How to launch online ordering for long-term success
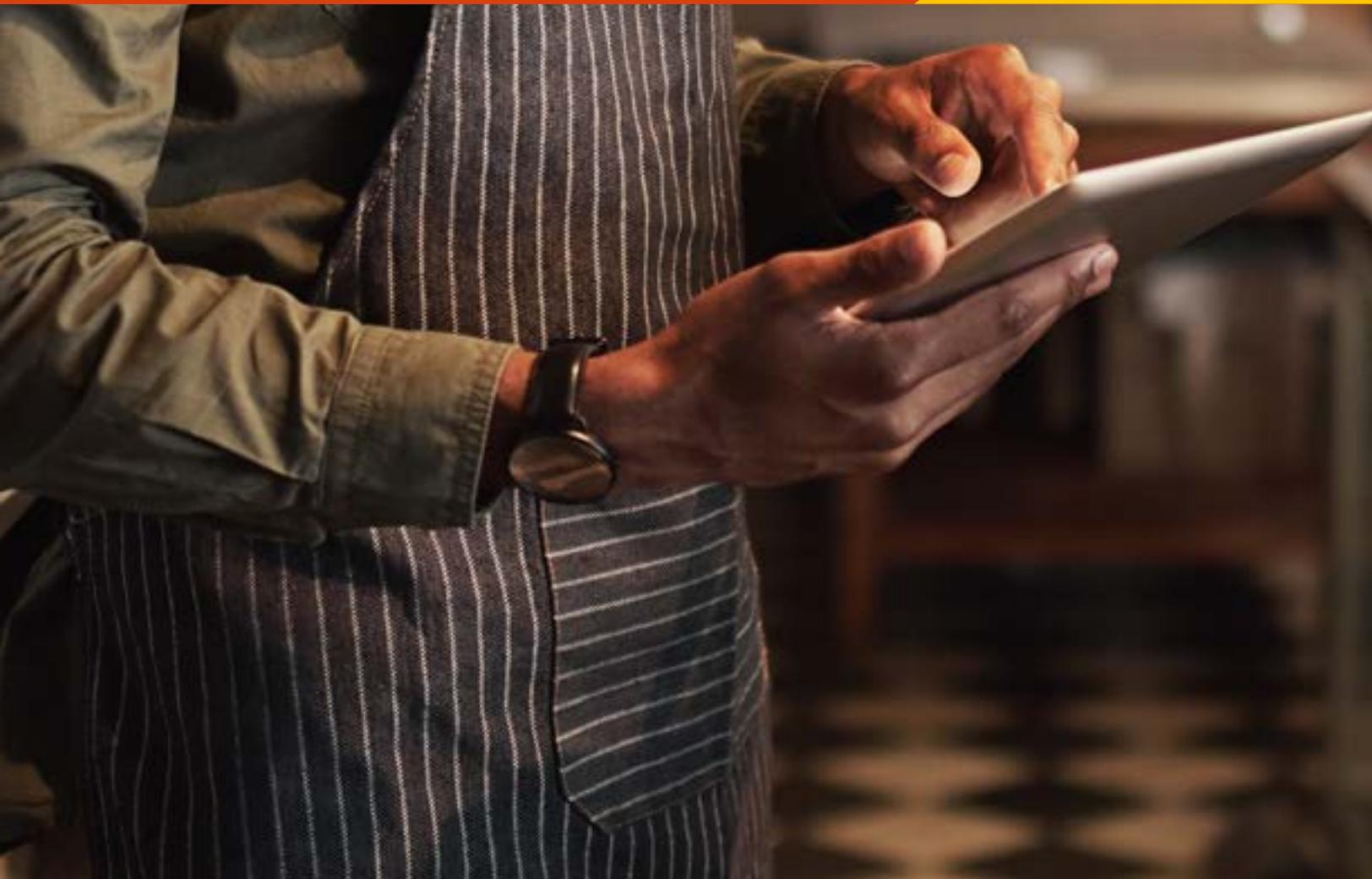
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Contents

Adapt to the delivery demand

The coronavirus pandemic has shed light on the importance of having multiple revenue streams for any business rather than relying solely on one avenue of income. This has become especially obvious in the restaurant industry with some restaurants closing their doors for dine-in service, coupled with consumers' unease at dining outside their homes during these unpredictable times. The result? Delivery and takeout have now become a main, and in some cases only, dollar generator for many restaurants across the country. Actually, eight states in the U.S. have seen more than 75% of revenue come from these off-premise outlets, while on-premise dining has declined 32% since March 18, 2020.

A large driver of this marked jump in takeout and delivery orders is the simplicity and ease that online ordering offers to customers. People are able to quickly search for their favorite restaurant, place their order, and pay, all from the comfort of their own home on their mobile device or computer. Although proven to be a worthwhile endeavor that has the ability to fuel a steady revenue stream, it's important to thoughtfully set up your business for success with online ordering. This includes researching the right ordering solution for your operation, optimizing your takeout/delivery menu for success, updating your digital presence, marketing your online ordering capabilities across all platforms, and consistently evaluating and tweaking your restaurant's ordering experience to ensure success and longevity long after the effects of COVID-19 have subsided.

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Choose an online ordering system

The first order of business when setting up an in-house online ordering system is to evaluate your restaurant's current takeout and delivery capabilities, if applicable. You'll want to unearth what aspects are garnering positive results for your business — maybe you've seen great success with specific promotions you're running during certain days/times — and which need to be reworked or removed all together — perhaps you don't have enough drivers to fulfill orders in a timely manner or need to invest in delivery bags that keep food at its correct temperature for longer.

It's important to narrow in on these nuances because perceived small changes can have a large impact on a customer's ordering experience and in turn your restaurant's bottom line. Now, with 92% of restaurant traffic being off-premise, and delivery growing by 7% since pre-coronavirus, it's vital for restaurant owners to adopt this service early on. This ensures plenty of time for testing and optimization to secure takeout/delivery as a future viable revenue generator.

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Criteria to consider

Next, it's a good idea to research and select a system that can provide an online ordering solution that aligns with your restaurant's structure and goals. Key points to consider when reviewing options can include:

- **The customer experience:** Implementing online ordering capabilities directly on your restaurant's website allows you as the business owner to be in the driver seat of the customer's ordering experience. This means that your branding, messaging, visuals, and user journey can all accurately depict your restaurant's specific values and aesthetic. Your website will act as the main hub for which visitors can discover, browse, interact, and eventually order from your business.

- **Point-of-sale system integration:** A majority of online ordering platforms can integrate directly with your existing point-of-sale (POS) system(s) as opposed to third-party services that usually use their own POS system. This component is crucial for streamlining customer data and sales analytics, while not disrupting your current in-house sales and procedures.

- **Mobile and incentives:** Mobile responsive websites have gone from being "a nice feature to have" years ago to an absolute necessity nowadays. The world of online ordering is no exception — 45% of consumers say that offering mobile ordering or loyalty programs would encourage them to use online ordering services more often. Loyalty/

incentive programs provide business owners with the opportunity to remarket and retarget to their customer base time and time again with specific offers.

- **Your bottom line:** Adding your own online ordering solution to your existing website and POS system means that you retain the majority of your takeout/delivery profits aside from any costs associated with your delivery drivers and to-go packaging. Third-party delivery services may provide great exposure to their customer base, but at a very steep cost that is often charged as a commission fee per order. In fact, 43% of restaurant professionals believe third-party apps interfere with the direct relationship between a restaurant and its customers. Instead, you can now own your customers' entire online ordering experience from beginning to end without shaving your profits.

> **43%** of restaurant professionals believe third-party apps interfere with the direct relationship between a restaurant and its customers.

- **Analytics and insights:** Like any revenue arm you add to your business, you'll want to confirm that you're able to capture pertinent data on your customer base, their purchasing behaviors, and any other

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analytics you can get your hands on. The more information a restaurant can obtain about what is/isn't working well for their online ordering system, the more they can tailor and optimize it to further meet the needs of their constituents.

Evaluate third-party options

After researching and weighing the pros and cons, if you feel implementing your own direct-to-consumer delivery and pickup solution isn't a practical option for your business, you may want to consider partnering with a third-party delivery service. There are numerous third-party services and apps available from the big names like Grubhub and Postmates to the more niche players like Zuppler and Rewards Network Online Ordering, that feature different pricing/fee structures, capabilities, and integrations. To learn more about the pricing and key features of the most popular options, download our free e-tool, "Top third-party food delivery services."

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Plan for success

Now that you have chosen an online ordering solution, it's time to set it up for continued success and profitability. This can include deciphering what tactics are working well for your neighboring competitors, creating a limited delivery/takeout menu, setting seasonal promotions, and implementing added health/safety standards. In order to maintain and bolster your brand's reputation for high-quality food and service, it's important to consider how you will guarantee that a customer's food will arrive at their doorstep in the same condition it'd be presented to them in-house at your restaurant.

Don't reinvent the wheel

Take a look at what nearby restaurants are doing during these challenging times in terms of takeout/delivery capabilities and glean insights as to what is generating awareness and dollars vs. what is falling short. This can be as simple as seeing what third-party delivery services they show up on and browsing their website to see how their online ordering system functions. Sometimes, you won't know what components you want to incorporate into your business until you see them being utilized in a similar fashion in someone else's restaurant. Maybe once you place an order on the competitor's website, they immediately send you a confirmation email with a link to track your order's progress. This is an example of functionality you may want to consider implementing into your own online ordering solution.

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Set a limited menu

True to the old saying, "less is more," it's a savvy move to curate an off-premise limited menu for takeout/delivery orders. Oftentimes referred to as a minimum viable menu (MVM), this menu can feature the best-sellers on your current dine-in menu that you know will travel well throughout the delivery process. Evaluate which of your menu items are generating the most revenue with the least overhead cost and then determine if they are a contender to endure the delivery process (restaurant kitchen, to carry-out containers, to delivery driver's car/bike, to customer's home). Utilize your POS system's data to certify that the items you choose are popular among your customers and still accurately reflect your brand. You can also test out seasonal food and drink items for takeout/delivery to gather intel on what options your customer base responds to best during certain months — think frozen to-go drinks in the summer and heartier fare like chili and seasonal soups in the winter.

Consider convenience and safety

Especially during the coronavirus pandemic, many customers and families are looking to unburden the added stress of cooking every meal at home. Many restaurants have seen great success with offering meal kit options for takeout/delivery. For example, if your margherita pizza is one of your best sellers, consider offering a take-home pizza making kit complete with all the fresh ingredients and toppings so that families can enjoy your

restaurant's food exactly how they want, when they want, and from the comfort of their own home. Along the same lines, many customers prefer to forgo the delivery fees by opting for takeout. It's a smart idea to take this a step further by also offering curbside and/or contactless pickup. If doable, place tables inside your restaurant's entrance area where customers can pick up their online orders in a contactless (not interacting with any other person) environment. Other health initiatives can

> Evaluate which of your menu items are **generating the most revenue with the least overhead cost.**

include cashless payments, hand sanitizing stations at the front door, and limiting the amount of people allowed inside to pick up their order at any one time. Many consumers during the COVID-19 pandemic appreciate that restaurant owners are modifying the usual on-premise restaurant interactions and look for these health/safety measures when choosing a restaurant.

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Nearly

63%

of consumers
prefer to order
directly from a
restaurant.

Train your staff

A crucial component of having a successful off-premise dining model is guaranteeing the food is of the same quality compared to dine-in service. Your staff is at the epicenter of this process, so it's important that they are trained correctly upon being hired on the ins and outs of your restaurant's off-premise dining procedures and standards. Creating an off-premise training manual and running all-staff training sessions can be helpful for your employees to clearly understand the expectations surrounding takeout/delivery/curbside orders. Nearly 63% of consumers prefer to order directly from a restaurant, instead of a third-party service, with 42% of those people listing the main reason being that they want more of the money to go straight to the restaurant. With so many takeout/delivery options, one poor experience can lead patrons away from your doors and through someone else's. Investing in your staff and your off-premise dining now can allow you to possibly see increased revenue and productivity in the future.

Chapter

Establish your digital presence

With the building blocks of your online ordering system's foundation firmly in place, it's now time to make sure that your restaurant shows up in a favorable spot in search results. Correctly setting up your business on Google My Business and Google Places is vital for any business that wants to be discovered by new customers searching for specific restaurant criteria on the web. It's also a smart idea to set up Google Analytics on your site (if you haven't already) to compile insights as to who is accessing your site along with how, why, and when.

Google Places: This service works by listing the location of local businesses that have registered with Google and are relevant to the visitor's search on a small map. In a quick snapshot, a user can view your

address, operating hours, and contact information as well as links to your website next to the map.

Google My Business: With Google accounting for nearly 88% of nationwide searches, having your restaurant correctly listed on Google My Business is a must. This free tool allows businesses to manage their digital presence across Google including Search and Maps. By adding, verifying, and updating your restaurant information, you can make sure that customers looking for your spot are able to easily find it. The Google My Business platform also allows restaurant operators to read and respond to customer reviews.

Google Analytics: To get optimal insight and ROI from a website, it's imperative to track what's working and equally vital to

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determine what isn't performing well. This can be done via Google Analytics, a web analytics service offered by Google that tracks and reports website traffic and trends. Most cloud-based website builder platforms have a Google Analytics plugin component that's easy to set up. This comprehensive tool provides all the information a business owner could want to know about the types of visitors on their site and what actions these users take. This can help to bolster and complement any analytics and insights that your online ordering solution may offer. Oh, and it's free!

Google online ordering

It's no secret that Google owns the majority of the search engine market share and most people use this search behemoth as their go-to source for any and all information. Recently, Google has entered the restaurant online ordering space by creating Google online ordering. When customers enter search terms like, "best Greek restaurant near me" they'll be shown a list of relevant restaurants, with those that are enabled for Google online ordering prominently featured. Then, with just a few clicks, users can choose a service option (takeout or delivery), create their order, and pay, all without leaving Google.

It's a smart play to work with a company, such as Zuppler, that can set your business up with Google online ordering, since restaurant owners can't manually set up their business with this platform on their own. This will allow your customers to order from your restaurant's menu directly from Google Search, Google Maps, and

the Google Assistant. After they do so, you'll have full access to all of their relevant information, such as phone number and email address, in the customer database. By managing and maintaining your customer database, you'll hold the power to choose how to remarket to these customers and encourage return visits.

If you'd like to learn more about how Google online ordering can positively impact your business and your customers' ordering experience, download Zuppler's free e-book, "10 Reasons Google Online Ordering is Crucial for Your Business."

Launch and test

Now, the time has come to launch your new online ordering system on your website. Remember, mobile traffic accounts for almost half of web traffic worldwide, so confirming that your current website is responsive — meaning it will render correctly across all platforms including mobile, tablet, desktop, etc. — is critical. Once your online ordering section of your website is up and running, be sure to do multiple test runs with it prior to announcing this new feature to the public. Recruit employees, family, and friends to test out all your system's capabilities and options to discover where optimization may need to occur. It's best to work through all the kinks in-house so that you can plan for a smooth public-facing launch. Digital ordering and delivery have grown 300% faster than dine-in traffic since 2014, so expect your order volume to increase once your online ordering service is announced and live.

Promote your new offering

Your website is your most powerful marketing tool. Use it to promote your new online ordering platform by showcasing your takeout/delivery capabilities front and center on your homepage with a call-to-action (CTA) button that links to your online ordering page/menu. You have a short amount of time to grab a visitor's attention and encourage them to stay on your site, so make your homepage announcement clear and concise. Especially during coronavirus, customers want to know right away when they land on your website if you offer takeout/delivery options and how they can order. To further incite takeout/delivery orders directly from your website (vs. a third party) you can test out featuring a promo code on your website that is exclusive to online orders for first-time users.

Feature high-quality photography

Professional-looking photography is a key driver in a customer's decision to order from your restaurant. The food and drinks need to look mouthwateringly delicious to entice initial and repeat orders, while also ensuring what arrives at a patron's doorstep lives up to the online hype. Of course, the ideal solution is to hire a food photographer and stylist, but if this is not within your budget, have no fear. There are many tips and tricks you can follow to take compelling food shots on your own. Proper lighting, correct photo composition, and clean, simple dishware are the main aspects you'll want to prioritize when taking photos. Try focusing on your bestsellers and the menu items that are featured on your takeout/delivery menu to remain true to your brand and encourage

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online orders. For additional guidance on how to take topnotch food photos without breaking the bank, download our free e-tool, "20 tips for taking perfect restaurant photographs."

Engage on social media

Your restaurant's social media pages — Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc. — are fertile territory for spurring brand awareness, engagement, and orders. Also, it's important to note that Gen Z and Millennials are 99% more likely to rely on social media and online reviews when compared to Gen X and Boomers. Social media has become an even more prominent communication tool for restaurants since the onset of COVID-19, allowing patrons to learn quickly of any updates, safety protocols, hours of operation changes, menu edits, and more. You can add a direct link to your online ordering webpage in the bios of your social profiles, on your Yelp page, and in your Facebook Messenger automatic replies. Social media is a great medium to interact and engage with your customers while also testing different strategic initiatives like specific promo codes for your social followers, different combinations of food imagery and copy in social ads, and different CTAs that all link back to your online ordering page.

Update digital and print pieces

Tap into all of your digital and print collateral to announce and promote your restaurant's takeout/delivery functionality. Beginning with emails, send a mass e-blast out to everyone in your email database

to let them know about your new and improved online ordering webpage. You can also include a special promo code that is only sent to those on your email list, that way you can evaluate down the line how many of those recipients converted into online ordering takeout/delivery customers. In general, restaurants make back $44 for every $1 spent on email marketing, typically making it a restaurant's most profitable marketing channel. If you don't already have an email marketing service set up, check out the various platforms that are well-suited for small businesses to see which

> ## Restaurants make back **$44** for every $1 spent on email marketing.

may be the best fit for you. No piece is too small when it comes to pushing what could be your largest revenue generator during the coronavirus pandemic and beyond. Announce that you're offering online ordering for takeout/delivery on sidewalk signs outside your restaurant's doors, on posters or wall decals, on table tents (if you're still offering on-premise dining), and on any flyers/collateral that you use to cross promote with local businesses. Don't forget that your delivery cars/bikes, to-go containers, and menus are all prime real estate for delivery-specific promo codes and reinforcing your online capabilities as a whole by featuring your website, address, and hours of operation.

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Continually optimize your marketing

It doesn't appear that consumers' desire and demand for off-premise dining is going anywhere anytime soon. In fact, as of mid-July 2020, 52% of consumers surveyed said they would continue to avoid dining in once restaurants fully reopen, up from 36% in mid-April. It's vital for restaurant owners to capitalize on the upward-moving trend of online ordering and delivery as soon as possible. Once implemented and launched, you can then begin to test different promotions, graphics, messaging, menu items, and more to determine the winning formula for your specific business.

Remember, a website and online ordering system are not a "set it and forget it" type of marketing mechanism. They require constant monitoring, evaluating, testing, and optimization to remain fully effective. A good best practice is to set aside time each week to check in on how your website and online ordering page are performing. You can submit test orders on both desktop and mobile and reach out to your staff for any customer feedback or issues they may have encountered while fulfilling takeout and delivery

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orders. During this time, you can also refresh and update any images, information, or menu items that may need updating to ensure all off-premise dining operations continue to run smoothly.

By launching an off-premise online ordering solution, restaurant owners are able to keep more dollars in their pocket while gathering powerful insights about their customer base and their dining behaviors. Although it can be a lengthy process — from choosing the best online ordering/delivery solution, curating an off-premise menu, and training your staff to setting up your digital footprint, launching and promoting your new capabilities, and continually testing and optimizing your site — it's a strategic initiative that can be well worth it in the end. By securing multiple avenues of revenue for your restaurant, you can potentially safeguard your business from taking a severe financial downturn during unexpected external circumstances such as the coronavirus pandemic.

By launching an off-premise online ordering solution, restaurant owners are able to **keep more dollars in their pocket** while gathering powerful insights.

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"Rewards Network has been a very strong partner for me. [They] help you grow your business at the same time as helping you financially."

— Jeff Parrott
Farotto's, St. Louis, MO

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