful sinks,” Grant says. And installing more sinks—both inside and outside bathrooms—will continue the communal basin trend. They will make hand washing a public event so everyone can see everyone else doing it. ■



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