

THE WHOLE KIT AND CABOODLE

Restaurant meal kits have rocketed to prominence during the pandemic. And the outlines of how melding them into an existing operation, though potentially profitable, can prove tricky.

Has the Covid-19 pandemic changed the way we eat? “At the beginning of the pandemic people who never thought of cooking decided to try their hand,” says **Arlene Spiegel FCSI**, president of Arlene Spiegel & Associates in New York City. “Not comfortable with searching for recipes or feeling overwhelmed at the supermarket, they opted for meal kits. It was fun and provided a meal solution.” To create a successful meal kit program, menu options need to be flexible, customizable and fit a range of lifestyles. The most successful ones offer daily, weekly and monthly scheduling and an option to pause or opt out on any day. Popular programs offer a choice of a full day of meals, including, breakfast, lunch, dinner, snacks and shakes, Spiegel explains. “They provide simple, easy to understand and execute recipes that will provide a feeling of



accomplishment by the home cook.”

Operational Considerations

Restaurateurs planning their meal kit program need to consider several factors:

MARKETING

Social media and third-party delivery platforms are “a natural way to reach the population to introduce the offering,” Spiegel says.

“Operators can expect to lose money until they hit critical mass to cover labor, food cost, and delivery fees.”

EQUIPMENT

Kitchen production may require the addition of equipment. The good news, according to Spiegel, is that meal kits/delivery programs can be prepared during off-hours. “Since the recipes and packaging may be different than a restaurant’s regular offering, it is best

to prepare the kits when the kitchen is not used for regular service.”

POTENTIAL PITFALLS

Incomplete planning may, unsurprisingly, result in problems.

Some of the mistakes that restaurants make in preparing meal kits, Spiegel says, include:

- Making the recipes too complex.
- Using too many ingredients.
- Including recipes that require special equipment.
- Not including a picture of the finished plate to guide the cook.
- Failing to include portion guides, leaving the cook confused about how many people the recipe will feed.

LOOKING AHEAD

How will meal kits fare once the pandemic is a memory?

Spiegel suggests that in the months and years to come, cooking engagement will decline as people “feel more comfortable ordering in fully prepared meals from their favorite restaurants.” ■

