

Restaurant Technology in the Post-COVID-19 World

COVID-19 has shown a harsh reality of not only what impact a pandemic can cause on the food service industry and economy, but also a glimpse of what the world is going to look like when we emerge from this. Restaurants and food service establishments are emerging into a different operational and technology landscape and post-COVID-19 will be a drastically different environment for your customers, employees, business and industry as a whole. **Begin thinking about the below topics to help rebound and profit post-COVID-19 and to be better prepared to address the objections, concerns, needs and demands of an uneasy consumer focused on personal safety.**

CUSTOMER-FACING RESTAURANT TECHNOLOGY

What	Why it's needed	Technology/Methods to explore
Contactless Payment Solutions	Provides no person-to-person transfer and mitigates the chance of spreading germs. Establishments that do not embrace and promote contactless payment options will find themselves behind the operations-technology curve.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EMV • Tap and pay • Mobile wallets • Other contactless payment options
Delivery & Customer Pickup	When food is consumed in a restaurant, there is a short labor chain as food goes straight from the kitchen onto a plate and given to the guest within a short period of time. With delivery and pickup, the labor chain is extended, and food is prepared, transferred to packaging, bagged, and then stored in a location somewhere in the restaurant for either a driver or customer to pick up.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some form of locker system that maintains the food at a proper temperature until the time of pickup. • System that can track, secure, and record who picked up the food and the time of pickup. • The ability to track and ensure that the food was within established temperature and storage parameters will help restaurants ensure top quality and minimize potential foodborne issues.
Fine Dining & Table Service Menus	It has been clearly established that germs can exist on plastic surfaces for several days. Newly educated customers will be uneasy about using menus that have been cycled through dozens of people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Options for guests to view menus on their own device. • Leverage digital menu board technology. In some cases, this may mean an alteration in the current serving model. • The development of new hardware that allows server to bring a large digital menu to a table for ordering.

EMPLOYEE-FACING RESTAURANT TECHNOLOGY

Employees will expect to feel safe when returning to their jobs. They will expect a higher level of protection and assurance of safety measures to allow them to get their minds off health concerns and back to providing excellent service to returning customers.

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Daily Health Checks (Temperature)	Regular health and temperature checks of employees (at least in the early days after regulations are lifted) and providing face masks to uneasy employees will help promote a healthy workplace and demonstrate an establishment's commitment to safety.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contactless or minimal contact thermometers. • Proper face masks. • For technology developers, development of a timeclock that has the ability to take a temperature, possibly through some biometric means as part of the clocking in process, with the ability to alert a manager should anyone clock in with a high temperature.
Anti-Microbial POS Screens and other device surfaces	Employees interact on a regular basis with POS systems and other types of technology during the day. Many of these surfaces are plastic and allow germs to survive on them for extended periods of time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anti-microbial POS screens. • Improved and frequent cleaning habits of high traffic touchpoints to avoid spreading germs. • Further development into voice ordering capabilities in order to eliminate the need of POS touchscreens.
Checklists & Alerting	Food service employee safety has focused more on slips, falls, cuts, burns, etc. Post-COVID-19, employee safety will need to also focus on safety from germs on surface and contagion from fellow employees and customers. Employees need to understand not only their right, but responsibility, to work in a safe environment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Automated checklist functionality and re-working tasks to ensure that new cleanliness and monitoring standards are reflected on the list of items to be performed. • Adding key sanitation items to your inventory, such as sanitary wipes, hand sanitizer, latex gloves, masks, safety glasses, etc.

BUSINESS MODEL CHANGES

Restaurant customers and employees will be much more wary and demanding in regard to their perception of safety and cleanliness, not only from businesses, but also from their merchants, and their merchants, and their merchants. Everyone should expect that the next level of scrutiny as it relates to restaurants will be food quality and the supply chain.

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Supply Chain Visibility (GS1 Standards)	The goal of the GS1 initiative is to provide a method for tracking and reporting on all products from their point of creation (or growth) to the production facility, to the warehouse, to the broadliner, and finally to the restaurant. By identifying each container with a unique code (GTIN), a product can be tracked down to the farmer or field in the event that a foodborne illness is identified.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The technology to accomplish this exists today, but the implementation and start-up time and costs to do so has scared away all but the most vigilant. • It simply requires significant effort on the part of the food service operators and the distributors to agree to conform to the standards, configure their systems to support GTIN numbers and to deploy. • For more information on the GS1 standards, visit https://www.gs1.org/standards.
Greater emphasis on Food Safety Scoring and Cleanliness Standards	There will most likely be an increased scrutiny and online visibility of a restaurant's adherence to food safety and cleanliness. This may be imposed and enforced by the FDA, or possibly even a third-party or private organization that publishes this information to the public through established social channels, such as Facebook and Yelp.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It will be imperative to respond quickly and decisively to any concerns raised through any channel in order to avoid negative perceptions of unsanitary and unhealthy conditions. • In the past, the only way the public knew of code violations was when a restaurant was closed. The idea of a numeric score could be enacted that would be publicly shared creating a quantitative measurement of safety compliance against all other establishments.
Accelerated migration from on-premise to off-premise	Those who offer off-premise service (delivery, catering, or pickup) are likely to rebound faster. For those who heavily depend on on-premise service, the return to profitability is likely to be longer. Businesses need to support an omni-channel sales strategy to promote growth.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redesign of menus to ensure more "transport-friendly" menu items, packaging, and an internal, external, or hybrid delivery strategy. • Assess an economical business model. For example, assess delivering orders yourself to avoid the 25%+ fees from delivery providers, or consider a banded strategy where you make the local deliveries and only use third parties for the longer deliveries.

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Safety over Efficiency	For years, the industry has looked for ways to be more efficient and improve speed-of-service, labor efficiency, and throughput in lines and drive-thrus. There may be a softening of this stance with the emphasis being placed on safety, cleanliness, and hygiene even at the expense of speed and efficiency.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cleaning of a credit card when handed to an employee and the cleaning of it upon return. • Cleaning of a POS terminal between transactions or when a different employee uses it. • Changing of gloves between customers or the regular use of hand sanitizer between customers. • Sanitizing trays prior to delivering it to the customer. • Placing items like napkins and condiments behind the counter and requiring customers to ask for them. • While these tasks will slightly increase delivery times and speed of service, the perception of this level of care and focus on cleanliness should be well received by most, if not all, customers.
Restaurant Design Changes	COVID-19 will have a longer lasting impact on the table service segment. While some will come back as loyal customers and a show of support, it is expected that a greater number will not, at least initially. Table service restaurants need to look at ways to manage the objections that will likely be raised by customers and do their best to address them immediately.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased spacing between tables and/or breaking up larger rooms into smaller sections. • Greater access and visibility or hygienic products such as wipes and sanitizers on tables and in public areas. • Cutlery, glassware, and plates cleaned at tableside or brought to the table packaged. • Removal of condiments and provide in packets or on demand. • Servers behind the counters in restaurants that offer buffets or salad bars. • Coverings over meal plates that are removed tableside. • Pay-at-table functionality to avoid passing a credit card to a server. • Offering e-receipts in lieu of paper. • Digital menu boards or tablets with anti-microbial screens in lieu of paper menus.

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