

Competitors Are Driving Off with Your Sales

Invest in takeout and delivery options to increase interest and profit



Consumers look to restaurants for new food and beverage experiences. Not only are Fast Casual customers craving distinctive flavors on the menu, but they also want to enjoy those menu items from the comfort of their homes.

Fast Casual operators address the desire for high-quality takeout and delivery in a variety of ways. A Fast Casual concept in California now offers a meal kit subscription for their customers; and the meal kit subscription industry is valued at about \$1.5 billion. Leading Fast Casual chains also have opened delivery-only spin-offs with limited menus to better maintain food integrity. Regardless of format, Fast Casual customers expect restaurants to offer delivery and carryout services. With Quick Service Restaurants still competing for takeout foot traffic, adopting a to-go program that showcases high quality, on-demand options will help put your Fast Casual restaurant on the map.

Deliver High Quality Food and Service

Diners expect takeout and delivery options to taste the same as dine-in occasions, which gives Fast Casual operators the chance to optimize to-go menus to maintain food integrity. Customers judge value based off of a number of factors including great service, variety, and ability to customize. Amanda Topper, Associate Director of Foodservice Research at Mintel, further explains the balancing act operators are tasked with when it comes to takeout and delivery – “Consumers care about quality, premium food, and affordability. Convenience is also nice to have, but some of those other factors rank a bit higher.”

“We’re not seeing a ton of restaurants take on delivery themselves, aside from pizza chains. Most use 3rd party services, but some leading Fast Casual restaurants use their own employees for deliveries, so they can better control food quality and efficiency.”

– Amanda Topper, Mintel, Associate Director of Foodservice Research

Over 30% of Fast Casual customers expect to-go amenities including call-ahead ordering, online ordering, mobile ordering, and delivery services. Some customers will choose to go elsewhere if a Fast Casual restaurant does not have those features. The good news for Fast Casual operators is: 60% of customers 25-34 and 50% of customers 35-44 are likely to order delivery if it is offered.

Offer Up Menu Items On Demand

While offering a delivery service is an important sales booster, operators should also focus on simplifying carryout options. Home Meal Replacements (HMRs) can be effective on-demand offerings for busy consumers. In addition to the traditional just-made carryout menu options, there are refrigerated meals, frozen meals, and prepared meal kits that require minimal time for the customer to recreate at home. Interest in HMRs is strong across dayparts, particularly at dinnertime. As Fast Casual operators continue to add HMRs as options, demand is expected to grow even more.

Non-traditional dayparts also have seen a boost in carryout. Topper describes the consumer mindset about snacking – “I think it’s important to consider that there are a wide variety of food options that consumers look for during snack occasions. They need for them to be portable and easy to take on the go.” As snacking becomes more ubiquitous, operators might want to add a ‘snacks’ or a ‘small plates’ section on to-go menus.

51% of consumers are interested in buying snacks at restaurants to take home.

Fast Casual customers are open to many different snacks and HMRs, but pizza seems to appeal as both a refrigerated meal and a popular snack. A salad is also a viable option for customers, and their speedy preparation is helpful for both consumers and employees.

Be Productive with Prep and Packaging

Off-premise eating occasions are on-trend, especially with younger generations. In order to keep up with the demand for high-quality food, operators should consider packaging that maintains food quality and keeps up with sustainability, but also displays the brand. Around 40% of customers use to-go containers to serve, store, and reheat food, so a Fast Casual restaurant’s brand has the potential to be prominently displayed should customers decide to use that package at work or elsewhere.

“It’s important that the packaging is both easy to transport and easy to hold. Also having options that are suitable for cup holders is beneficial for people during their commutes.”

– Amanda Topper, Mintel, Associate Director of Foodservice Research

Plus, superior to-go packages that are branded and eco-friendly make leftovers more attractive, which reduces overall waste. Operators can capitalize on leftovers by selling larger meals at higher price points, pointing out that these menu items are meant to be eaten in multiple sittings.

At Fast Casual restaurants, 39% of orders are carryout orders and 11% of orders are for delivery. If Fast Casual operators choose to forego to-go options, they are missing out on a massive opportunity, especially since operators across segments are taking the initiative. As more locations offer takeout and delivery services, capture sales with high-quality food and beverages, on-demand options, as well as recognizable and practical packaging.

All trademarks are owned by Société des Produits, Nestlé S.A., Vevey, Switzerland, or used with permission.