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LA TRATTORIA®

NOVEMBER 2021 P.O. Box 3951, MODESTO, CALIFORNIA 95352 (800) 328-8667

Sharing Success: Adapting to Change



Despite ongoing pandemic and supply-chain challenges, I am glad to report that our family's tomato company successfully completed yet another fresh pack tomato season.

After taking a brief break away with family after the long tomato harvest to recharge my batteries, I have been reflecting on how current events are impacting our independent restaurateur customers.

I remain immensely proud of the determination and resilience displayed by our Independent restaurateurs. Owning and operating an Independent business is never easy. But it has been truly inspiring to see how restaurateurs keep finding ways to adapt to a seemingly never-ending series of challenges.

I am reminded of the old proverb, "The only constant in life is change." That is, no matter how much we wish things would someday "return to normal," a reality of business is that, with each new challenge, our competitive landscapes continue to evolve. In other words, even when this pandemic thankfully fades away, things likely won't return to the "normal" we remember.

Keep in mind that even before the pandemic, there were already significant consumer and employee trends underway:

- **Electronic ordering** – Especially among younger generations, more than half of all takeout and delivery orders were already being placed digitally via smartphones or laptops. During the pandemic, that percentage has only grown.
- **Off premise dining** – Overall takeout and delivery sales were growing at a faster rate than dine-in. They remain strong today and will likely remain so in the future.
- **Hiring challenges** – Just prior to the pandemic, many restaurateurs were already reporting challenges in finding affordable, dependable new hires.

More recently, new challenges have emerged in the restaurant industry, including:

- **Ingredient and wage inflation** – Restaurants are facing higher costs on everything from food ingredients (especially among proteins, cheeses, grains, and oils) and takeout packaging to natural gas and employee wages. **Businesses wishing to remain profitable have no choice but to raise prices to match rising costs.** As my grandfather Amerigo used to say, "Aritmetica non e opinione" (Arithmetic is not an opinion). Fortunately, restaurateurs who have routinely updated their menu prices have said that, for the most part, their regulars have taken these adjustments in stride. I find this understandable, considering that consumers are already experiencing similar increases at the supermarket and the gas pump.

- **Acute labor shortages** – In most areas, restaurants remain hard-pressed to fill open staff positions. As a result, many successful restaurateurs have been creatively reimagining labor usage. This includes everything from adjusting operating hours to better match their most profitable days/dayparts to rethinking service models or menu offerings. Contrary to earlier hopes, the labor shortage didn't immediately ease with the end of extended unemployment benefits. These things take time, so I'm confident that the supply of labor will continue to improve. Additionally, the labor efficiencies that have been created are here to stay—which is a very good thing!

- **Hygiene hypersensitivity** – Many consumers remain hypersensitive about distancing and hygiene issues. For example, despite relaxed indoor dining restrictions, some table service guests continue requesting chillier outdoor shelters vs. cozier dining rooms. Given this continuing hygiene sensitivity, some restaurants make a point of visibly wiping down each tabletop in view of guests just before they are seated. Others have replaced effective, yet anonymous, "bleach and water" wipe downs with more visually obvious commercial sanitizing sprays or wipes.

In this issue of *La Trattoria*, I have asked Editor Steve Rouse to highlight restaurateurs who continue to challenge traditional business assumptions. Whether these examples fit your particular type of business or not, I hope that they provide inspiration to reevaluate your business practices and willingness to challenge "conventional wisdom" to further improve your own situation!

At the beginning, I quoted an old proverb that continues to be very relevant. However, I feel compelled to alter it to apply to today's restaurants: "The only thing constant in life is change... and the love of good food!" Thankfully for your business and ours, restaurant patrons still don't mind paying a bit more for the consistently great-tasting food they crave!

We remain incredibly proud to stand with you during these challenging times. Keep up the good fight!

Until next time,

Tom Cortopassi


Tom Cortopassi,
 President and Co-Owner



IDEA EXCHANGE FOR INDEPENDENT RESTAURATEURS

BUSINESS BUILDERS: CREATIVE SOLUTIONS


Takeout Window Growth


 When restaurateur Maria Fox originally moved into her present location, she eliminated delivery in favor of installing a drive-up takeout window alongside the building. However, during the pandemic, the window has been a godsend which has helped sales steadily grow. Perhaps because many locals still feel uncomfortable about entering public spaces, this safe-feeling version of "curbside pickup" continues attracting 20 new customers weekly. And thanks to Maria's great-tasting food, many return as regulars!



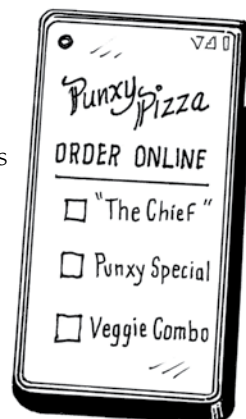
Maria Fox, Owner
 Pizza Ria's Too
 Thurston, OH

Solving Limited Labor

 To get more done with fewer employees, Scott Anthony has shortened business hours and closed one day per week to better match available labor to when customer demand (and sales) are highest. He has also encouraged his regulars to order online, thereby freeing team members from less-productive phone duty.

 Similarly, Scott is keeping close tabs on rising wages and ingredient costs and has successfully adjusted his menu prices three times this year to keep up with unavoidable increases. As a result, Scott's unit sales and profits are actually tracking *ahead* of 2019 pre-pandemic levels!

Scott Anthony, Owner
 Punxy Pizza
 Punxsutawney, PA



Share your proven business-building tips and if we publish your idea, we'll send you \$100! Your tip can deal with any aspect of your business as long as it has added to your success. While we would like to give you credit, we will respect your wishes to remain anonymous if you prefer.

SUCCESS STORY:

ANTONIO'S REAL NEW YORK PIZZA ESTES PARK, CO

Located in a Rocky Mountain resort town, this popular ristorante has overcome an extreme labor shortage to reopen its busy dining room by using technology to replace traditional waitstaff and cashiers!

Early in the pandemic, Anthony DeSousa closed his busy 160 seat dining room to shield his team from public contact. Instead, his team switched to "100% touchless takeout," which eliminated face-to-face cashiering by requiring customers to order/prepay via his website. Takeout food was transferred to arriving customers touchlessly via outdoor curbside tables.

In the process, eliminating voice-to-voice order taking and cashiering allowed Anthony to redeploy those employees to the kitchen to help meet growing demand.

REOPENING WITHOUT SERVERS

When Anthony eventually reopened his dining room, an extreme labor shortage prevented him from finding servers or cashiers. Instead, Anthony used technology to reproduce his take-out "self-ordering" success in the dining room.

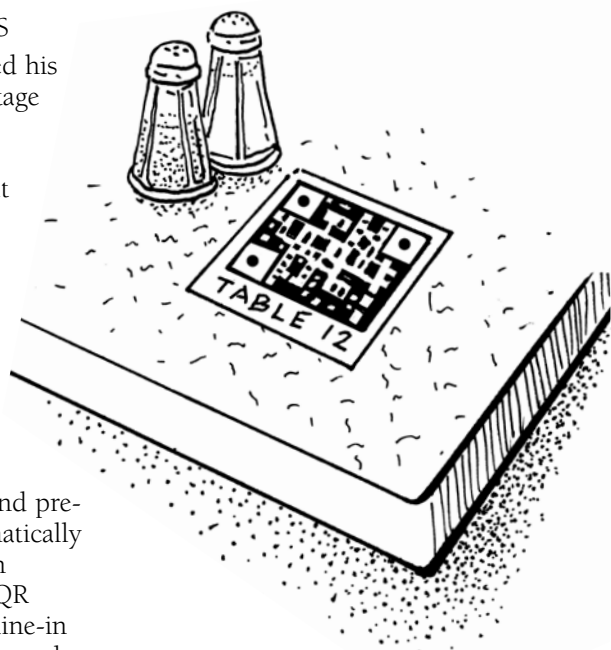
Instead of servers, guests access Anthony's menu and self-order via a unique, location-specific QR decal on each table. When scanned with smartphones, each QR allows guests to review the menu, order meals and beverages, and prepay via credit card. The POS automatically routes their orders to screens at each kitchen make-station. Because the QR codes are table-specific, once each dine-in item is prepped, the POS screen directs the food runner to the proper table.



Because runners are also responsible for assisting guests with service questions or requests, each table is also topped with a two-sided red/green flag on a wire stand.

Guests needing ice water or an extra napkin alert Anthony's runners by rotating their flag to red. Otherwise, flags left "green" indicate smooth sailing.

Aware of the labor shortage, Anthony's regulars support his unconventional solution. As a result, his dining room is once again packed Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. Adopting "self-ordering" technology has allowed combined dine-in and takeout sales to break 2019 sales records ... **but with half the staff as before the pandemic!**



Visit Our Business-Building Library Online!

Visit our *Restaurateur Only* website for information about our company and products, family recipes, plus **multiple issues of La Trattoria!**



www.stanislaus.com

LA VERA CUCINA: MAMA DELIA'S POLLO CACCIATORE BIANCA

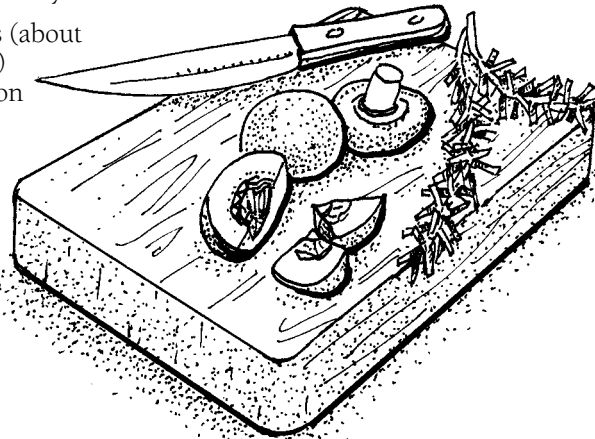
At *Cascarino's* in Montgomery, NY, the Cascarino family has proudly satisfied locals with hearty Italian American fare for three generations! A particular guest favorite is *Mama Delia's Pollo Cacciatore Bianca*, which seasons juicy bone-in chicken thighs with aromatic fresh rosemary, white wine, and fresh mushrooms!

Anthony Cascarino says **his mother Delia's secret to keeping the chicken especially tender and flavorful is cooking it with the skin on to lock in the juices.** After cooking, the skin can always be removed before serving, depending on guest preference.

Mama Delia's Pollo Cacciatore Bianca

Ingredients:

- 1/4 cup fresh fall harvest extra virgin olive oil
- 5 cloves garlic, freshly crushed
- 8 chicken thighs (about 4 ounces each) bone-in, skin on
- 1 1/2 cups white wine
- 15-20 medium mushrooms - halved or quartered
- salt
- pepper
- 3-4 sprigs fresh rosemary



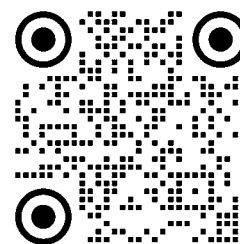
Instructions:

In a large sauce pot or Dutch oven, briefly warm olive oil over medium heat. Add 5 cloves crushed garlic; gently sauté until garlic begins to turn translucent.

Salt and pepper chicken thighs on both sides. Braise 4-6 minutes per side until skin is golden brown. Add the white wine and fresh mushrooms. Add pinches of salt and freshly ground pepper. Add rosemary sprigs. Continue to simmer over medium-low heat for 30-40 minutes without lid. Promptly serve hot over favorite pasta or risotto! Serves 4-6

LA TRATTORIA.

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KEY IDEAS: SECRETS TO DELIVERY SUCCESS

If you are short delivery drivers, reducing delivery range may increase driver pay, boost food quality, and help you profitably deliver more orders per hour. Similarly, avoiding "multi-destination" deliveries can boost quality, service, and better distribute driver earning power.

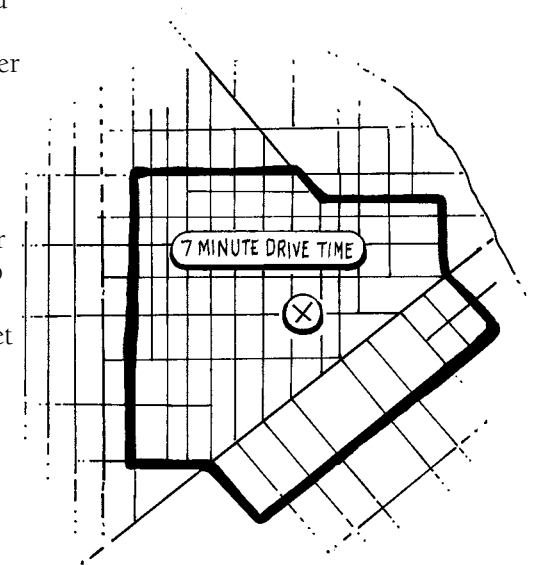
Boost Driver Pay by Limiting Range



Because drivers **typically earn more in tips than base wages**, this restaurateur limits her maximum delivery distance to 15 minutes round trip. That keeps her drivers delivering (and earning tips) at least four times hourly. Between a state-mandated minimum wage and four \$5 tips per hour, most of her drivers consistently earn more than \$30 per hour. As a result, the labor shortage has not limited her ability to attract and keep dependable drivers.



To identify exactly which neighborhoods to include within her service area, she uses a mapping app with a "drive-time" function to chart how far from the store drivers can get within 7 minutes.



Banning Daisy-Chain Deliveries

Allowing drivers to daisy-chain multiple destinations into a single delivery run may **seem** more efficient. But this restaurateur found the opposite to be true.

In addition to promoting "tip hogging" by drivers, combining multiple destinations **guaranteed late deliveries (and reduced food quality) for the 2nd and 3rd stops.** Studying actual deliveries also revealed that combo deliveries also frequently **lengthened total driving time** due to inefficient routing between destinations vs. straight out and back to the store.



Insisting on 100% "single destination" deliveries has improved service speed, boosted food quality, and customer satisfaction. It also distributes "earning power" more evenly across her drivers, promoting greater driver retention.

- Wishes to remain Anonymous

If we publish your idea, we'll send you \$100!

La Trattoria's proven ideas come from successful Independent restaurateurs like you. What are you doing differently in your business (besides making great food) that adds to your success?! If we publish your idea, we'll send \$100 to say "Grazie!"
Call me, *La Trattoria* Editor Steve Rouse, at (800) 328-8667!



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