

Simple Strategies for Restaurant Owners to Get More Customers and Make More Money

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The simple pleasures of life include enjoying a meal from a restaurant with friends and family. Maintaining high standards of service is a must, so let us consider how your systems and processes can be enhanced for a better customer experience and win their confidence during a time of social distancing, stricter safety protocols, and restaurants being placed under governmental restrictions for service in an effort to reduce the continuous rise of COVID-19 cases. With the guests' experience as our main objective and priority, let us look into the ways we can improve it while maximizing productivity and profitability for your business.

Innovative reservations program

As entrepreneurs, let us be innovative on how we can best serve our customers and provide our teams with the solution, system, and process that will enable us to achieve our business' goals. In a time of a global pandemic, it is a risk to have people gathered, especially in large numbers for any reason including to dine in an establishment.

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To address this concern, having a reservation system where

customers can order and pay for their meals in advance will allow both parties (consumer and business entity) to save time and effort. Considering the possibilities, they will be able to order and pick-up their food and beverages for take-out with the option of doing the same for their dine-in experience as well.

As you introduce and implement this approach, it is best to create a fun marketing initiative that will promote how your new program will benefit your consumers and embody the goals of your program: 1) To ensure their well-being and safety by reducing their waiting time efficiently. This includes all activity spent during their idle time at the establishment such as being seated and expecting orders, which could expose them to groups of waiting patrons and making them prone to catching the virus and; 2) Highlight the convenience of this service to working professionals, where they can be provided with their favorite meals, without having to worry about being late for their shift.

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As a part of your online ordering system, provide a space for guests to enter optional notes while booking their reservations where they can modify their meals and specify food requests for special dine-in occasions, such as weddings, anniversaries, business meetings, etc.

Increase table turnover rates

A result of offering a service like this would be an increase in your table turnover rates. The front and back of the house's work will become more predictable having an efficient workflow that can eliminate delayed orders, and inventory will be stocked based on what customers really want to avoid disappointments if their orders are out of stock. Before implementing this kind of system, however, create a detailed master plan that will allow you to launch this new service as

seamlessly as possible.

Seating and cancellation policies

For the success of your reservations program, establishing clearly defined, written, and advertised seating and cancellation policies are essential. Provide guidelines that explain the system to your guests before they proceed with their reservation, orders, and payment. The staff must also be given proper training and preparation for the new system to guide customers and deliver a satisfactory service.

A couple of years ago when preparing to travel to Japan with my son, I was surprised to learn that an all-you-can-eat restaurant that we were interested in dining at advertised time limits for how long you could sit, eat, and drink at the tables. A part of the rules I read on their website also indicated that even though you have food or a beverage on the table after your allotted time, everything would still be discarded.

The same practice can also be adapted to contribute to the success of this program. Set a time limit on how long a reservation can be made available with the understanding that each table is reserved for a specific time period to accommodate other guests as well, similar to scheduled doctor's appointments.

Stating these guidelines set expectations and remove the awkwardness of trying to get guests to leave at a designated time. This way, your staff will be able to prepare for the next reservation by sanitizing and disinfecting essential items and areas in your establishment.

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For guests who need a longer dining experience, create a

special program to address these requests by having a longer reservation period for special events or have an effective means of communicating that you will not be able to accommodate their requests.

Accountability by the restaurant and the guest

Efforts to guarantee the effectiveness of an innovative system include accountability on both ends. This means that your business must uphold its end of the bargain by serving guests promptly and accurately immediately after being seated and ensuring that you have what they ordered in stock. A seamless and timely experience can be made possible by preparing in advance all of the essential items such as condiments and utensils for their dining experience.

When seated, each guest should receive napkins, utensils, their beverage, water, the appropriate condiments, straws, etc. Having them prepackaged, even the real silverware, is good to reduce possible contamination. In-between courses, clear the tables promptly and provide the appropriate settings, etc. After their meal, printing a check will no longer be necessary as they already ordered, paid, and hopefully tipped in advance.

Prepare popular meal add-ons subjected upon request. Only allow add-ons to a meal if they are simple menu items that will not take extra time to prepare, extend dining time nor disrupt the flow of service unless it is being ordered for take-out. In scenarios like these, have an updated e-check that can double as a receipt you can readily issue, which they can verify through their mobile phones to provide payment. This reduces the amount of contact you will have with each other and gives you a backup of servers at your terminals as well.

Internal communication system

Trying to find a server after they have walked off can be challenging as well as time-consuming. Design an internal communication system using text messaging, for example, where guests and servers can communicate with each other, instead of waiting for their server to return or become visible again.

Another part of this system could include a time update, just like with parking meters, that lets them know that their time at the table is about to end. This keeps guests on their scheduled timetable, however, see to it that you are notifying them politely and professionally.

Test some of these suggestions and tweak them according to the specific needs of your guests and operation, measure your results, and get feedback from your guests, management, and staff. Give the program a good effort before deciding away with it if you experience challenges in the beginning.

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