

Retailing Your Restaurant Products Post Pandemic

By Howard Riell

Restaurants have been selling a wide variety of their food and other products at retail for years. For nearly two decades, national chain concepts have made available their branded products in the supermarket aisles.

The Restaurant as Grocerant

“During the pandemic, restaurants realized that there was an opportunity to become grocerants by supplying many retail items to their customers along with ordered meals,” explains Arlene Spiegel, president of Arlene Spiegel & Associates Inc. in New York City. “In addition, platforms like Goldbelly, an online marketplace for regional and artisanal foods, were seeking independent restaurants to offer their customers local menu favorites.”

One of Spiegel’s clients, Antun’s Catering in Queens, New York, all but shut down during the pandemic, but its loyal customers kept asking for its Caribbean food. “Micky King, the owner, started preparing meals to go,” Spiegel says. “After realizing the demand was consistent, we put together a complete retail line of foods under the label Caribbean Plate. Mickey prepares the meals in a certified kitchen, and is ready to market refrigerated and frozen meals under that brand.”

Pricing and Distribution

When selling into a retail market channel, Spiegel advises operators carefully consider every cost – ingredients, container/glass packaging, labels, shipping containers, and shipping. She also reminds operators that “grocers like to mark-up items 40%, so back into the wholesale price you need so you can make a profit, typically 10%.”

“Distribution channels will vary based on the market position of the type of products being offered, Spiegel says. “If your product is organic, natural, gluten-free, dairy-free and kosher it will find a home in retailers like Whole Foods and Health Nuts. Distributors like United Natural Foods, Inc. (UNFI) a Providence, Rhode Island-based natural and organic food distribution company carries products for this niche.” She recommends working with local and regional distributors who will introduce your products to their customers.