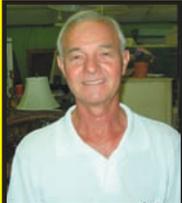


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"On The Town"

By Dr. Richard J. Martorano Ed.D

Eat in? Take out Or Delivered?

Food delivery options have become too numerous for restaurants. Over the past few months in Volusia County and surrounding areas, everything from fast food hamburger stands to epicurean style restaurants now have added food delivery options to its menu. Fortunately or unfortunately as you view it – It has become a fact in America that “consumers love food delivery”. The only problem is that restaurants hate it.

Restaurants increasingly dependent on third-party sellers such as DoorDash, Grubhub or Uber Treats, to take orders and deliver the food. Those platforms generally take a 10 to 25% cut of the sale. Demographics are showing that 85% of consumers are not willing to pay more than *five dollars* for restaurant delivery. Because of that, restaurants would have to raise prices substantially to recoup those costs. They don't want to do that!

A few restaurants have resisted the trend to have delivery options. Locally the one of five hundred Texas Roadhouse Steakhouse chain stopped the delivery test after consumers complained that “the food quality wasn't good and that the prices were higher than in the restaurant”. And unfortunately, they were posting this on the web. Trade magazines from the hospitality industry are saying that “delivery services for food orders are beginning to equate to almost a third of restaurant business, and the market is likely to grow from the current 25 billion to 62 billion in 2022.

Profitability in getting orders to their customer's door is an expensive and a crucial puzzle that some restaurants haven't yet solved. “Ordering take out” is a “habit that can quickly set you back hundreds of dollars a month” says Joe McGauley of “Thrillist.com”. For instance - the average household in Seattle, spends \$2,520 per year on take-out and food deliveries. Convenience comes at a cost writes Melissa McCart in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. Locally, delivery companies add an “up charge” on top of the usual \$3-\$6 delivery fee along with additional pricing at peak hours and special events. In Pittsburgh, where the typical family spends \$199 a month on delivery, “It is becoming common to see half empty dining rooms” even as the staff races to keep up with delivery orders.

After speaking with a couple owners of local restaurants, the accord of their observation is that: “transformation of a restaurant from a social sit down space to just

a kitchen that takes orders is changing the way we eat”. “A beautifully plated food dish must now fit into packaging that can be transported across town without losing its flavor. Culinary aesthetics may now take a backseat to customer convenience.

Unfortunately in our on-demand society and those “lazy and hungry among us”, delivery apps are nothing short of a miracle” said *Clint Rainey in the New York magazine*. A local owner of a top-end restaurant told me “in my restaurant I enjoy cooking, hosting and entertaining my guest. Delivery services have taken away the personal contact that has been a major quality for the success of my restaurant”.

Unfortunately the pay is meager for delivery workers. Data has proven that only 27% of customers of delivery services tip. Because of this, finding and retaining good delivery help is becoming a problem. Restaurants can't afford to pay delivery personnel in addition to the other expenses incurred by delivery.

As you can imagine there are now organizations that watch for flukes or mishaps of each restaurant making sure that you get all the chicken nuggets you ordered and that you meat has been cooked to your satisfaction. Also: was the ordertaker over the telephone kind, courteous and understandable? From the survey you were asked to complete, these organizations will review and evaluate the restaurant and post it to on the Internet. One survey I previewed stated that “if you don't take the survey it implies a negative result”. I didn't like that at all!

I live in a private golf club and gated community with an excellent clubhouse restaurant. The club has initiated a service that will bring a staff member to meet you in the parking lot and deliver your phoned in order. They are doing this to be competitive with other private clubs and restaurants in town- that deliver. A nice convenience but I like the personal service and the food presentation that has always been excellent at the club.

I live on one maxim: Everything must change nothing stays the same. It seems to be happening faster now than in the past.

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