



Preparing Your Restaurant for Winter

The
2020-2021
Guide



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INTRODUCTION

Winter is coming

Historically, winter is a time for slower restaurant sales. In recent winters past, restaurants have seen as much as a 1.5% drop in January (compared to October through December).¹ In-store sales take a hit in the Northeast especially – because it’s cold out, because people are busy with the holidays, and because the experience is less exciting than warm-weather dining.

This year has thrown the unexpected at restaurants – and you’ve taken it with grace, adapting and evolving to new changes in consumer dining habits, and local and national regulations. Outdoor dining, socially-distanced tables, and masked waitstaff have become the norm – however, as colder temps arrive, restaurants are facing not only the typical winter slowdown, but the reality of the pandemic as well.

The introduction of both reduced-capacity indoor dining and year-round outdoor dining requires a whole new strategy – one that keeps your guests warm, [customers and staff safe](#), and your kitchen humming no matter the weather.

This guide will help you prepare for the months ahead. From assessing your menu to rethinking your restaurant layout to modifying your marketing strategy, this ebook provides tips, tools, and tactics to help you set up your restaurant for success.

↓ **1.5%**

Restaurants see as much as a 1.5 percent monthly sales drop in January alone (compared to October, November, or December)



Here's how DoorDash is helping restaurants prepare for winter this year.

Want to learn more? Visit our Winter Resource Guide for DoorDash merchants.

[Learn More](#)



Purchasing **heaters** in bulk and offering them to restaurants at a steep discount through the DoorDash store.



Hosting **Winter Wednesdays in December** to drive sales to restaurants with 5 locations or fewer.



Signage for restaurants to place to point Dashers in the right direction.



Selling cold weather merch like space blankets, gloves, and beanies in the DoorDash store to keep Dashers protected from the cold.



Enabling merchants to **sell alcohol** where legal.



Provide **grants to merchants** in select cities.



Helping restaurants **reopen for delivery**.



Hosting delivery-centric restaurant weeks in larger markets to increase delivery volume in restaurants.



01

Menu planning

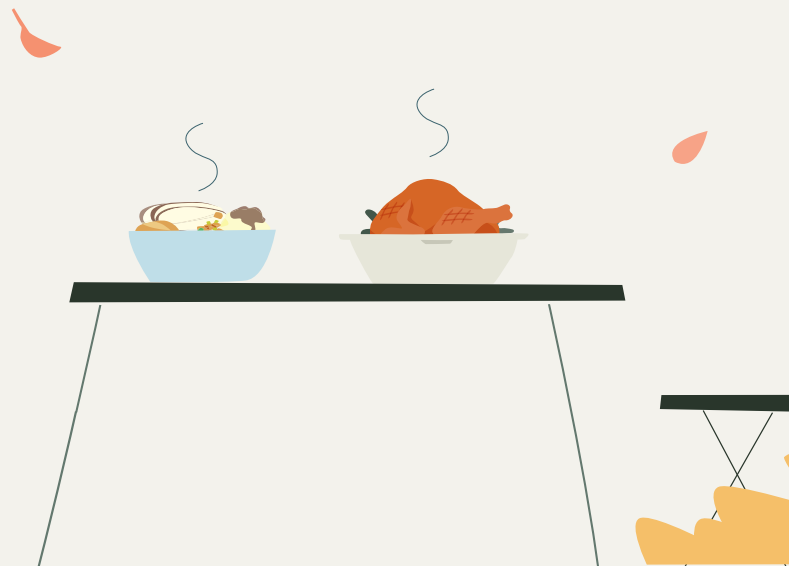
Modify your food and service for winter dining

As the seasons change, it's important to think about what new experiences you can provide diners — from what you're offering to how you're offering it. Whether it's changing your food menu or creating a mini-marketplace, there are many creative ways you can make an impact.

In this chapter, you'll learn new ways to reach your customer base that fit within your existing business model.

Developing your menu for winter

This winter calls for thinking outside of the box. Recognize that some customers are not comfortable dining indoors – and with capacity guidelines in place – you may not be able to rely on your dine-in menu alone to sustain sales.



Lean into comfort foods

The COVID-19 pandemic has only intensified the need for comfort foods² – with more consumers turning to packaged goods and items that feed nostalgia and remind them of simpler times. For your seasonal menu offerings, consider incorporating comforting dishes – whether that’s mac n’ cheese or chicken pot pie.



Think seasonally

For many, the arrival of winter signals different flavors and cuisines: warmer dishes, complex spices, and heartier options. Swap out your summer fare for cold weather-appropriate meals. For instance, if you typically offer salads, transition to soups and stews that are sure to sell as the air gets chillier.



Offer meal kits

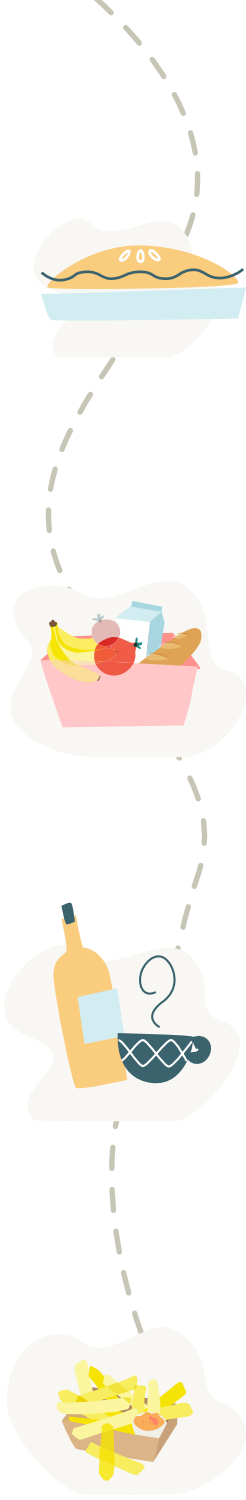
Make available for purchase pre-packaged ingredients customers can use to recreate a favorite pizza or pasta your restaurant is known for, in the comfort of their homes.



Cater holidays at home

Holiday celebrations are more important than ever. Introduce a limited-availability menu surrounding key winter holidays. Establish a pre-order system and market in advance so customers can reserve their meals.





Supersize your menu for families

With many parents and children working and learning at home, families are closer than ever — and putting food on the table is infinitely more stressful because of it. Adding a family-size option for takeout meals can help you cater to families who need an easy no-cook option. Offer a deal that includes an entree and a couple of side dishes, or enough to feed an average-sized family of four.

Package handy pantry staples and provisions

More and more people are cooking at home these days. Bottle and sell items like sauces, salsas, pastas, and spices that customers can buy when they dine with you. You can even integrate a delivery-powered market into your DoorDash platform via [DashMart](#) — the next-generation platform for grocery and convenience items. This is an easy way to reach the at-home crowd and increase your revenue.

Sell seasonal alcoholic beverages

Irish coffee, mulled wine, spiced cider, and hot toddies are all festive nods to the winter season. These offerings can make your restaurant stand out to customers who are looking to quench their thirst. To make to-go and delivery cocktails even easier, DoorDash is helping restaurants deliver beverages in cities and states that allow it. Learn what the regulations are in your area using this handy guide from the [National Restaurant Association](#).

Add frequently ordered delivery items with [high profit margins](#) to your menu

Look at best-selling items — ones you can produce with a food cost of about 30% and a margin of about 70%. If you can produce parmesan fries with truffle aioli for \$2-3 and sell them for \$10, you're making big gains from an add-on item that customers love.

All of these are simple ways to bolster your offerings and reap the rewards. If you add a new offering, be sure to alert your customers via email, social media, and more to spread the word. In chapter 5, we'll cover how to promote your winter specials, items, and services to maximize your return on investment.

Think big: Expanding into virtual kitchens

The new dining climate means on-premise dining is in flux, but have you considered that you may be able to open a second restaurant for the price of one? The rise of technology-driven platforms like [DoorDash](#) has enabled [delivery-only restaurants](#) to operate out of commercial kitchens — minus the operating fees of seating customers and hiring waitstaff.



There are various different types of delivery-only restaurants you can operate — below is a breakdown of each type:

✓ Ghost kitchens

A restaurant model where orders are cooked at an off-premise location (say, a commercial kitchen shared among a few businesses). Orders are delivered directly to the consumer, and there's no physical location for them to visit. Ghost kitchens are focused on fulfilling as many orders as possible.

✓ Virtual restaurants

Similar to ghost kitchens, virtual restaurants are meant solely for delivery. But they may be associated with an existing brand and operate out of the same kitchen used for a physical restaurant. As a virtual restaurant gains popularity, owners may be more focused on collecting data and scaling to many locations.

✓ Dark kitchens

Like more advanced ghost kitchens, dark kitchens are owned by larger companies and are almost exclusively focused on making data-driven decisions. These kitchens may operate in shifts — i.e. a restaurant serving traditional breakfast fare occupies the space in the morning, and a ramen restaurant delivers piping-hot dishes at night.

✓ Virtual brand

A virtual brand is focused around a concept. Unlike the other types of delivery-only restaurants, a virtual brand makes itself known to customers and may even have a social media presence. Think: a bite-sized bao restaurant, an avocado toast purveyor, or an all-vegan fast food establishment. If recognition is something you're after, you can license your brand and get cooking.

Now you know the nuances of each type of delivery-only restaurant. But you may be wondering: why set up a restaurant focused on convenience over customer interactions?

For starters, it's an extremely lucrative way to generate business without many overhead costs. In fact, you can use your existing kitchen and staff to operate a virtual kitchen or create a virtual brand.

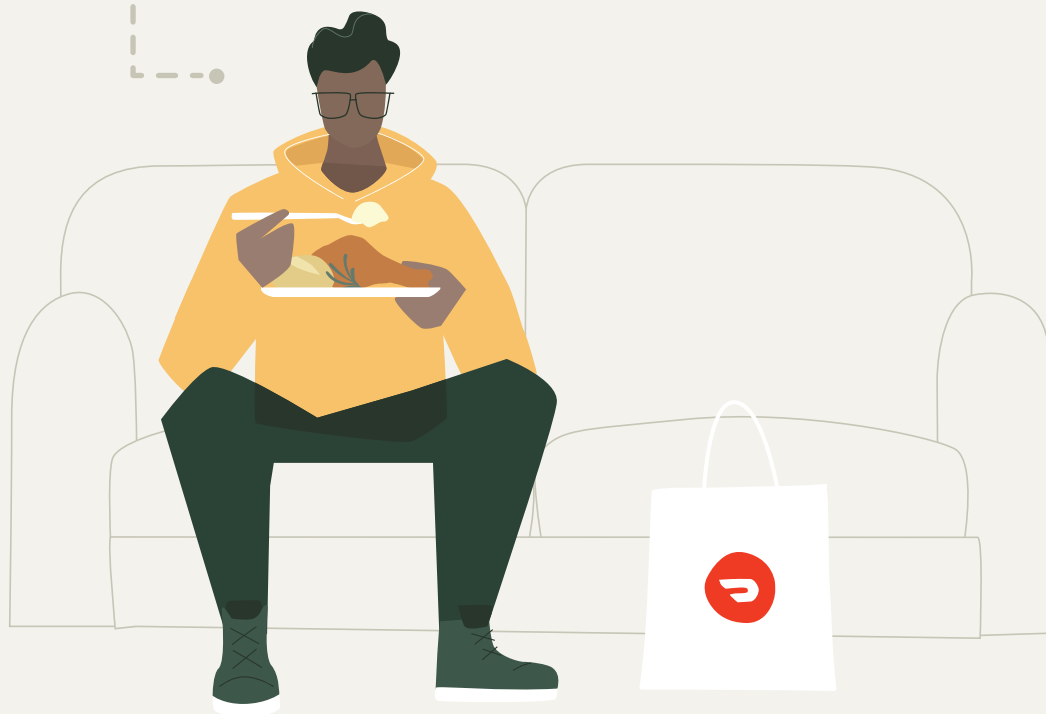
Customers also love delivery — and even more so since the beginning of the pandemic.

77%

of consumers have increased their use of third-party delivery platforms

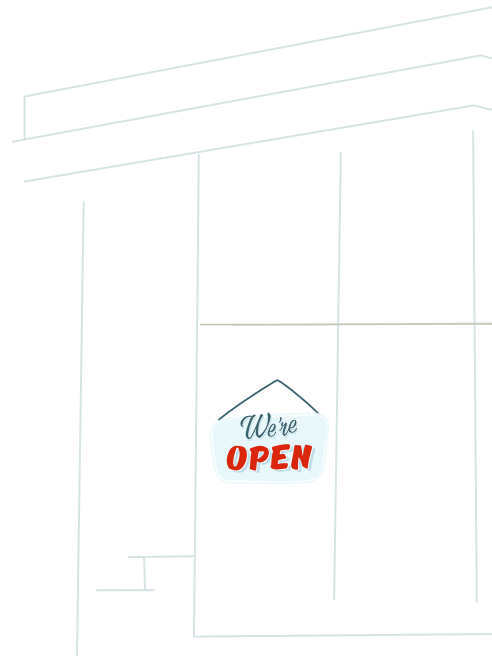
Customers also love delivery — and even more so since the beginning of the pandemic. 77% of consumers have increased their use of third-party delivery platforms during this time, and 66% of adventurous consumers have used delivery to try a restaurant they would not have otherwise tried.³

As you shape your delivery-only restaurant, use the following checklist to pin down your concept.



CHECKLIST

Opening a delivery-only restaurant



Choose a focus that fits with your existing restaurant

You're not reinventing the wheel – you're building a business out of one you already have. Choose a theme or concept that fits with your current focus. If you offer burgers, open a virtual wing shop. If you're an ice cream shop, offer a virtual "cakery" (cake bakery). If you operate an upscale farm-to-table dinner restaurant, build an afternoon cafe to serve brunch and lunch fare.

Think about what's popular in the winter

Winter is a time for heartier, hotter, home-cooked meals. Especially in cold-weather locales, items like soups and stews, pasta dishes, and curries are in demand. These standard cold-weather items are all good bets to introduce your delivery-only restaurant.

Identify a market gap in your area

Does your area need a late-night restaurant? Or an early morning eatery? Perhaps there are plenty of Mexican restaurants in your area, but no one has opened a Cuban joint yet. Look at what's missing – and what could perform well based on the most popular restaurants in your community.

□ Focus on high-margin items

Increasing your margins is all about reducing the costs of making your food. Focus your menu around items that can be made with lower-cost cuts of meat, in-season produce, and grains and starches that are all-around low-priced. The types of items that work best may depend on your geographic location, but this practice guarantees that you're making back money you've invested in the business.

□ Get your logistics handled

To operate a successful delivery-only business, you need a high-visibility partner to help you reach customers, quickly fulfill deliveries, and provide excellent service. With a wealth of resources and one of the largest market shares in the U.S., [DoorDash](#) is the go-to technology platform chosen by delivery-only restaurants.

Once you decide on a concept and find your niche, you're ready to serve up steady business all winter long. If you're focused on optimizing your existing kitchen first, consider adopting a strategy for [stepping up your floor plan and layout](#).





02

Dining logistics

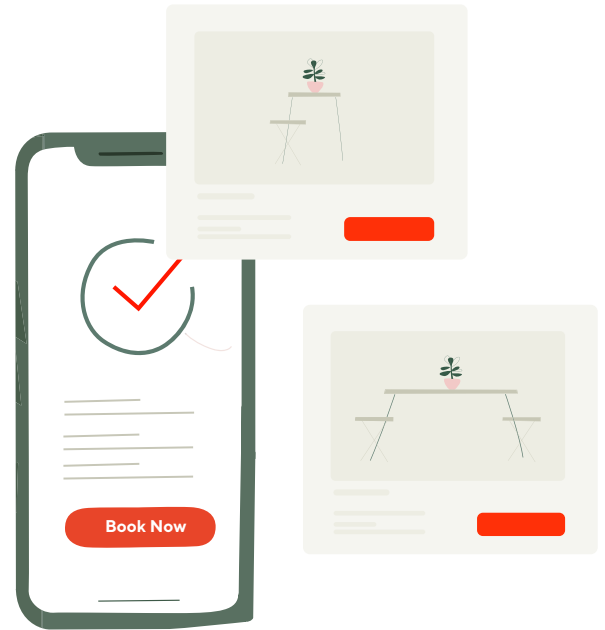
Position your restaurant for outdoor dining

In years past, winter dining meant escaping from the cold (and perhaps sitting by a cozy fireplace or sipping on a warm beverage). Today, many states and cities are extending their outdoor dining setups into the winter to accommodate guests safely — including chilly destinations like the state of Colorado,⁴ New York City,⁵ and Somerville, Massachusetts.⁶

As restaurateurs across the globe seek to transform their short-term solutions for reopening into permanent fixtures, many have concerns about the cold weather. Here are a few tips for ensuring your restaurant's outdoor space is clean, cozy, and comfortable this winter.

Get a reservation system up and running

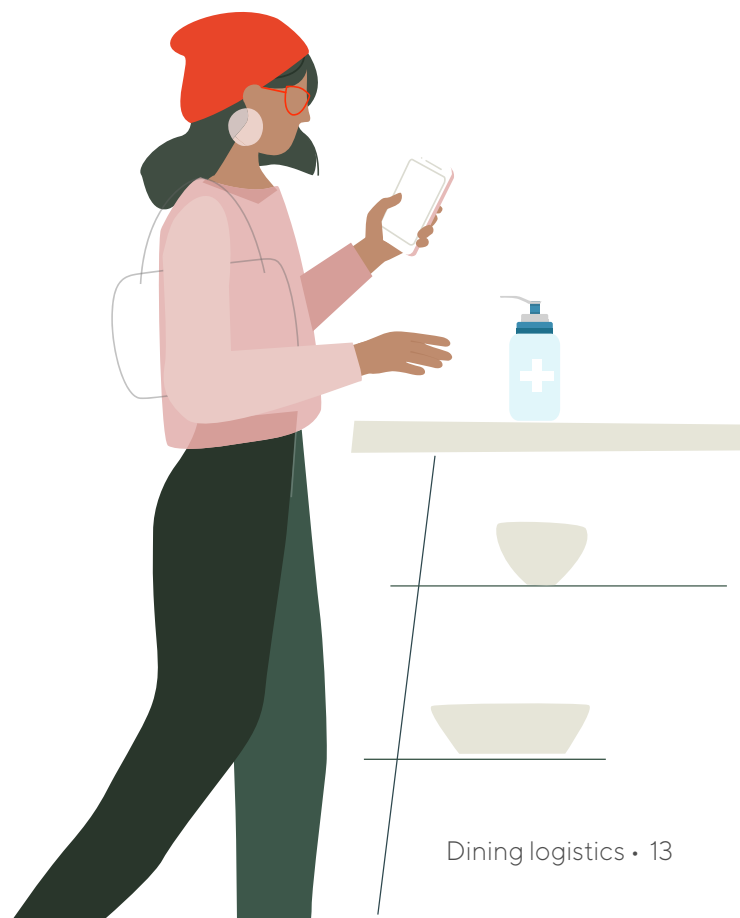
Does your restaurant currently take reservations? Adopting a reservation system that sets clear expectations for how long customers can stay at a table is a good way to optimize your dining capacity – and let your guests know of any time limitations before they settle in. Reservation booking tools like [Resy](#) and [OpenTable](#) (both of which are currently waiving all fees to restaurant partners) can help ensure you're meeting maximum capacity without overbooking (or overcrowding) your space this season – especially as waiting outside for tables to open up becomes less appealing.



Keep safety at the forefront





As outdoor dining endures, ensuring you stay up to date with the latest safety precautions is essential.

Take diners' temperatures before they enter your establishment, and provide hand sanitizer and masks for guests that may have forgotten theirs at home. You can leave these at your hostess desk, quick-service counter, or anywhere else at the entrance of your restaurant – and you can even turn them into a marketing opportunity by offering personal protective equipment (PPE) branded with your logo. Continue to distance tables appropriately, and consider establishing a signage system to identify clean and dirty tables. That way, customers won't sit down anywhere that hasn't been sanitized – and staff knows at a glance which tables to clean next. Guests will appreciate the added effort. And once they see you're up to standards, they'll feel even more comfortable coming back.



Schedule an HVAC inspection

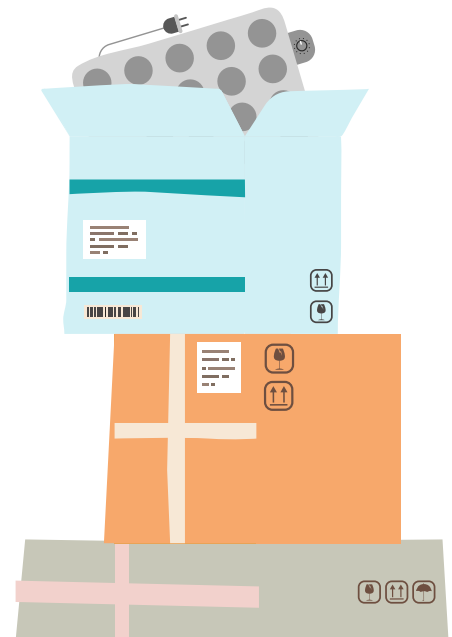
Winter means turning up the heat. Plus, great ventilation is one of the biggest ways to prevent the spread of COVID-19.⁷ To make sure everything is in working order for the winter (and to ensure you're complying with industry requirements), schedule a check-up for your heating, ventilation, and air conditioning equipment. Scheduling this appointment well ahead of winter can help you skip any wait times at peak inspection season — and avoid freezing any customers out.

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Stock up on essential equipment

Dining outdoors during winter doesn't have to be uncomfortable — and it isn't in a lot of places. But if your location drops into low enough temperatures, relying on your diners to dress warm won't be enough. Purchasing equipment like outdoor heaters, heat lamps, and electric fire tables can elevate your restaurant's outdoor dining aesthetic while keeping guests comfortable in colder weather, and [DoorDash](#) is providing restaurant partners with access to [discounted cold-weather equipment](#) to help you get a headstart. If you're looking for additional brand recommendations, [Xtremepower](#), [Golden Flame](#), [authenTEAK](#), and [Outland Living](#) are some of the most popular brands for patio heaters and fire tables. If you're a bit less traditional, consider outdoor tents — or even heated igloos. Multiple New York restaurants have [implemented igloos](#) to keep parties — and heat sources — contained in a trendy, festive fashion.



Of course, whether you settle on lavish igloos, cozy fire tables, or traditional heat lamps, COVID-prevention comes with cold prevention. As you prepare your restaurant for winter, you may want to consider installing air purifiers or [iWave filters](#). These can prevent the spreading of germs both indoors and out — and account for any concerns that may come with increased capacity (or cases) come the cold season.



03

Customer service

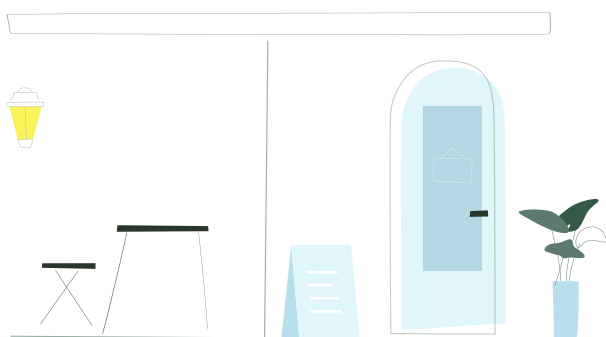
Provide exemplary customer service

Changes in the dining landscape have left some customers confused. It's up to restaurants to adapt your customer service to accommodate a wider range of needs.

Implement a few simple changes to provide the most informative, safe, enjoyable, and delicious guest experience possible.

Manage crowds and wait times in the cold

In warm weather, it's easy for customers to stand outside or take a walk while waiting for their table. But as temperatures drop, customers will be more inclined to huddle close by your business. You'll want to avoid overcrowding and allow for the flow of car and foot traffic outside of your doors. Use the following tips to manage crowding, cut down on wait times, and provide a superb customer experience.



Optimize your indoor and outdoor layout

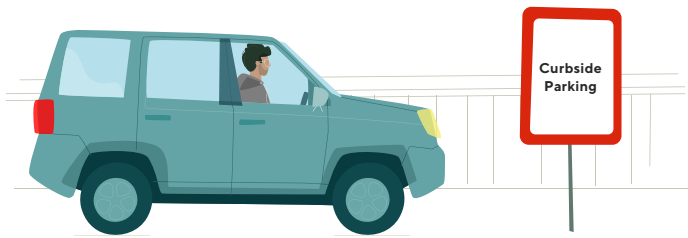
Survey your restaurant and make sure there's no wasted space. If you've moved your host stand outside to accommodate outdoor diners, move the stand just inside your doors so there's more space for waiting customers on the sidewalk. Need to add additional heaters for the cold? Look for an overhead option rather than something that takes up needless floor space. Designate areas for customers to wait with tape or stickers to avoid crowding.



Designate a to-go section that's separate from your dining entrance

Customers and Dashers — DoorDash's delivery drivers — need to collect their orders quickly. The sooner you can give them food, the better.

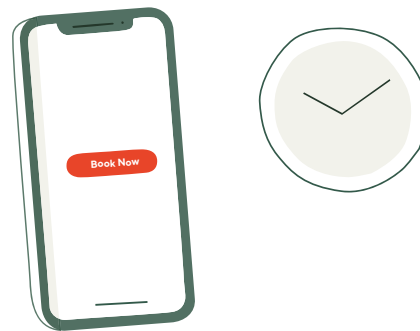
Designate a separate entrance or side window to hand off pickup orders, and be sure to include any [pickup winstructions](#) in the DoorDash Merchant portal. This winter, DoorDash is providing signage for you to help steer Dashers in the right direction.



Ensure ample parking spaces for curbside orders

If you're located in an area where cars are the primary means of transport, it's worth designating parking spaces specifically for your curbside pickup customers so they don't have to worry about finding a spot.

Paint markings on the ground if your region stays warmer throughout the winter, and invest in freestanding signs if you are in a snowy destination.



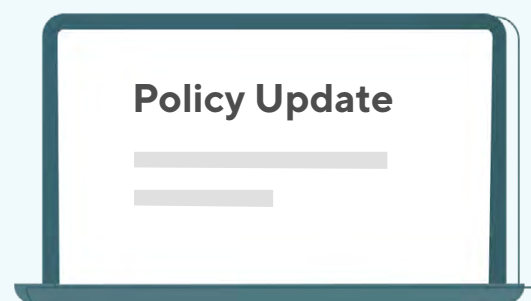
Add buffers to your reservations

Once you sign up for a reservation system like those mentioned in chapter 2, encourage customers to pre-book their slot. You can limit seatings to a fixed time like 90 minutes to ensure you can accommodate multiple parties throughout the dining service.

Schedule buffers between seatings to ensure there's enough time to sanitize surfaces and prepare for the next party. This will help you better manage crowd control and know how many customers to anticipate in a given day.

Keep your policies up to date online

Many customers are apt to research a restaurant's policies before dining there. If you introduce a new policy, update your website and social media with any relevant new protocols that must be followed.



Design new staff protocols for service and safety

Your staff is the backbone of your restaurant — now more than ever before. They're in this with you, and they're willing to do what it takes to help your business thrive with the changing seasons. To maximize efficiency, keep productivity high, keep staff safe, and provide five-star customer service, you need to modify your policies to fit the evolving landscape.



Designate food runners to bring customers their meals quickly.



Appoint health captains on your team to ensure customers and staff are following health protocols, including participating in temperature checks, wearing masks indoors, and using hand sanitizer.



Provide PPE to all staff members so they can perform their job responsibilities safely.



Prepare for holiday staffing weeks ahead of time. If you're operating on reduced hours or perhaps ramping up meal production and hours, let your team know — and [begin the hiring process](#) for any necessary seasonal personnel ahead of time.



Revise staff hours to account for prep work. Enlist a couple of team members to come in early and prepare ingredients so meals can be cooked and assembled quickly to help manage crowd levels.

Throughout the season, don't forget to acknowledge your staff and show your appreciation for them banding together during uncertainty. Their support helps you continue to provide a great customer experience and give diners a sense of normalcy.



04

Business strategy

Expand into new revenue streams

Necessity breeds innovation. Businesses everywhere are using creativity to thrive amid shifting market conditions, regulations, and changing consumer trends.

The restaurant industry is no exception. From outdoor dining to at-home cooking kits to enhanced takeout experiences, restaurateurs everywhere are finding ways to expand into [new revenue streams](#) and capitalize on customer demands.

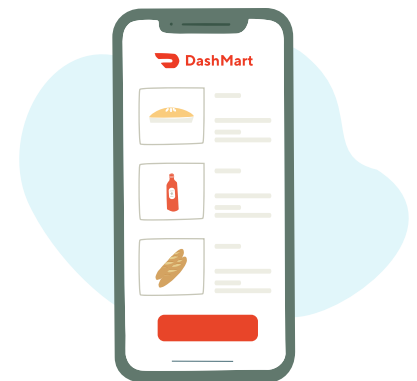


Convert your business model

While at-risk customers may be wary of restaurant dining, they still crave delicious food – and everyone needs to eat. Consider converting your shop (or shops) into a bodega or grocery store, leveraging your existing supply chain connections to sell the ingredients and food items that set your establishment apart – and that your customers already know and love. By shifting your business model, even just temporarily, you can open up additional profits while maintaining the same supplier relationships and continuing to do what you love: selling customers quality food.

Look to alternative selling avenues

If you don't want to open up your own bodega or store but are still looking to capitalize on an alternate selling strategy, you may want to consider selling through a third-party convenience store. DoorDash's [DashMart](#) is a new type of convenience store, selling everything from everyday essentials to household goods and restaurant favorites.⁸ By channeling some of your inventory there, you can double-dip – serving customers the delicious meals they deserve both from your own storefront and through the local [DashMart](#).



Create meal kits for popular dishes

Many restaurants in New York, Boston, and beyond – from [chain restaurants](#) to higher-end establishments – are adding variety to their usual takeout and delivery offerings by creating meal kits. Customers can purchase them either in-person or online, and cook up gourmet dishes in the comfort (and safety) of their own home. By allowing customers to capitalize on the joys of cooking *and* one of their favorite restaurant meals, they can experience your food in a whole new way – and open up a brand new stream of revenue for your restaurant.



Create branded merchandise

Customers love to represent their favorite brands and businesses. Selling a collection of t-shirts, beanies, buttons, and ball caps featuring your logo is one spirited way to cultivate brand loyalty and generate additional revenue. Don't forget to promote your offerings in-store and on social media.

Launch your own online ordering system

It's true: the majority of customers (especially younger ones) just don't want to order over the phone. Launching your own online ordering system through a service like DoorDash's [Storefront](#) (currently free through March 2021, and always commission-free) can help you not only manage a higher volume of orders, but promote higher-profit orders as well. You can customize your online ordering store's look and feel, so you can drive brand loyalty. Plus, Storefront connects with your DoorDash Marketplace page to integrate seamlessly with your current menu, hours, and payment system. Taking mere minutes to set up and generate return, Storefront is a new way to [increase sales](#) and boost restaurant revenue.



Get started with delivery now

As the COVID-19 crisis first began to unfold, pickup and delivery became the leading way to support restaurants. Businesses that didn't offer these services before quickly jump-started their own operations — or signed up for a service that could help them. But delivery and pickup are more than just a backup to bring in more business when dining-in isn't an option. They're an integral strategy for bringing in as much business as possible — and churning out much-needed sales. Restaurants on [DoorDash](#) are six times more likely to have remained open during the pandemic compared to U.S. restaurants as a whole⁹ — and the pandemic isn't over yet.

The bottom line? Pickup and delivery are no less important now than they were six months ago, so if you haven't selected a third-party solution yet to help you handle the overflow and multiply your incoming orders, there's no better time to do so. Here's how to get started.



- 1 Evaluate potential third-party delivery partners.** Ensuring you approach the discovery phase with care — rather than just signing up for the first option that comes to mind — is essential to making sure you match up with the right service for your restaurant.
- 2 Start the signup and onboarding process as soon as possible.** Once you've made your decision, don't dilly-dally. It can take two to three weeks to get activated on a third-party platform, so make sure to get ahead of the game while you can.
- 3 Give yourself a "ramp up" period of two weeks for your team to adjust.** Just like with any new venture, it can take some time to get into the swing of things. Keep in mind that it takes most restaurants a couple of weeks to settle into a rhythm — it's perfectly normal.
- 4 Ensure your staff is properly trained in the process.** It's important to make sure that everyone is on board *before* you advertise that you're available on a new service. This can prevent potential hiccups with paying customers, or a surge in orders before your team is equipped to handle them.
- 5 Let customers know you're up and running.** Once you and your restaurant staff are ready, spread the word that your restaurant is available for delivery on your new platform — and start bringing in (or carrying out) more business.

When it comes to expanding into more revenue streams, there are plenty of paths to explore — and plenty of profits to be made. Innovation comes in all forms, so don't be afraid to experiment. Whether you opt for a new menu item or an entirely new service, your customers will appreciate a fresh idea and some newfound flexibility. All you need to ask yourself is: what's next?



05

Restaurant marketing

Create a strategy to spread the word

All of the strategies contained in this ebook are only effective if people know what's going on at your restaurant. And while word-of-mouth marketing and review sites are great for driving customers to your business, your own marketing strategy is crucial for spreading awareness. The good news: you don't have to be a marketing guru or invest hundreds or thousands of dollars to implement an effective strategy. Below are some simple boxes to check off as you prepare for the winter season.

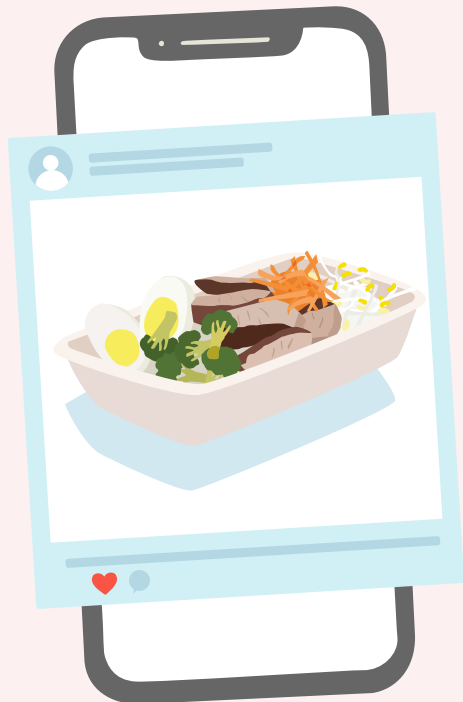


77%

of customers look at a restaurant website before dining in or ordering out, according to a recent survey.¹⁰

Update your website

Keep your website up to date, and ensure the most up-to-date information is on your home page. This will give customers peace of mind and cut down on the amount of phone calls and web inquiries you receive. Don't forget to incorporate important weblinks into your website navigation – including links to your DoorDash MarketPlace or Storefront page, Facebook, and Instagram accounts.



Go social

In tandem with your website, share updates on your social media pages – from current hours to your latest menu. You can even use your social channels to run special promotions for customers who follow you, driving engagement and encouraging people to dine with you. Platforms like Instagram also enable you to embed an 'order food' button into your Stories so customers can order your food on DoorDash in one click. In short, social media is a valuable tool that enables you to do a range of different things. Find more social media tips in [The Ultimate Guide to Restaurant Social Media Marketing](#).

Promote your delivery offerings

If you're new to delivery or making changes to your on-premise dining, you'll want to let customers know on all channels that you offer delivery.

Restaurants on DoorDash also receive an in-store marketing kit with decals, stickers, and more that let your in-person diners know where to find you for delivery when the temperatures drop.

80%

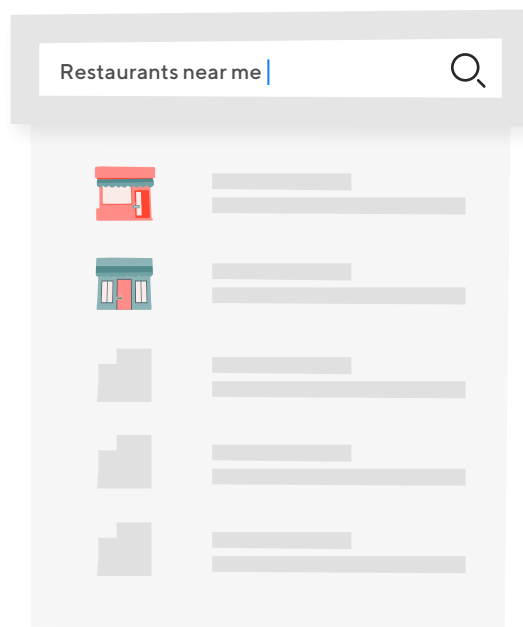
DoorDash reaches 80% of Americans, so you'll already reach more customers in your area – and neighboring ones – just by being on the DoorDash marketplace.



Update search engine platforms with accurate info

Google and Yelp are some of the biggest search platforms for restaurants. Update your Google My Business page and Yelp page with info about your current hours, dining protocols, and anything customers need to know in advance. This will help them have a good experience and encourage them to choose your restaurant.

When navigating a sea of changes, it's tempting to stop focusing on your marketing strategy. However, it's perhaps the single most important thing you can do. The more you reach out and engage customers, the more your business will flourish during the winter months.



CONCLUSION

Delivering joy all winter long



The winter dining landscape may look vastly different this year, but customers are as hungry as ever. They are relying on you to deliver warmth, comfort, consistency, and joy. DoorDash connects your restaurant with more customers than ever and enables you to deliver cuisine piping hot or crisp and cold. And beyond that, we're a community and support network for restaurateurs around the globe. We're here to champion you and provide resources to help you thrive in a time of uncertainty. Join us in embracing the future of dining — whatever it may bring.

Get started with
DoorDash, and start
offering delivery
and pickup.

Get Started



Visit get.doordash.com to sign up in less than 5 minutes.

1

Sign up and send us information about your restaurant.

2

Go live. You'll be up and running in 1 week.

3

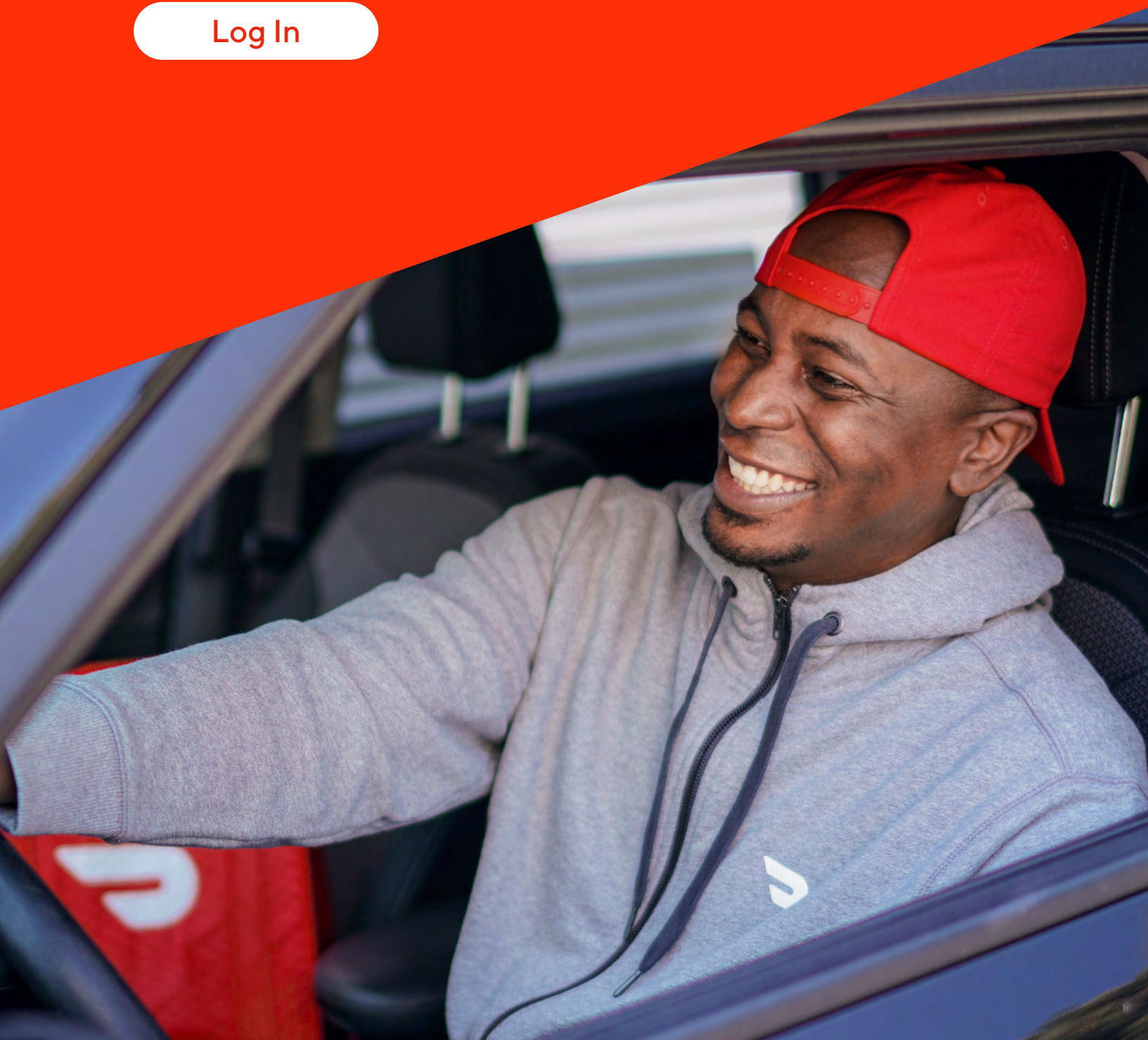
Receive and fulfill orders.

Set Up Your Account Today

Or call **1-855-554-5779** (Monday-Saturday)

Go to your Merchant Portal
to enable pickup, update your
menu, and more.

[Log In](#)



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3. DoorDash, "[Restaurant Impact 2020](#)"
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10. Restaurant Dive, "[77% of Diners Check Restaurant Websites Before Visiting](#)"



About DoorDash

DoorDash is a technology company that connects customers with their favorite local and national businesses in more than 4,000 cities and all 50 states across the United States, Canada, and Australia. Founded in 2013, DoorDash empowers merchants to grow their businesses by helping to solve mission-critical challenges, such as customer acquisition, on-demand delivery, insights and analytics, merchandising, payment processing, and customer support. By building the last-mile delivery logistics platform for local cities, DoorDash is bringing communities closer, one doorstep at a time.

