

Predictions for 2021

The Future of Independent Restaurants: Arlene Spiegel, FCSI, founder and president, Arlene Spiegel & Associates

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Something that was going on before the pandemic and that has since accelerated is this shift into looking at venues and outlets more as suppliers, almost like grocerants. I was working on two concepts like this before the pandemic. I see a growing hybridization, or merging [of concepts to become] fast-casual restaurant, grocery, even hardware and convenience store, all in one space.

These are what I call “lifestyle concepts” — they have all the essentials that people need in their lives. They have been very successful in urban markets and popular among single, young professionals and office workers, and even married couples with kids. These types of hybrid “suppliers” are in the best position to have longevity and the flexibility to adapt and remain profitable if something like a pandemic hits and indoor dining is suddenly banned. When that happens, they can expand grocery and not miss a beat. [As a business consultant], my work has been to drive concept development or help existing concepts engineer more flexibility into the design of their space. I have also been working with clients to rethink their outdoor spaces availability, not just for outdoor dining, but also to facilitate pickup and delivery easier.

Many of the restaurants I am working with now are also looking into converting some or all of their kitchens into quasi-ghost kitchens where they can prepare meals with more consistency and in higher-volumes, not just for their own clientele, but also to supply other institutions or organizations that have



a high demand for feeding, like schools, senior living facilities and even government organizations. I see restaurants [of the future] being diversified suppliers, which means we need to rethink the way we design spaces. We need to think about what elements we keep and what needs to change and building in that flexibility so whatever challenge arises in the future, [the operator] can address it and not have to go out of business. ●