

Will Contactless Take-Out and Curbside Options Stick Around?



Everyone's talking about the 'new normals' ushered in by the coronavirus pandemic, but how long is this socially-distant standard going to remain prominent?

In response to the right-now moment, restaurants are offering services that quell the risks and fears associated with the virus. But one thing that COVID-19 has shown the world is that changes happen in the blink of an eye. There's no telling what is coming next - or even when it's coming.

While contactless take-out and curbside options are the baselines of the restaurant business at the moment, how will this trend evolve over time? Let's dig into the issue to get a better understanding of what's to come.

Consumers aren't Ready to Embrace the Old Ways Just Yet

One of the biggest commercial shifts that the coronavirus initiated was a never-before-seen set of consumer behaviors.

As soon as the virus first swept across the United States, even the everyday restaurant-goers became wary of the unknown threats. Even in the states where restaurants had the okay to stay open, business was surely slow. Some eateries even closed up shop because things were too difficult to keep up with.

Now that we're well into the second phase of things where re-openings are slowly happening all over the country as bans are lifted, restaurants are still quite far off from the full-houses or evening rushes they were used to.

Even as things are on the climb, not everyone feels comfortable enough to 'go with the flow' 2019-style. A recent study showed that consumers are still reluctant to return to restaurants that have reopened their dining rooms. 87% of citizens said they wouldn't be going to any restaurants the entire month of June (and potentially longer) for fear of coronavirus exposure.

However, 25% of respondents said that they would order food via food delivery apps. Obviously, restaurants are placing their bets on alternative solutions to the traditional dine-in experience.

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Touchless Options Securing Business

The silver lining of the restaurant business is contactless service. Calling in for take-out, ordering a meal from DoorDash or UberEats, and curbside models are funneling business to restaurants.

These options mitigate the risks most citizens associate with COVID-19 transmission as they provide an escape from high-traffic areas and multi-use items, such as silverware and menus. Thankfully, it's working. People are making orders again, business isn't halted, and many restaurants are taking things one step at a time.

Implications of Physical Space

While the immediate moment seems to be as under control as possible amid these circumstances, what should restaurants do to prepare for the future? Considering the current contact-free direction things are going, these decisions will surely impact restaurant leasing.

A large number of restaurant businesses will likely be reducing their space requirements as indoor dining rooms aren't racking up profits.

Outdoor dining areas will also thrive as they are better equipped to deal with COVID-19 concerns. Expanding the open-air dining options will make sit-down service doable, regardless of the coming ups and downs.

Some restaurants may even go completely remote by embracing the 'ghost kitchen' trend. These are eateries that are kitchen-only, where food is prepared and delivered via take-out services. This model cuts back on the overhead costs, helping to balance out the bills during this slow season.

As we can see, the contactless restaurant approach doesn't seem to be falling out of favor anytime soon.

