

Restaurant Reinvention: Best Practices for COVID Adaptation

Rethinking business operations, from training your staff to interacting with customers, will take awareness and discipline; However, the benefits will be seen quickly and will outweigh the effort. These new procedures will soon become part of your day-today functioning.

Sales and Marketing – “Be agile, transparent, and creative.”

- ❑ Prioritize take-out/delivery options with online ordering.
 - Add links to website
 - Promote on multiple social media channels
 - Partner with delivery services if available or utilize staff for deliveries to both keep them employed and expand your services – win/win.
- ❑ Consider adding value items, family meal combos, or pre-packaged “dinner in a box” kits with at-home preparation instructions to your menu.
- ❑ Consider adding additional pantry or grocery purchase options through suppliers.
- ❑ Create a loyalty program to promote repeat business – keep it simple, digital, and incentivize future visits.
- ❑ Communication with customers is key!
 - Use email lists, website, social media content, and physical posters/signs.
 - Promote specials, new initiatives, changes in hours/menu, COVID procedures, and anything that can encourage your customers to trust you in these times.
 - Convey empathy and concern for the community and remind them that you are a part of it.
- ❑ You must be on social media and link to your social media from your website.

Operations & Safety – “Build trust and confidence in your procedures.”

- ❑ Health and safety of employees and customers comes first!!
 - Have a plan for sick employees and send them home immediately.
 - Make sure you have a COVID exposure plan and that employees will notify you.
 - Implement symptom screening and self-monitoring for early signs.
 - Wear masks and distance as much as is possible.
 - Disinfect all surfaces and equipment regularly.
- ❑ Contact your local Health Department for information and to review your plan.
- ❑ Make sure employees understand hygiene protocols for:
 - Hand washing
 - Avoiding eyes, nose, mouth
 - Wearing gloves
 - Covering coughs/sneezes
- ❑ Be strict about foodservice operation protocols: clean, separate, cook, and chill.
- ❑ Discontinue any buffets, salad bars, or other open food areas subject to touching.
- ❑ Enforce distancing and mask guidelines in your local municipality.

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- Rearrange dining areas for distancing.
 - Remove seating if you can vs. just blocking off.
 - Measure to ensure proper 6 ft. distance.
 - Set up outdoor dining and separate take-out waiting areas where possible.
 - Restructure walking pathways using furniture to encourage one-way traffic where possible.
 - Add partitions and hand sanitizing stations if possible.
- Use disposable menus or digital menus to limit touching of menus.
- Implement contactless payment system where possible.

Protecting Cash Flow – “Build back faster.”

- Review vendor payment terms.
 - Renegotiate agreements with more flexible terms.
 - Ask for credit extensions from larger vendors.
 - Pay early if vendors provide incentive (% discount, rebate, etc.)
 - Ask if partial payments or installments are an option.
 - Use electronic payments to better control timing (last minute vs. mailing a check.)
 - Talk to other local restaurants about forming a buying collective to get better pricing and terms.
- Update your menu and remove items with lowest profit margins or that are least popular. Keep it trim and efficient.
 - Remove items with shorter shelf life or more difficult distribution.
 - Reduce inventory SKUs – fewer items is less money tied up in inventory and can minimize spoilage and waste.
 - Verify pricing – recalculate the per item cost of everything on the menu.
 - Consider price increases on certain add-on items or premium dishes.
 - Train your staff to sell the menu and increase average check size.
- Maximize inventory you have already paid for and get creative with using non-perishable items in stock as well as alcohol.
- Smaller menu = less kitchen staff needed = less labor cost.
- Factor the cost of take-out containers when deciding which items to keep/eliminate.
- Be strict about inventory counting, verifying delivery quantities, and daily register audits.
- Use technology where possible!!!
 - Online reservations – Open Table, Yelp, etc.
 - Digital point-of-sale systems and bookkeeping
 - Online banking