Foodservice Updates

Week of:
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Could a ghost kitchen make the math work for you?

In recent months, consumers have ordered restaurant meals via third-party delivery companies in increasing numbers: Marketwatch reports that throughout the course of the pandemic, food-delivery apps' business has more than doubled. Restaurants have long regarded these apps warily, weighing the benefits of being able to serve convenience-loving customers against the risks of having a delivery app's fees dissolve their profits. Those fees aren't likely to come down anytime soon, but what if other restaurant operating expenses can? Ghost kitchens are helping to make that possible by removing expensive overhead – like décor, prime real estate and large dining rooms – and freeing up revenue for delivery expenses. To be sure, the experience of dining in a restaurant is appealing to consumers (and something they will want to return to post-pandemic), but your food is at the core of people's desire to order from you. Stripping your business down to its key ingredients – quality food and people who enjoy it – is about having space to prepare it and a means of connecting customers to it. That means locating a professional kitchen (minus the pricey real estate), setting up a technology platform through which people can place orders smoothly, and having a partnership with a vendor who can ensure your food arrives promptly and safely. The pandemic has made ghost kitchens a key growth engine for the restaurant industry at a time when few others exist. Businesses that already have strong brand awareness and delivery customers may find that a ghost kitchen can help them turn a more stable profit. Consider a ghost kitchen an opportunity to test a new concept for minimal investment, or to shift an existing concept to a delivery-only mode for minimal investment (especially if the kitchen is shared by multiple businesses). These kitchens aren't likely to go away after COVID-19 is behind us – consumers have had too much time to get used to their convenience – so they may be one of many lasting changes to emerge from it. There are many ways to approach them. If you want to discuss whether a ghost kitchen could be right for your operation, contact Team Four.

Drill down on the data you have

Is your restaurant as future-proof as it could be? Whether you can answer yes or no largely depends on how well you are gathering, managing, measuring and responding to the data you collect – about your customers, your inventory, your sales throughout the day/week/month (and the list goes on). The information you gather now can prepare your business to power through the next crisis and, in stronger times, make it as profitable as possible.

If you're not in a position to hire a team member whose full-time responsibility is managing data, consider the tech acumen you already have on your team. What's most important is an ability to see patterns in your data and make connections. Studying the approaches of quick-service restaurants, which had already been well on their way down this road before the pandemic, may also provide some clues. Start with your biggest pain points. Now is an important time to take stock of the challenges of the past year, identify key weaknesses, and use the capabilities of your POS system to defend against them going forward – or possibly eliminate them altogether.

Does your menu shine on a smartphone screen?

In these takeout-heavy times, your menu is often viewed on a smartphone and needs to be readable and understandable on one – with minimal scrolling and waiting. To accomplish that, keep your menu in a format that is easy to navigate vertically and uses short lists or clickable boxes to differentiate categories. Use contrasting colors and standard fonts to enhance readability. Finally, help people see your food – but don't let images of it drag down your site: Low-resolution images (around 96dpi) will have the same effect as higher-resolution images without slowing down your site.

Save room for dessert

Desserts can be a profit driver for restaurants – is your dessert menu tempting customers right now? As it's the start of a new year and consumers are more focused on their health, consider lower-sugar options that still offer some sweetness after a meal, or smaller portions (or a shareable sampler of them) that can be enjoyed without guilt. Think in combinations too: Desserts can pair well with liqueurs or specialty hot drinks that help beat the cold and boost check totals.

Food Trends

Triple Zero Strawberry Trifle Parfaits

Ingredients:

3 C Triple Zero Strawberry Greek Yogurt
3 C Whipped Cream
1/4 tsp Cinnamon, Powdered
1 tsp Granulated Sugar
1/3 C Nilla Wafer, crumbled
3/4 C Whip Cream
Strawberries, Fresh, spears
6 Nilla Wafers

Instructions:

1. In a large mixing bowl, combine whipped cream and strawberry Greek yogurt.

2. Using a rubber spatula, gently fold the whip cream and Greek yogurt together until ingredients are well incorperated.
3. Transfer in to a storage container, cover and refrigerate until need.
4. In a medium mixing bowl, combine granulated sugar, crumbled vanilla waffers, and powdered cinnamon.
5. Mix until ingredients are thorughly incorperated.
6. Transfer the crumble in to a storage container, cover and store at room temperature until needed.
7. For each parfait, layer the ingredients in the following order, 1/4 Cup(s) of strawberry yogurt trifle base, 1 Tbsp(s) of cinnamon-sugar wafer crumble, 1/4 Cup(s) of strawberry yogurt trifle base, 2 Tbsp(s) of whipped cream, 1 Each strawberry spear, and 1 Each nilla wafer.
8. Serve.

Recipe and photo courtesy of Danone

Make sure your outdoor dining area protects safety

As operators weather what is likely going to be a difficult winter, many of those fortunate enough to have outdoor spaces have taken steps to outfit them with heated pods, screens and other partitions aimed at containing the spread of the virus while also allowing the safe (and more comfortable) serving of guests as the temperature drops. But according to medical experts, these spaces can be as risky as indoor settings if operators don't take sufficient precautions. To minimize the spread of infection in the next couple of months, be sure to air out individual dining pods between guests, or in case you have a partially enclosed space for dining outdoors, ensure that air is able to circulate throughout it. Outdoor space heaters and fireplaces can help beat the chill without posing additional safety risks, and you can also encourage guests to bring their own blankets to keep warm during their meal.

#FoodSafety

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Study the contents of your packaging

As we have come to rely on takeout restaurant food over dine-in meals in recent months, the safety of food packaging has been put under a magnifying glass. Beyond the packaging's ability to keep food at the proper temperature and protect it from tampering, it must also be made from materials that don't have an adverse impact on the safety of the food it carries. Recently, several states including Washington, Maine and New York have introduced bans on packaging containing PFAS chemicals, which are commonly found in food packaging and are potentially carcinogenic. As packaging improves to help operators manage increases in off-premise dining, consider the safety of its ingredients – along with its ability to keep a meal warm and secure en route to a customer.

Foodservice Updates

I'll drink to that

As much as food menus have had to transform throughout the pandemic, beverage menus have felt pressure to change too. You may have noticed changes in your customers' beverage-buying habits in recent months: A downturn in classic coffee purchases from people who would normally stop by on their daily commute to work, or a dip in soft drink sales now that groups who used to order a couple of rounds of drinks over a meal in your dining room are finding their beverages at home. But beverages can still be money makers for restaurants – your menu may just need to shift to accommodate the current environment. First, make it special by offering people something they wouldn't find at home, from coffees and herbal teas with seasonal flavors, to nutrient-dense smoothies, to fruity kombuchas. If you're selling meal bundles this winter, don't forget to build in a special beverage option to complement the flavors in the meal: Suggest a wine for each bundle (and explain why it's a good fit) or offer a non-alcoholic fizzy drink like a sparkling cider or mocktail to make it more worthwhile for a customer to include beverages in their order. As people continue to work from home, their mid-afternoon breaks have also taken on new importance – and beverages can help there too. Offer a snack/appetizer and beverage pairing as an afternoon pick-me-up: Going out for gourmet hot chocolate and popcorn, a pot of tea and scones, or an Italian coffee and cheese board feels more worthwhile than making a special trip for a latte you can easily prep at home. If you're known for your specialty cocktails, you can even put together a simple kit to help a customer enjoy a special Zoom happy hour on a Thursday evening.

Team Four/Value 4 provides customized Supply Chain Solutions and Business Consultancy to the foodservice owners and operators throughout the United States. To find out how we can help your business save money contact us at:

1-888-891-3103 or visit our web site at www.teamfourfoods.com and www.valuefour.com

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