Restaurant ~~Survival~~ Revival Guide

7 Tips to Prepare Now for Post-COVID-19

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced many restaurants to adapt in order to survive, and those who adapted the quickest have been the most successful.

As restaurants are opening their doors and capacity, and another opportunity to adapt will present itself as we all step into the "new normal" together.

To help you prepare your restaurant, we've taken our experience from working with thousands of restaurants and interviewed top experts in the field to compile advice on how to manage your brand post-COVID-19.

An while we don't know exactly what the "new normal" will look like and how that will evolve, as you follow these 7 tips and think through the 21-point checklist summary at the end, you'll be prepared for whatever comes your way in the coming weeks and months.

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01 | Collect Usable Customer Data

"It's crazy to me how you can build a business, and have all these transactions happening, and not even know who these customers are."
- Seth Weinert Co-Founder, Ovation

It is critical that you minimize customer anonymity in your restaurant because customers will return more often if they feel that they are known. Digital retailers know this and use online tools to learn everything they can about a customer in order to improve the customer experience and be able to market to them specifically. For example, Amazon knows what you've searched for on their site, the items you've placed in your cart, and what you've bought. This data allows them to both make accurate product suggestions, and to send you personally-tailored promotions.

> **Pro Tip: However you collect the data, always make sure you're getting the customer's consent to receive follow-up marketing messages. Also, try to focus on mobile numbers as those are opened 5x more than emails. SMS + permission opens SO many opportunities!**

Of course, restaurants aren't Amazon and cannot use browsing history or cookies (at least the digital kind), but they can employ the same strategy. By collecting usable customer data, you will be able to help the consumer feel like part of your community, and market to them in the most optimal and personal ways possible. How?

Take advantage of online ordering. The COVID-19 pandemic has pushed consumers to order digitally, and while its usage rate will most likely drop when dine-ins open again, it will remain higher than pre-COVID-19. Are you asking for customers' names, email addresses, and phone numbers as they order from your website/app? Are you collecting data by putting cards into the to-go bags asking for their input and contact? When they come inside your restaurant, do you have table toppers or a kiosk asking them about their experiences?

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"People order for convenience, for ease of use, and for price. If it's convenient, it's easy for them to figure out, price isn't as much of an issue…But if they can't do those two things, they're going to move on to the next place that makes it easier or simpler."
– Bruce Irving Founder, Smart Pizza Marketing

Third-party delivery platforms have come in handy during the pandemic, but unfortunately they separate you from your customers. There's less direct communication which can lead to missed opportunities to gather data, and less ability to mitigate bad situations (visit go.ovationup.com/third-party-delivery to watch a hilarious and near unbelievable example of how delivery can get out of hand). Put simply, the biggest problem with third-party delivery is the "third-party" part.

Therefore it's imperative that restaurant owners do what they can to have as much control over the process as possible. Give discounts to order through your own systems and keep the margins.

> **Pro Tip: Try putting cards in delivery bags that allow your customers to reach out to you and give feedback, or integrating an SMS service with the delivery service (like Ovation). While there are a lot of logistics with implementing in-house delivery, if you already have it, use it.**

Along with third-party delivery, continue to simplify and optimize the curbside pick-up process. If the process isn't convenient and clearly communicated, people will simply choose to go somewhere else for dinner.

Are customers supposed to come up to the door, walk inside, or stay in their car? At what point do they pay? Where are they supposed to park, exactly? Leaving these types of questions unanswered can lead to frustration—the money is in the details here.

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"I think there are those who will be fearful of stepping into a restaurant for a long period of time."
– Rory Balkin Founder, DonutDigest.com

While restaurants may be opening the doors again soon, customers are going to be more sensitive to cleanliness and sanitation practices than ever before. Here are simple operational changes recommended by the Texas Restaurant Association (as published at RestaurantBusiness.com) that you could make to stay safe:

- Doing a preshift health check of every employee
- Certifying every staff member in food safety, with a certified manager on duty for each shift
- Either using disposable utensils, placemats, condiment packages and menus, or sanitizing the items after every use
- Making hand sanitizer available to all employees and sanitizing a dining setting after every use
- Cleaning and sanitizing all surfaces
- Observing health officials' social distancing recommendations

In addition, there are simple operational changes you can make to ensure the best customer experience and efficiency:

- Use fewer tables and then space out the rest
- Consider how you can reuse the same ingredients across menu items
- Restructure the layout of your store to make it easy for pickup/takeout
- Figure out how to ensure social distancing within the store
- Simplify your menu
- Consider packaging differently for easier to-go access

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"Culture is big, and often forgotten."
– Joe DeSimone Business Development, Source One Hospitality

New operations won't make a difference unless your team members are committed to them. A key aspect of adapting your restaurant to post-COVID-19 standards is how you are going to communicate them to your employees and make sure everyone is on board.

Start by talking about sanitation.

From day one of training, make it an emphasis. Have sanitation meetings regularly where you go over procedures and incorporate customer feedback and online reviews to see if there are any complaints about cleanliness so that every team member feels like part of the solution.

> **Pro Tip: Consider rewarding employees for their excellence in keeping the standards—employee of the week, free meals, etc.**

It's going to be critical to make sure to ingrain these standards into your culture. Anything below these standards will jeopardize the health of your customers and your reputation.

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go.ovationup.com/how-to-overcome

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"When restaurants re-open, it will be the greatest game of musical chairs that anyone has ever seen."
– Derek Williamson Founder, HireMe

COVID-19 has been rough—to say the least—and has hit all of us in the restaurant industry especially hard.

Many managers have had to let employees go, and those employees have already found other jobs working for delivery companies, grocery stores, or e-commerce brands. But this pandemic will end, and when it does there will be a flood of hiring. There will be more employers than employees, so what can you do to stand out?

Start hiring now for a full opening. Some managers are conducting virtual interviews, and then giving contingency offers of employment.

Look beyond the job boards. While good talent can be found there, they will be oversaturated with so many companies looking to hire. Texting tools like HireMe can help make it easier to apply.

Pro Tip: Try canvassing on LinkedIn—especially for management roles. It's free and has great recruitment tools.

Also consider tapping into your customer base or your local community to find great employees.

"You'll find better talent if you can be super honest with yourself and with the candidates you bring in." - Joe DeSimone. Sometimes owners will be looking for a unicorn employee, but only willing to pay donkey wages. The truth is that job candidates are going to have many options, and will pass on jobs that they don't feel pay enough.

LEARN MORE AT:
go.ovationup.com/how-to-hire

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"Get on Social Media. It's 2020."
– Bruce Irving Founder, Smart Pizza Marketing

More people are interacting with restaurants online than ever before. Having an online presence is a necessity now (if it wasn't three months ago), and it will continue to be.

Make a website. Some restaurants are solely on Facebook or Instagram, and while they are good supplements, those channels are "borrowed land" (Rory Balkin). Having your own website allows for greater professionalism, options, communication, and customization. It's also more affordable than it's ever been to create and host one. There are many low-price services, and even free ones such as the website feature offered through Google My Business.

That being said, you still want to be active on social media.

> **Pro Tip: "You don't need to be on every platform, but go to where the people are in your area. If you're in a college town it's probably Tik-Tok, and older communities are usually on Facebook."**
> –Rev Ciancio Founder, Yeah! Management

Restaurant owners have found success making behind the scenes videos of their business, doing live streams of themselves answering questions, etc. The key is that social media helps you interact with and find new customers online, and helps you stay on the offensive. Get trusted employees to help as well!

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go.ovationup.com/how-restaurants-can-succeed
go.ovationup.com/3-locations-closed

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There's a gap that traditionally exists between operations and marketing. What's the solution? Actionable feedback. When a customer is involved in a feedback loop directly with management, operational insights are gained and future marketing opportunities open up.

But not all feedback is created equally—it's really a not great, good, better, best situation. How do you rank?

1. **NOT GREAT:** You only rely on online reviews.
2. **GOOD:** You have a way of collecting feedback (survey, comment box, etc).
3. **BETTER:** You have aggregated feedback to help operations continuously improve.
4. **BEST:** You are able to take action based on feedback immediately to resolve concerns, help customers know you care, build a relationship, and turn feedback into revenue-generating opportunities.

There are three wins with #4 BEST: Operations gets feedback for improvement, the customer is happy and much more likely to continue doing business with you, and now they are in your marketing database for future promotions.

Let's give an example of a best feedback, off-prem scenario:

Samantha doesn't like her burrito she got from a restaurant through a delivery service. Luckily, she received a personalized text message from the restaurant manager immediately after her food was delivered asking how her experience went. She tells him the burrito was disgusting. He responds promptly, acknowledging her complaint and offering her some sort of resolution. Samantha is satisfied (91% of customers feel satisfied with companies after complaining if it was handled promptly and personally), and in fact leaves a 5-star review of the restaurant online for handling the situation so well. Other people had been complaining about burritos recently too, so the manager makes a menu change, and a week later Samantha receives a personalized text letting her know of a deal on their new burritos which she uses that day.

Interactions like this one happen all the time for restaurants utilizing the Ovation feedback system.

LEARN MORE AT:
go.ovationup.com/how-to-manage-reviews

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We hope we've been able to add some value to you as you plan to re-open your doors.

On the next page you'll find a master checklist of the ways we've discussed to help you prepare for the post-COVID-19 industry.

These are challenging times, but we are here to help! Ovation is the ultimate tool that will help you collect and use data, connect with customers for the very best feedback, close the gap between marketing and operations, and more.

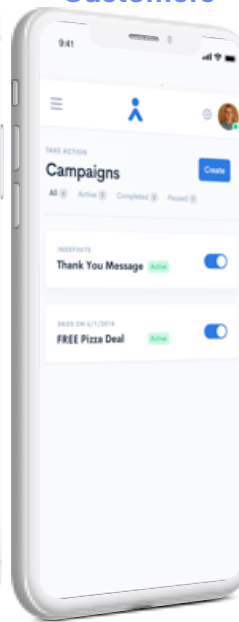To learn how we can help grow your business through the ultimate guest feedback platform, visit ovationup.com.
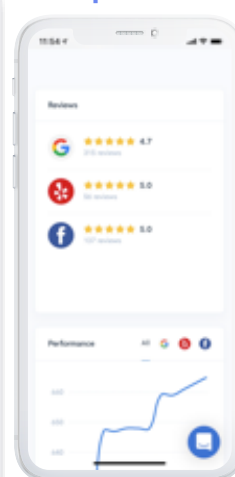
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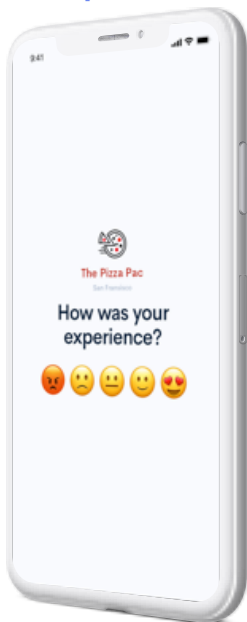
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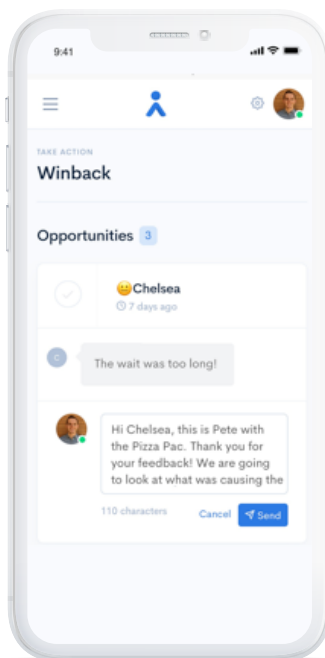
Engaging with Happy Customers

Managing your online reputation

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Collect Usable Customer Data

🔲 Gather Data (with consent) through online ordering, 3rd party ordering, to-go cards/bag stuffers, text clubs, etc.

🔲 Have data lead to the sales funnel

🔲 Find a text marketing tool to drive business

Take Control of Online Orders

🔲 Make it simple to order ahead (give customers options!)

🔲 Put feedback cards in delivery bags

Optimize Operations

🔲 Implement new standards of cleanliness and sanitation

🔲 Adjust operations to meet more pick-up/take out

🔲 Simplify menu (especially with to-go items)

🔲 Standardize curbside pickup messaging and process

Put New Standards in Culture

🔲 Have team meetings about sanitation

🔲 Begin training on sanitation from day 1

🔲 Read reviews/feedback with staff

Hire Well

🔲 Start hiring now (you can hire virtually and with contingencies)

🔲 Try LinkedIn and options besides job boards

🔲 Be honest with yourself and job candidates

Upgrade Digital Footprint

🔲 Create/update a website

🔲 Get on the right social media channels

🔲 Share content consistently (even quick, live videos)

Gather Guest Feedback

🔲 Solicit feedback after all orders

🔲 Have a way to make that feedback actionable so you can respond and engage with the customer as soon as possible

🔲 Create process to turn dissatisfied customers into loyal fans...like by using Ovation! ;)

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BONUS next eBook!

THE
**OFF
PREMISE
RESTAURANT**

6 Tips to Own
Customer Experience

BY RESTAURANT EXPERTS

Now that you are opening, you've seen that more than ever before, your restaurant customers are going off-premise.

How do you...
1) Take control of delivery?
2) Make it easy to get feedback?
3) Collect the correct info?
4) Make the survey timely?
5) Take action the right way?
6) Fix the root issue?

Lean about that and more by downloading at:

go.ovationup.com/off-premise-ebook

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