



2021 TOP RESTAURANT TRENDS

Read more in our 2021 STATE OF THE RESTAURANT INDUSTRY



2020 was a year unlike any other for the foodservice industry. It tested the limits of operator innovation, accelerated trends, and confirmed that customers miss their restaurant experiences.

The following food and menu trends didn't offset the industry's devastation; it's down nearly \$240 billion in sales and nearly 2.5 million employees are still out of work. But they do show restaurateurs' resiliency, innovation and commitment. The following were the top operating means by which restaurants survived 2020, from a survey of 6,000 operators and consumer preferences from a survey of 1,000 adults.

1. Streamlined menus

Fullservice operators got lean fast, reducing inventories and developing menu items they could make well with a smaller staff. These items had to travel well and be what customers craved. Expect menus to stay trimmed in coming months.

2. Off-premises takes precedence

Prior to the pandemic, 80% of fullservice restaurant traffic was on-premises. Then in March 2020, most restaurants were forced to shut down on-premises dining. In what's likely the fastest pivot in industry history, focus quickly shifted to off-premises, via takeout and delivery.

3. Blended meals, a team effort

Homebound, customers like to mix up meals—maybe

make the main dish but order appetizers, sides or dessert from a restaurant. Millennials are especially big fans of the blended meal.

4. Bundled meals? Considered deals!

Why do any cooking? Customers' restaurant choices can be influenced by the offer of a bundled meal that perhaps includes an appetizer, entrée and dessert in either family packs or for individual meals.

5. Meal kits make cooking fun

More than half of adults surveyed say they'd likely purchase a meal kit if it was offered by one of their favorite restaurants. That percentage rises to 75% for both millennials and Gen Z adults. Kits package pre-measured ingredients and

instructions to make the restaurant meal at home.

6. Meal subscriptions

Customers sign up to get meals during the month for pickup or delivery—at a discounted price. More than half of consumers surveyed say they'd sign up if their favorite places offered this option.

7. Selling groceries

Seems like anything that saves a trip gets a thumbs up. More than half of consumers surveyed would buy groceries (fresh, uncooked food items such as meat, produce, dairy, bread or pasta) if restaurants offered them.

8. Alcohol to go

A third of off-premises customers (ages 21+) say they included an alcoholic beverage

with a takeout or delivery order since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak, and they'll continue to in the future.

9. Comfort foods

Consumers say menus that offer a good selection of comfort foods influence their restaurant choice. From haute to homey, a third of fine dining operators surveyed are adding more comfort items—think burgers, pot pies, lasagna, soups, curries, sandwiches, pizza and noodle dishes.

10. Healthy and diet-specific food

To the same degree the availability of comfort foods influences restaurant choice, so do healthful menu options. Diet-specific items (gluten-free, vegan, etc.) however, are less important right now.



What Customers Crave. Each year, the National Restaurant Association publishes its annual What's Hot Culinary Forecast to identify the menu trends to watch in the coming year, as identified in a survey of American Culinary Federation chefs.

This year, to identify what's *truly selling best* during the pandemic, we asked restaurant operators for their single most popular menu item right now.

The vast majority say their current top-selling food and beverage items were already on menus prior to the coronavirus outbreak.

2020 TOP MENU SELLERS

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Top Sellers: Fullservice

(Fine Dining, Family Dining, Casual Dining)

1. Burgers
2. Seafood items
3. Pizza
4. Steak
5. Chicken items (excl. wings)
6. Breakfast items
7. Pasta
8. Mexican food
9. Sandwiches / Subs / Wraps
10. Chicken wings

Top Sellers: Limited Service

(Quickservice, Fast Casual, Coffee & Snack)

1. Sandwiches / Subs / Wraps
2. Pizza
3. Burgers
4. Chicken items (excl. wings)
5. Ice cream / cookies / cakes
6. Baked goods
7. Breakfast items
8. Mexican food
9. BBQ items
10. Seafood items

METHODOLOGY

National Household Survey, 2020: The National Restaurant Association commissioned Engine to conduct an online survey of 1,000 adults in December 2020, asking questions about their personal finances and interaction with restaurants.

Restaurant Trends Survey, 2020: The National Restaurant Association conducted an online survey of 6,000 restaurant owners and operators in November-December 2020, asking questions about their business and operating environments.