

# THE NEXT PIVOT: PREPARING TO MAXIMIZE TAKE AWAY THIS FALL-WINTER

2020 has been a year that no restaurant operator is going to want to relive. As the year rolls towards the New Year, there will be many a resounding toast to the end of 2020. Operators will be ready for the restart that lengthening days and spring brings. Between then and now, more curveballs will be thrown out forcing additional changes.

The coronavirus pandemic is a worldwide crisis, unprecedented in living memory. This means that we don't have packaged resources, reference points and easy solutions. We know that limiting group sizes and the fear of gathering inside are having a profound impact on our guests, and may do so for a long time.

If there is anything predictable for 2020, it's the constant need to bring fresh ideas to the table to rethink and reimagine what successful restaurants look like. Watching the path of the virus across the country tells us that we have to be ready for an increase in cases and to plan to manage our businesses in a way that accounts for more changes.

One of the lessons we learned this spring is that takeout drives a new value proposition for customers looking for a different way to support local business and still enjoy food they don't cook.

We've delved into some of the Takeout trends to give our 8 top ideas for driving incremental revenue and maximizing your opportunities in changing times.

**Even if Takeout hasn't been a staple of your business, you need to consider these business building ideas.**

Why? Takeout was a steadily growing channel for restaurant revenue prior to COVID-19, with double-digit year-over-year category growth projected for the next 5 years. Sector growth is incrementally growing as compounded by COVID business pressures. In these unusual times, take out is a real option for nervous customers who still love a meal prepared for them.

**We can't plan effectively during COVID, but you can plan to fight.**

Take every opportunity you can to get ahead. Don't get stuck responding at the last minute – don't just be reactive or pivot as a last resort. Plan to fight. Commit to change and use takeout as a core part of your business whether it's an additional opportunity or the only option.

## **TIP 1: PLAN A MENU THAT IS RESPONSIVE TO THE REALITIES OF TAKE AWAY.**

Make sure that anything you put on your take out menu is priced correctly, packaged appropriately and travels well. Not all dishes work well for takeout. Some meals can't be easily packaged, and certain foods will lose their heat or texture in transit. Look at which menu items you know won't travel well or have a limited following and remove them. Think about which meals your most loyal guests tend to prefer and make those a staple of your offering.

Make sure you offer items that can be prepared en-masse ahead of time and frozen or refrigerated. They're a great workaround for restaurants who never considered takeout when planning their menu.

If you determine a side you usually offer won't travel well, consider a new side that will travel and create a unique food experience for your customers.

## **TIP 2: PROMOTE TAKE OUT AS A CORE STREAM FOR YOUR BUSINESS IN YOUR MARKETING AND SOCIAL MEDIA.**

We've all heard about how important it is to promote our businesses and tell our unique stories. This seems cliché – but it isn't, especially in COVID-times.

Where we once relied on customers driving by or being in our neighbourhoods for work or pleasure, people are not making as many trips around town as they did. Our customer behaviour changes are impacting their spending patterns. **People are at home more and using social media for their primary connections. As businesses, staying in front of our customers means meeting our customers where they are.**

Social media is an ideal way to actively engage your customers, generate awareness and be front of mind when they are making buying decisions. If you showcase great photos of how you package your take-away, your weekly

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take-out feature or how your pick up process works, this will connect customers that didn't know you offered the service with a new way to support your business.

You can use social media as a platform to distinguish your brand from competitors, too. If your take out process looks smoother or how you package your food looks like it is designed for travel, you may convert a competitors customer.

Social media isn't free – it requires an investment of time and can require an investment in strategic advertising dollars, but it can be targeted and cost efficient. It's worth a small investment to stay top-of-mind for your followers.

## TIP 3: MAKE SURE YOU PRICE YOUR TAKE-OUT MENU SO YOU ACCOUNT FOR THE COSTS OF DELIVERY AND PICK UP MODELS.

Creating a dedicated take out menu allows to you to account for the costs that your business incurs to offer this specific service.

**In calculating menu costs for take away, it's important to include the costs of:**

- Packaging (meal and sides separately if necessary)
- Cutlery if provided
- Seasonings/dips/sauces
- Bag
- Delivery charges
- Delivery commissions

## TIP 4: PARTNER WITH OTHER LOCAL BUSINESSES.

Is there a local bakery that you can offer their breads or their pies to pair with your dinner menu? Is there an ice cream company that you can offer a take out pint with a meal deal? Is there a local coffee roaster or tea company that can complement your breakfast or lunch offerings? Do you work with a local brewery or winery that you can offer as a featured pairing to highlight and elevate your food experience?

British Columbians are looking for ways to support a range of businesses in their communities. If you can support a neighbor, this is the time to do it proudly. Take about your local partnerships on your feature page. Showcasing connections is ideal – and it's a selling feature for people thinking differently about their purchasing decisions. Paired alcohol is a great opportunity to increase your cheque totals.

Remember that Millennials were already making their decisions to align with their values – so this is a trend you should be capitalizing on anyway – not as a COVID-pivot.

## TIP 5: CREATED TARGETED HOLIDAY FEATURES.

Not everyone is dining out, but everyone is looking for new ways to celebrate the holidays in different ways. Do you have something unique that you can offer for US Thanksgiving, Hanukkah, Christmas, National Ugly Sweater Day (December 20), Winter Solstice or New Year's?

Can you offer a winter walk, winter hike or winter picnic package? Do you have a house made energy bars or warm power beverages? Do you have a unique seasonal treat that will help folks start a new winter tradition?



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## TIP 6: OFFER TAKE AWAY TO DINE IN GUESTS.

People who are dining in may be limiting their “bubbles” and therefore limiting their exposures from meals out. If someone has a great meal in, why not share your “heat and eat” to-go menu and see if they are interested in taking home an extra item for the next day? Start by adding a couple classic to go items on your dessert and coffee menu.

### Great offerings include:

- Housemade breads, tacos and naan
- Signature bake ahead dishes (lasagnas, paellas/ jambalaya, meat/fruit pies, quiches, stews, chilis, beans, ribs, potstickers/gyoza, curries or curry sauces)
- 1 litre of fresh or frozen soup
- House roasted coffee/tea or cocktail pre-mixes.

## TIP 7: THINK BIG.

Family size meals were very popular in the spring. With fall and winter the season of comfort food – these larger portions will be a great option for people scrambling to solve multiple meals or trying to feed families with a range of tastes. Heat and serve or completed items complemented by items with a few instructions for finishing make sure that your meals taste great and are easy for customers with complicated schedules.

Many families have members with simple tastes and those with “advanced” tastes. If you offer a range of a la carte sides with a pick 2 or pick 3 model, your guests can have options that cater to even the picky eaters in their household. Think about having options that target different palates: something spicy, savoury, sweet, plain, complex or unique. Larger portions increase your average guest check and connect with people who might generally not consider take away.

## TIP 8: GET CREATIVE WITH HYPER LOCAL PROMOTIONS AND DELIVERY

Locals around your restaurant might be stuck in their home getting stir crazy – with 75% of businesses still getting people to work from home, that’s a huge captive audience. Use take out to find a way to offer a relief from the every day blahs of cabin fever.

### Ideas for people nearby include:

- work-from-home lunch specials
- wellness lunches or wellness break
- power up options (energy/protein features)
- coffee break (drink and a treat)
- feature to go cocktail
- weekend brunch
- happy hour local cheese and charcuterie plate

Hyper local deals connect with people walking by your business or who can geo-tag to your proximity. Think of deals that you can offer your neighbours that can tie it into a mid-day or afternoon walk or just a quick outing to break up their day.

For cocktails, you can pick a day – we love “Thirsty Thursday” - where you offer a cocktail of the day. A customer can come in and get a canning jar with the base for a “happy hour \$5 special”. Custom drinks are very in and they add a little excitement to people that are stuck in their COVID-19 routine. Pick drinks that only require vodka or gin – as most people will have them at home. Offer both single serving or litres of mix to make it fun. Alcoholic drinks are a high-margin menu item and generally represent at least a 100% markup over costs.

To complement these at home specials, consider offering free delivery within a 5 or 10 block radius.

Some fun naming of these offerings on an a-frame sign outside your business can drive interest and revenue: think “Lockdown Lunches” or “Social Distanced Drinks” or “Quarantini Cocktails” or “Quarantine Kits”.



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## TIP 9: JOIN THE HASHTAG

There are a number of great hashtags that will increase your post visibility for your takeout promotions:

#TakeoutTuesday #TakeoutTakeover #CarryoutWednesday  
#ThriftyThursday #ThirstyThursday #BreakingBreadNow  
#CanadaTakeOut #WineWednesday

These tags can amplify your brand and help you reach new audiences. If you are including these tags, make sure you also tag your location so that people are looking for you in the right city, district or town. Many cities go by their airport codes, so look around to see what is being used in your area.

## TIP 10: MIX FOR 6

If customers are trying to stick within the 6 person bubble, do you have a take out option that targets small groups? A mix and match menu for couples that are getting together, a combo that includes appies, main and dessert with wine or beer pairings can make an exciting evening for people who are looking for an evening's distraction. Include pairing notes to take it to the next level.

## TIP 11: DESIGNATED TAKE OUT PICK UP AND PARKING SPOTS.

The easier the access to take away, the better it is. Some jurisdictions will allow you to take over city parking spots and designate them for short term take out customers – consult your local city hall. If your restaurant has a parking lot, then you should designate a few spots close to your door as carryout only. If you add signage to these allocated parking spots, make sure you include a phone number for guests to tell you where they are parked for curbside service.

It may be challenging for staff running orders to the curb, so make sure you coordinate with team members in advance and plan their outfits, especially their footwear, to manage the weather.

If customers typically have to stand or line up outside of your restaurant for carryout (or dine in), think about ensuring that lines are under cover, or that your guests can return to their cars and you text when their meal or a table is ready.

## CONCLUSION

Regardless of how you choose to promote your take out, it's important to market it and make it part of your COVID-19 response. Target making take out at least 20% of your revenue plan for the next year or more. Get to know your area and your customers even better than you did before the pandemic.

Figure out what they like, what they are looking for and where they are looking. If you catch customers where they're comfortable – you'll be able to increase your guest checks. Make it simple for your customers to support you: take away is an easy win. Call ahead, trunk service, delivery, pick up windows all make a customer feel comfortable with this new experience. If you can personalize the experience with a little "thank you" note for good customers – you'll really take this to the next level.

Finally, keep up your marketing, consumers are more likely to perceive brands who advertise during downturns as leaders who are more stable and reliable, which could mean a big boost for your business both now and after the pandemic passes.

