DoorDash’s new Storefront feature will help restaurants set up their own websites

DoorDash on Thursday launched a new initiative called Storefront to help restaurants create websites and directly manage online pickup and delivery orders.

As the COVID-19 pandemic has forced restaurants to pause their sit-down service, many have become increasingly reliant on delivery platforms like DoorDash, as well as competitors Grubhub, Postmates, and Uber Eats. These partnerships, of course, saddle restaurants with all kinds of commissions and fees, but they’re still necessities for many that lack their own delivery infrastructure or a website to facilitate online orders.

DoorDash’s goal is to help businesses create their own online stores instead; 40 percent of DoorDash’s partners don’t have any online ordering system, by the company’s estimate. With DoorDash Storefront, the company says restaurant owners can create these sites “at the click of a button.” Restaurants will manage these stores themselves, with orders coming directly to them (though DoorDash will still fulfill delivery requests and take a cut).

Image: DoorDash

DoorDash Storefront is in testing now and will be “widely available” in July, the company says. Restaurants can join the waitlist now on DoorDash’s website. The company will also waive a number of fees through the rest of 2020 — including those for setup, subscription, and merchant delivery — for restaurants in the US and Canada with five or fewer locations.

Those small businesses also qualify for a new promotion under DoorDash's Weblinks program. Through Weblinks, restaurants who would rather DoorDash handle their online orders can place a DoorDash button on their website and redirect customers to the platform. DoorDash is waiving commission fees on those delivery and pickup orders through the end of 2020; signups for that service are .

Finally, DoorDash is launching a promotion called Local Restaurant Saturday, which will waive delivery fees on orders from local businesses on Saturdays in June. Subscribers to DashPass, DoorDash's monthly subscription service that waives delivery fees for orders above $12, will also receive 10 percent off pickup orders in June.

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DoorDash says it intends for these promotions, part of an effort it calls "Main Street Strong," to help smaller establishments survive the pandemic. "As we turn towards the future, the most important thing is to come together to help the restaurants that mean so much to our communities," reads DoorDash's blog post.

Of course, DoorDash's promotions won't last forever, and the waived fees will presumably return in 2021. As a viral pizzeria owner proved earlier this month when he bought his own inventory from DoorDash at a profit, the company's business model — like those of many on-demand platforms — often involves losing huge amounts of cash to acquire more participating businesses in the short term. That's what makes this initiative look like a smart, but not exclusively altruistic move for the company: more restaurants dependent on its ecosystem now means more profit down the line when commissions kick back in.

Nevertheless, it's a nice change of pace to see new delivery initiatives that give options and agency to restaurants. Competing services have seen scrutiny in recent years for

attempts to load more fees onto their participating partners, primarily by exploiting search results and masquerading as the business owners themselves.

Earlier this month, *BuzzFeed News* highlighted a long-standing Grubhub policy of putting its own custom phone numbers onto business's platform pages, fooling customers into calling Grubhub when they meant to call restaurants directly (and enabling Grubhub to collect a fee for the call). Last year, the company also came under fire for making fake websites to impersonate restaurants in an effort to capture more customer orders. Back in January, GrubHub was caught listing restaurants on its platform without their permission.

https://www.theverge.com/2020/5/28/21273696/doordash-main-street-strong-storefront-online-delivery