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## SUMMER COVID-19 2020

A lot has changed in the last six months. The global Coronavirus pandemic has (and continues) to change how foodservice businesses operate. What, where, and how food is being served and sold is evolving to meet the culinary and safety needs of diners worldwide. And while it's hard to reinvent yourself overnight, chefs, farmers, shippers, and even IT departments, are getting creative as well as scientific.

Read on for a brief glimpse at how the industry is handling these massive challenges and finding success.

# Trends

SUMMER - COVID-19 2020

## Down-Size Menus

As restaurants of all types are starting to re-open from coast to coast, food budgets remain a top concern. Smaller, focused menus are the answer for this summer's "new normal."

- The days of in-house, mix-and-match appetizers and grazing menus are gone—or at least on hold. Families and groups that live together may continue to enjoy shareable options on take-away menus (especially pizza and flatbreads), but within brick and mortar establishments, individual portions will make a comeback.
- Upscale, sophisticated "food as art" dishes are taking a back seat to sentimental meals that evoke a sense of safety.
- Choose dishes with ingredients that can be cross-utilized in multiple parts of the menu to reduce food costs and storage space problems.
- Meat shortages have impacted ordering, moving plant-based options to the forefront as healthy menu substitutes.
- And while consolidation is the name of the game, don't forget to be you. Customers patronize specific restaurants to eat their favorite meals, so don't pare down too drastically. Keep the focus on favorites, but don't lose creativity.
- The breakfast segment, long a menu winner, has taken the biggest hit during the pandemic. Note that people are least likely to step out for this meal than for other dayparts.
- Desserts have held their own, but operators should ensure their options will sustain delivery and pick up times as a percentage of business shifts that way. If the ice cream and paletas are going to melt before arrival, give them a miss.

## Off-Premise Persists

When most dining rooms were mandatorily shuttered through the spring, the take-away and delivery platforms became the only means of serving customers, and in many cases, keeping restaurants alive. Now that the gradual transition back to in-house dining has begun, savvy operations are realizing the importance of maintaining this revenue stream.



- Customers haven't given up their sustainability wants, but just when progress was being made in this arena, Covid-19 changed the game. To reach those patrons that continue to prioritize the environment, rethink your packaging choices and expand your delivery containers beyond styrofoam and plastic to include earth-friendly, compostable and recyclable options.
- Send orders packed in containers shut with tamper-resistant seals.
- Include sanitizing wipes in delivery bags.
- Set up seamless online ordering systems.
- Construct a safe, outside pick-up zone for nearly contactless transactions.
- Ensure the food itself maintains the proper temperatures (hot meals at 135° F/57° C or more and cold dishes at 41° F/5° C or less) through travel and arrival to prevent foodborne illnesses.
- Frequently clean delivery bags or boxes and high-touch surfaces (including the inside of delivery vehicles).
- Test and retest the quality upon arrival to ensure that the dish meets guest expectations. Some recipes may only work for dine-in menus, while others can better withstand travel times.
- Include heat-and-eat options paired with online videos showing customers how to prepare ingredients.

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# Trends

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## Tip Toe Back Into Innovation

Comfort foods clearly dominated restaurant delivery and pick-up orders during the early days of the shutdown. Now that customers are venturing back to in-house dining, they are seeking the meals they crave and/or cannot make at home, especially seafood and global cuisines.

- Although it's important to keep serving comforting favorites, you should start reseeded the menu with exciting ingredients and flavors.
- Summer seafood, especially crudos like ceviche and poke, are rarely made in consumers' kitchens. Diners want these dishes, particularly when paired with citrus, cilantro, and crunchy, shaved vegetables.
- Portable sandwiches, crispy fried chicken, and tangy pickles are all big sellers on their own—why not combine them into the Japanese classic chicken katsu? This hand-held option combines nostalgic features with balanced textures and inspiring flavors (see photo above).
- Fresh herbs and edible petals are budget-friendly ways to add sophistication.

## The Hot List

- Outdoor Dining Spaces
- Social Justice Alliances
- Drive-Thru & Curbside Pickup
- Alcohol To-Go
- Transparency 2.0
- Delivered Family Meals
- Fruity Summer Ice Cream
- Pizza, Pizza, and More Pizza
- Restaurant Meal-Kits
- Social Distance Seating
- Disposable Menus
- Outside Take-Away Kiosks
- Produce Delivery Boxes
- Global Sandwiches
- Mandatory Reservations
- Social Media Connection
- Cultures of Kindness
- All-Hands-On-Deck Employees
- Contactless Payments
- Healthy Salads
- Gloves & Masks
- Meal Donations
- House-Made Condiment Jars
- Summer Seafood
- Temperatures Scans
- Plant Proteins
- Heat-and-Eat Options
- Global Rice Bowls
- Supporting Farmers/Suppliers
- Spicy Fried Chicken
- Elevated Menu Prices
- Table Hand Sanitizer Pumps
- Bento Boxes
- Fermentation Revival
- Plastic Partitions
- Increased Hand Washing Protocol
- Local Business Support Programs
- Growing Consumer Demand

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## The New Rules: In-House Dining

Although many diners remain anxious and less adventurous overall when seeking food away from the house, polls show that eating out is among the top three things they look forward to doing. Most have moved from panic to caution when considering in-house dining.

- Transparency has never been more important. Customers want and need to be shown what safety measures are being taken in your establishment (front and back of house) to feel confident about patronizing again.
- Relaxation is a critical want of diners venturing out again. They're not only looking forward to the food, but also the atmosphere and ambiance, i.e. the overall experience.
- If you are entertaining on premise, post markers that keep customers six feet apart and discourage guests from congregating with people outside of their own party.
- Touch-free technology is advancing at an astronomical rate. Surveys show diners prefer contactless transactions, disposable menus, and QR codes.
- Use digital dashboards that display employees' temperature checks, sanitation and hand washing schedules, and social distancing rules.
- Keep food covered while being taken from the kitchen to tables.
- And above all, stay nimble: this virus is new and not everything is known yet. Be flexible and ready for the rules to change at any time.

### Sources:

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