

The Great Restaurant Reset

**THE FUTURE OF ENGAGING
FOOD EXPERIENCES**



“There is a unique opportunity these days for restaurants to connect with existing fans or tap into new ones through exclusive items and services that they may not have offered before.”

-Emily Hamilton, NELSON Worldwide

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Challah
\$11.00

XOXO
\$11.00

Sour Cherry & Miso Hot Sauce
\$11.00



Jerk Hot Sauce
\$11.00

Wildair Olive Oil
\$14.00

Koji-Miso Yuzu Vinaigrette
\$14.00

#1 *Brand Extensions*

Adjusting to stay-at-home orders, many restaurants began packaging signature items such as secret sauces, spices, and other branded merchandise, allowing their consumers to take a piece of the brand home with them. DIY meal and cocktail-making also became a popular way to connect with people at home. As diners become more accustomed to dining in, it's never a better time for a restaurant to develop a brand extension that adds a totally new point of engagement and better yet, brand awareness to new and existing fans.

Blending restaurant and CPG, brands may consider dedicating a corner of a restaurant to retail, showcasing these branded products.

Wildair NYC

Normally a casual place to eat and drink, Wildair located in the LES neighborhood of Manhattan, New York quickly shifted its focus, and began packaging signature items such as their famous cherry miso hot sauce and chili oil so customers can purchase the products for delivery or pickup online. Growing in popularity, the restaurant has added a micro-market where loyal fans can stock up on pantry staples.



“De-risking the trial experience will be a key driver for capturing new potential consumers helping brands to build trust and credentials with reassurances of quality, process, and ingredients.”
-Kelsey Chessey, NELSON Worldwide

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#2 *Interactive Culinary Offerings*

With nearly a year of downtime, many people have used their time to experiment in the kitchen and learn new skills. Also, many restaurant and food brands have made their products and services more accessible on a digital level via recipe guides, tutorials, and more.

As a result, consumers are more connected and have been granted more trial opportunities with brands than ever before. From engaging programming such as virtual and in-person cooking classes to seasonal tastings, catered experiences, and pop-up concepts, any opportunity to interact with consumers outside the traditional dining experience is a way to feed post-pandemic expectations and desires.

Virtual Cooking Class Studio

RPM Restaurant Group opened a large event space above Chicago’s RPM Seafood at the onset of COVID-19. When weddings, corporate parties, and other big events were put on hold, the restaurant pivoted and created a full functioning photo and video studio providing their customers with a venue to produce and host virtual events.



“Pandemic-weary consumers are clamouring for memorable hospitality experiences: 47% plan to dine out more in 2021 and 47% plan to travel internationally.”
(Tripadvisor, 2021)

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#3 *VIP Driven Experiences*

In the past year, consumers have become familiar with new restaurant formats. Often, tables are socially distanced and separated via plexiglass and canvas walls. While most are excited to see these temporary fixes go away, diners will still crave the more private intimate experience they’ve become familiar with. Whether it be private dining pods, secluded areas to host intimate events, or even just a special menu/ service that can be ordered as an elevated offering.

This idea will push restaurants to provide more variety when it comes to seating which may lead to restaurants to adopting more luxurious, immersive, and experiential models that offer guests that “VIP” feel.

R17 At The Greens

Pier 17, an outdoor entertainment center in New York City, recently transformed its rooftop concert venue into The Greens—an exclusive experience where guests can rent a private, rooftop mini-lawn. Customers can order summertime dishes like crispy chicken or frozen watermelon margaritas from the venues R17 restaurant and bar.



“The opportunity to bring sensory experiences back to dining is something the restaurant industry must not lose sight of. Brands must differentiate themselves in the marketplace to keep consumers invested.”

-Robyn Novak, NELSON Worldwide

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#4 *Rotational Flavors*

Experiential and differentiated elements will always bring value, but the larger focus will be driven by meaning, authenticity, and connection. With travel and exploring limited, diners will be seeking ever-changing flavors, menus, and environments to experience something new.

Tapping into this trend, restaurants may consider introducing seasonal or rotational concepts by making easy changes to menus, décor, and the overall dining experience to gain attention and draw people in with something unique.

Blume/Hutte NYC Seasonal Pop-up

Located in the Upper East Side of Manhattan, this hidden gem transports diners to an Alpine ski-lodge with a woodsy cold-weather restaurant concept that serves up Austrian beer and fondue. Named Hutte from October to March, the rest of the year during the warmer months, the concept and name transitions to Blume, a secret garden concept featuring floral refreshments and summertime spreads.



Consumers who had never tried delivery prior to the pandemic now anticipate using delivery an average of **1-2x per month**.
(NELSON Worldwide)

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#5

Ghost Kitchens

After an extended amount of time relying on amenities like delivery services, which were once thought to be indulgent, restaurants will have to continue to innovate down to the supply chain.

Today, restaurant brands are introducing “digital outpost” or “ghost kitchen” concepts to fulfill high volumes of online orders. Since these locations are not customer-facing, they may benefit brands of all sizes by making it possible to get closer to consumers or by eliminating the need to invest in costly real estate.

P.F. Chang's To-Go

Asian food chain P.F. Chang's has debuted its first P.F. Chang's To-Go restaurant in Chicago and New York City. The spinoff concept has expanded the iconic brand into metropolitan areas thanks to its smaller footprint and has allowed for more online ordering and third-party delivery.



“For the restaurants that built their business around a traditional, sit-down model, the key to bouncing back post-pandemic is being flexible while focusing on exceptional service.”
-Aaron Ruef, NELSON Worldwide

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#6 *Four Season Dining*

With outdoor dining flourishing in cities across the country, the rules and expectations of restaurant design are changing. Offering a safer dining experience, restaurants have (literally) taken to the streets to provide airy, al fresco dining on sidewalks, adjacent parking spots, rooftops, patios, and gardens.

While outdoor concepts have been a growing trend for years, the pandemic has greatly increased the consumer desire to spend more time outdoors and will continue to accelerate the need for experiential environments. The next steps in this evolution will be about activating a location’s outdoor space to make it a functional and seamless part of the dining experience.

Sauce On The Blue’s

Located in Silverthorne, Colorado Sauce on the Blue’s created a yurt village that features private dining structures. Equipped with radiant floor heating, each yurt is decorated with found objects and made to feel like a warm and cozy cabin. The yurts have not only expanded the restaurant’s dining capacity by 50% but they have also created a unique dining experience that can be enjoyed no matter the weather.



“Guests will not be shy about sharing feedback on whether restaurants are following health protocols or not. It’s important that restaurants make this a priority without intruding the dining experience.”
- Emily Hamilton, NELSON Worldwide

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#7 *Hospitable Hygiene*

Nearing the slow down of a global pandemic, diners and restaurant staff will be acclimated to hand washing and cleaning, but the next step is figuring out how to seamlessly mesh these significant principles into a traditional, elevated dining experience.

Does the future restaurant include a dedicated space for hand washing before being seated? Could sanitizing stations become an immersive moment that is made memorable by design? In recent years, bathroom design has become another touchpoint in creating memorable experiences from restaurants and post-pandemic it could be a stylish way to keep our hands clean.

Please Cincinnati

At Please, an upscale American eatery in Cincinnati, OH, fine dining is not the only thing customers rave about. This restaurant is also known for its bathroom, aka the #PleasePotty. This viral selfie spot has become a sensation thanks to its hand painted wall tiles that look fantastic on Instagram.



“Having a viable click-and-collect solution is nothing without support. In-person or digitally operated, it’s critical to make these novel activations successful.”

-Robyn Novak, NELSON Worldwide

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#8

Clear Customer Journey

Catering to new consumer behaviors, even more restaurants will naturally become not only a place to dine but to fulfill to-go orders. While these concepts have been around for many years, COVID-19 has only accelerated their growth, especially with third-party delivery options.

Restaurants that were not previously focused on take-out orders must re-think their spaces and a crucial point is offering clear pathways and directions for anyone that enters a restaurant. For example, this may also include adding multiple entry points for diners who are looking for a table, picking up, or placing a carry out order.

Mooyah Burger

This Texas-based burger chain recently unveiled a concept that reduces friction for our guests and team members. The new approach has allowed the restaurant to elevate its seating dining experience while also creating purposeful and strategic third-party and to-go pick-up areas. A side door allows these orders to be fulfilled outside of the main dining area to bypass lines and decrease crowding.

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