

To Take Out Or Not Take Out

Whether you have been an operator for years or are just getting started in our industry you all have something in common. You want to establish your business in the area you're located, and have a pleasurable and profitable experience for as long as possible. Despite the fact that a small percentage of businesses last only a short time, there are many, many more that pass from one generation to another over decades.

After grand opening and years passing, you become known for a myriad of reasons. Maybe it's the price or size of your drinks. On the other hand it could be the ambiance or your location. Usually though, it's the quality or quantity of your food. But whatever the reasons are that people come to your business, you want them to take home with them a memorable experience that will hopefully bring them back.

So what about those patrons who want what you are selling but are unable to come and sit through the entire experience of ordering and waiting. The diversity or uniqueness of your menu is essentially what brings customers to your business in the first place, but it's not really the printed word that draws them in the second time, it's what comes out of your kitchen. That is what they all want. Where am I going with this?

Recently, I was on a trip whose secondary purpose was to visit as many restaurants as time would allow, talk to the owners and collect "take out" menus. We know that these menus are really nothing more than a miniature version of the real thing, but, none the less, it represents your offerings to those who want what you sell but can't be there.

Of the 25 sit down bar/restaurants I visited, only 16 had take out menus, 5 had excuses and 4 simply didn't have one. The ones who interested me the most were those who did not have one nor did they understand why they should have one. I couldn't understand how these operators could work as hard as they did, operate what appeared to be successful businesses and were not interested in or did not appreciate the value of "take out" business.

According to a recently published study by the national restaurant association, approximately 5% of all sales in restaurants with checks \$15.00 and under were attributed to take out. In restaurants with checks \$15.00 to \$24.00, the total take out sales were 3% and restaurants with checks \$25.00 and over, 2%. It may sound like small percentages, but in terms of dollars, that is revenue none of you can afford to lose. So why not do what you can to maximize those numbers?

In reality, there is no excuse to not have and not nurture your take out business. It doesn't matter if you serve burgers and fries or carefully prepared recipes. The fact that your business has a customer base at all indicates that you have customers who may want to enjoy your offerings off premises. So, don't deny them that opportunity. If you have a takeout menu printed and laying out front, be sure that your customers get one. Those menus should not just be for those who ask for one, but for everyone who comes through the door. If you don't have a takeout menu, this is your wake up call. Figure out a way

to reproduce your regular menu and have it available to all of your customers. If nothing else, it serves as a great marketing tool for future business.

How many times have you picked up a meal and brought it home from your favorite place? Take out is as American as coconut custard pie, so if you want to get your 5% share of the pie, be sure to push your take out menu.