



Streamlining off-premise order fulfillment without overwhelming staff

How using data, delivery partners and the right equipment can ensure order fulfillment without overwhelming the kitchen

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The way consumers enjoy restaurant food has changed due to COVID-19 and state restrictions closing many dining rooms. Instead of viewing restaurants as venues for dining-out occasions, consumers are turning to them for takeout and delivery—and the meals they're ordering go well beyond pizza to include just about everything. Today's consumers still enjoy casual-dining and upscale-dining experiences, but instead of sitting at a restaurant table, they're often gathering around their own kitchen tables.

Technomic's *2018 Takeout & Off-Premise Consumer Trend Report* reports that 60% of restaurant operators said they received more takeout orders in 2018 than they did in 2016. What's more, 32% of consumers said that compared to two years ago, they are ordering carryout more, and 21% are more frequently having their meals delivered. And with restaurants being closed for dine-in business, off-premise orders are even more prevalent this year.

This uptick in off-premise orders is big business: According to Technomic's *2018 Next-Level Off-Premise Report*, off-premise restaurant sales totaled \$138 billion that year—38% of all restaurant sales. With coronavirus-related dining room closures, that number is likely to be much higher this year, even after dining rooms begin to reopen.

But for restaurants, an increase in takeout or delivery orders can be a problem—if a kitchen is designed to handle a certain number of customers (i.e. those dining in), how can restaurants plan to accommodate all of that business—and more—and maintain efficiencies and meet new health and safety standards?

OUTSOURCING DELIVERY

One challenge of increased off-premise business is that it can put a lot of stress on restaurants. If an operator hasn't yet dealt with the volume of delivery orders coming down the pipeline, it can be tricky to know how to accommodate those production demands.

To help ease the burden, restaurants can partner with third-party delivery providers, which offer the manpower and delivery vehicles to get food to customers. This way, operators don't have to worry about making sure every order is delivered p. According to Technomic's data, sales made through third-party delivery services reached \$9.8 billion in 2018. With numbers like that, operators would be wise to add delivery and takeout rather than resist the changing tide—and with help from third parties, it's easier than ever to do so. If outsourcing, retailers should establish appropriate expectations and protocols to preserve food quality and safety and protect their brand's reputation.



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UPDATING AND UPGRADING KITCHEN EQUIPMENT

Making sure the kitchen is prepared is crucial to ensuring the ability to fulfill a large volume of orders. The large footprint and limited capability of standard stoves and ovens means restaurants are restricted when it comes to increasing production. According to Technomic's *2018 Next-Level Off-Premise Report*, 52% of operators say delivery sales have increased in the past year, with the average increase being 20%. Without adequate equipment, ensuring these orders are prepared in a timely, well-planned manner can be difficult or even impossible because a 20% increase in delivery sales significantly impacts the normal kitchen operations.

With an efficient upgrade, production levels can increase significantly, ensuring all customers are well-served and won't experience any delays in the speed of service. With efficient equipment, kitchens can decrease ticket time and get off premise orders ready to go in less time. Orders prepared quickly helps keep customers happy, and happy customers give better ratings. And those good ratings boost business even more—Toast's *2019 Restaurant Success Report* notes that 35% of diners say they're influenced by online reviews when choosing a restaurant. In short, better ratings translate into more business.

Combi ovens, such as those produced by industry leader RATIONAL, allow restaurants to do more with less. For instance, their small footprint (less than 11 square feet) gives restaurants the capacity to prepare a lot of food for both dine-in and off-premise, in a short amount of time. They also can fry, roast, steam, grill, bake, poach and more—perfect for fulfilling just about any order. From iCookingSuite, which allows the kitchen team to select the results they desire, load items and be done, to iProductionManager, which can prepare several kinds of food at the same time, the iCombi Pro® is a restaurant's greatest assistant, making the kitchen more efficient so customers stay satisfied.



Restaurant owners can rely on the culinary team to produce consistent results, no matter the employee's skill level. The intuitive touch screen on the iCombi Pro makes it easy to produce signature menu items in a flash.

Recirculating vents make it easy to add kitchen capacity without investing in additional hood space. The RATIONAL UltraVent, for instance, absorbs and dissipates steam, and the UltraVent Plus combines condensation technology with special filters to capture vapors, grease, and smoke that can build up while grilling and roasting. When these vents are atop combi ovens, even small kitchens can fearlessly expand their food production to accommodate multiple service points, increasing work space and line efficiency.



HOLDING TIMES AND CATERING HELP

According to Technomic's *2018 Takeout & Off-Premise Consumer Trend Report*, some of the reasons consumers don't often order food for takeout or delivery include that the food is fresher when they dine in, the food quality is better when they dine in and that delivery takes too long. Using a combi oven can help prevent all of these issues, too. With combi ovens, food is cooked much more quickly, so kitchen staff can pull together orders in a speedy manner and get them on the road. What's more, cooking results are superior with a combi oven, as the cooking environment automatically adjusts to produce desired results—crispier crusts, crunchier veggies and more tender meats. The bottom line: fresher, better tasting food leaves the kitchen.

Combi ovens also can cook and hold, meaning that food can be prepared—even overnight—and safely held. This enables increased prep volume and can help with catering orders. Kitchen staff can get to the restaurant in the morning and prepare larger food items with the combi oven and the combi will hold the food at the perfect temperature until it needs to be served. And because the oven also manages humidity levels and other environmental factors, food remains fresher than food held in warming containers or under heat lamps, both of which decrease food quality.

Using combi ovens in restaurant kitchens also helps ensure consistency. Because combi ovens adjust their cooking environment automatically, foods that typically require turning or flipping, such as pan-fried or grilled steaks, don't need to be flipped or turned.

Combi ovens give restaurants the ability to produce a lot more food in a small amount of space, with minimal staff training. For businesses that are seeing a spike in off-premise ordering, a combi oven is an excellent asset, ensuring every order is cooked perfectly and quickly off to customers.



GETTING STARTED IN THE KITCHEN

Managing a steep increase in off-premise orders can be tricky at even the most established restaurants. While the coronavirus situation accelerated this trend, it's clear that customers now want and expect their favorite restaurants to offer pick-up and delivery. These purchase options are crucial for restaurants that want to stay competitive in their markets. Combi ovens have the ability to assist a modified kitchen team and manage the high demands of off-premise business. To learn more about how combi ovens can help streamline off-premise order fulfillment, [visit rational-online.com](https://www.rational-online.com).