

The Takeout-Focused Future

By Rita Nergrete-Rousseau



Last year posed challenges never before encountered in the foodservice industry. As America went into lockdown when the pandemic arrived last March, restaurant operators got creative just to survive.

Redefining and Reinventing Full Service

Full-service restaurants have been “trying every which way they can to keep cash flowing in,” says Arlene Spiegel, FCSI, who heads New York-based restaurant and hospitality consulting firm **Arlene Spiegel & Associates**. “They all hate it, but they know they have to change.”

Spiegel predicts that in coming years, delivery will represent at least a quarter of sales for all restaurants other than fine-dining places. In a future in which flexibility and quick pivots will be key, she advises FSRs to reengineer their menus to concentrate on the best sellers and items that travel well. “Really rethink your use of equipment, space and labor,” she emphasizes.

Spiegel notes that as foodservice has further embraced takeout and delivery, the salvation of many FSRs has been off-premises sales of alcoholic beverages (in jurisdictions where it’s allowed). “Being able to sell a bottle of wine or a signature margarita has been really helpful, because margins on alcohol are huge,” she says.

Tailoring menus to match the adult beverages provides another opportunity for differentiation.

But to-go alcohol sales also imply the need for new equipment and supplies as well as subtle infrastructure changes. “Packaging and delivery systems for beverages will have to change,” Spiegel says. “Dispensing equipment for 100 mojitos to be bottled – that’s something that restaurants have never had to deal with before. Labeling equipment for labels with ingredient lists, no matter what you sell off-premises. So many restaurants are boosting sales by selling their signature salad dressings or marinades, thereby blending foodservice and retail, and becoming *grocerants*.” **FE&S**