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Sharing Success: A Time of Rebirth



Spring is known as the season of renewal and rebirth. After the restaurant industry has suffered a year-long “economic winter” due to the pandemic, it feels like change is in the air. Hopefully Independents will soon begin experiencing “economic spring.”

Over the past year, I have been exceptionally proud to be associated with so many Independent restaurateurs who, with grit, determination, and resilience, have continually adapted to radically challenging conditions.

Resourceful restaurateurs have repeatedly stepped up to do whatever it takes to overcome adversity while simultaneously striving to keep their teams and customers healthy.

In the short run, “whatever it takes” has included closing dining rooms; repurposing staff; offering curbside pickup; improving takeout/delivery packaging; streamlining menus to increase profitability, deliverability, and/or kitchen efficiency; and adding/improving online order-taking, etc.

In colder climates, some even conquered inclement weather by creating heated outdoor dining shelters. Some restaurants who hadn’t previously self-delivered may have added 3rd Party Delivery services.

Tough times have also taught important lessons about labor costs and profitability. Some labor-intensive table service restaurants were forced to shift gears by slimming service staffs and adapting to mostly takeout/delivery. Others reevaluated profitability by daypart and found that they could reduce hours of operation by closing during less productive periods and, ultimately, stay in the black financially.

Now, as the weather begins to feel like spring, it seems that the pandemic may be turning the corner. If so, it is my belief that the restaurant industry will also be positioned to experience its own rebirth.

As lockdowns, dining closures, and stay-at-home orders gradually diminish, restaurants will increasingly be shifting from “survival mode” to “prosper mode.” **As that happens, individual restaurateurs face a variety of choices and opportunities.**

The easiest course of action would be to try to go back to “the way we always did it.” But for many restaurants, this transition will provide the opportunity to further evolve and grow. However, I would urge you to “put yourself in your customer’s shoes” and think about what changes they actually liked and should be incorporated into the “new normal.”

Here are a few things to provoke thought:
 During the pandemic, many restaurateurs learned how to accomplish more work with fewer team members.

But as hourly wages continue to climb, some operators may prefer to remain “lean” in their staffing.

Casual restaurants previously offering table service might consider reopening dining rooms **with counter service instead**. A potential “positive” for the customers is that ordered entrées arrive at the table faster (since orders are placed upon arrival). Restaurateurs also benefit from leaner staffs and faster table turns.

Also, during the pandemic, consumers demonstrated they are willing to pay premiums for delivered foods. As a result, restaurants utilizing 3rd Party Delivery might consider replacing them with self-delivery. One study I read suggested that on \$50 entrée orders, some bigger city consumers are paying 3rd Party Deliverers combined “service fees” from \$8 to \$15 (excluding tips). If self-delivery is not viable, Independents may want to adopt a tactic already in use by chains - creating a higher priced menu for 3rd Party Delivery Apps to help offset merchant fees.

Reopening in-person dining also provides the opportunity to freshen up menu appearances and to reevaluate prices (never be afraid to make a reasonable profit on items that deliver value). Think about menu redesign in a way that highlights exceptional and/or unique items which really allow your place to stand out from the crowd while also reassuring “regulars” that the menu lineup has not changed while they were away.

Finally, remember that your “regulars” have missed dining with you as much as you have missed seeing them! So welcome them back with the same excitement that you would bring to staging a “grand reopening.” Consider visual ways to brighten up your dining space, from rearranging pictures and décor to introducing fresh greenery or flowers. Even if your team remains masked, remind them that they can still share customer smiles with their eyes!

Whether we have entered our “economic spring” yet remains to be seen. However, I remain exceptionally optimistic about the future of Independent restaurateurs. To our restaurateur customers, thank you again for making us part of your ongoing success.

Until next time, Ciao!

Yours,
Tom Cortopassi
 Tom Cortopassi,
 President and Co-Owner



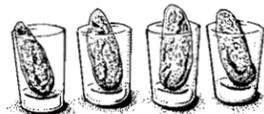
IDEA EXCHANGE FOR INDEPENDENT RESTAURATEURS

BUSINESS BUILDERS: UNIQUE IDEAS

Jalapeño Roulette



Because appetizers are often impulse purchases, Jonathan Cowan boosted app sales by turning “jalapeño poppers” into an order-boosting attention-getter. Now, his team suggestively sells four breaded peppers, side by side, as “Jalapeño Popper Roulette.” The twist? Three of the visually identical peppers offer normal heat, while the fourth (located randomly) offers an exceptionally spicy surprise!



Jonathan Cowan, Owner
 Wooden Paddle Pizza
 Lemont, IL

Pizza e Vino!

During the pandemic, “prepare it yourself” restaurant meals have become a popular form of home entertainment.

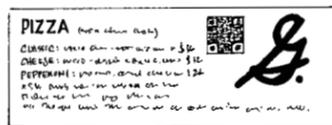
Restaurateur Mike Bausch found a way to further elevate his customers’ home pizza making experience (and boost sales) by adding bottles of wine to his pizza kits! BRAVO!



Mike Bausch, Owner
 Andolini’s Pizzeria
 Tulsa, OK

Touchless QR Menus

While COVID remains a concern, many consumers still prefer avoiding shared surfaces, including door handles, tabletops, restrooms, and even printed menus.



To provide guests with a touchless menu option, *Guantonios Wood Fired Pizza* created a **digital QR code** which, when scanned, pulls up a digital version of their menu onto guest smartphones!



Nick Guantone, Owner
 Guantonios Wood Fired Pizza
 Lodi, CA

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:

SOURDOUGH WILLY'S PIZZA BAINBRIDGE ISLAND, WA

At *That's A Some Pizza* and now *Sourdough Willy's*, Will Grant has been satisfying Bainbridge Island, WA, locals with premium quality sourdough pies for more than three decades. Will is also an accomplished pizza-baking competitor and frequent speaker at Pizza Expo.



An early adopter of online digital ordering, Will has long offered his tightly focused menu of pizza, salad, beverages, and desserts for takeout and delivery via his own website.

Will's POS company originally helped build the website menu and order platform. While buying an online-compatible POS system wasn't cheap, the investment continues to pay for itself many times over.

Here's how. First, accepting digital orders allowed Will to tap into the growing portion of consumers who prefer ordering that way. (Since 2016, more than half of all North American takeout and delivery orders across all restaurant types are being placed digitally.)

Second, while outside order-taking services would also allow Will to take digital orders, processing his own transactions directly has been even more cost effective.



Now this early-adopter is making another bold move! Since COVID, so many of Will's regulars now prefer this cashless/touchless digital option that **Will has decided to eliminate phone orders altogether!** (Guests can still dial the restaurant for help with "order emergencies.")

Regarding digital ordering, Will's guests seem to appreciate:

- Not feeling rushed while placing orders.
- Greater accuracy (eliminates misheard/misspoken verbal orders).
- Smoother pickup/delivery because orders are prepaid via credit card.

Will sees multiple advantages to completely switching over. First, based on the high percentage that order that way, the vast majority of his patrons already prefer it.

Second, eliminating phone orders greatly slims his staffing needs. Instead of multiple employees jotting down phone orders or cashiering "to go" payments, a single employee now coordinates Will's delivery drivers, queues customer pickups, and answers occasional customer questions.

Closing is also faster since 100% cashless sales eliminates needing to reconcile cash drawers at shift end.

Operationally, busy shifts are also far quieter. With no one on the phone and fewer "misheard orders" to correct, the kitchen workflow is smoother than ever.

It is true that a few older "phone only" customers have chosen to go elsewhere. However, eliminating verbal orders/cashiering has allowed this "early adopter" to **rebuild sales to pre-COVID levels with half the staff**, greatly enhancing profitability in the process!



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!**



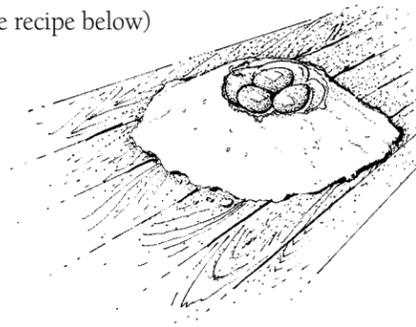
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LA VERA CUCINA: GRAZIELLA'S FRESH HANDMADE LASAGNA

At *Ristorante Luciano* in Stone Harbor, NJ, owner Luciano Iacovino satisfies well-heeled regulars with braised pork shoulder ragu and other specialties. But a runaway favorite remains his mother Graziella's lasagna with her fresh, housemade pasta. Here, Luciano shares his mother's recipe for lasagna noodles (and how they are best enjoyed)!

Graziella's Handmade Lasagna

Fresh Fall harvest Extra Virgin Olive Oil
Fresh, handmade lasagna egg noodles (see recipe below)
Béchamel sauce (use your favorite recipe)
Marinara sauce (use your favorite recipe)
1/4 cup grated Pecorino Romano



Pasta all' Uovo Ingredients:

- 2 cups flour, plus more for dusting
- 3 large eggs
- sea salt

Instructions:

Mound flour on counter and make a well in the center. Add eggs and a pinch of salt, whisk eggs. Using a fork, slowly mix into the eggs a small amount of flour from the walls of the well. As the dough becomes stiffer, use your hands to knead it thoroughly. Dust surface with flour as needed to prevent sticking. Keep kneading dough until it is smooth and no longer sticky - about 5 to 7 minutes. Cover with plastic and let rest on the counter for 1 hour.

Once the dough has rested, cut off a quarter and rewrap the rest. Use the heel of your hand to flatten the quarter dough. Then, using a pasta machine (or rolling pin), adjust the dough rollers to their widest setting (3/8"). Pass the dough through the rollers; fold it in half, rotate it 90 degrees, and roll again. Fold, rotate, and roll twice more.

Reduce the roller gap by one setting (1/16") and pass the dough through. Lightly dust dough surface and rollers with flour if they begin to stick. After each pass, tighten the roller by one setting until the dough is 1/16 inch thick. If pasta begins to tear, go back to a larger setting, fold pasta over and reroll.

Lay rolled pasta on a lightly dusted sheet pan or hang on a pasta drying rack until all pasta is finished. Let pasta rest for 15 minutes or longer. Cut into 4 inch by 12 inch pieces.

Bring a large pot of salted water to boil. Cook 2-3 noodles at a time for about 1-2 minutes. Carefully transfer cooked noodles to cool water for 1-2 minutes, drain well and lay on a towel lined sheet pan, pat dry, and rest until ready to use. Repeat until all noodles are cooked.

Lasagna Assembly: Oil a 9 by 13 inch baking dish. Cover bottom with a layer of noodles, being careful to not overlap, and to trim to fit dish as needed. Spread 1 cup of marinara over noodles. Spoon 2/3 cup béchamel over marinara and gently spread with a spatula. Sprinkle with 1/4 cup Pecorino Romano. Repeat these layers three to four times, depending on how many noodles you have. Finish the last pasta layer with béchamel and cheese. Bake lasagna in a preheated 400 degree oven for about 25-35 minutes until golden brown and bubbling. Let rest for 10 minutes before cutting and serving. Serves 6.

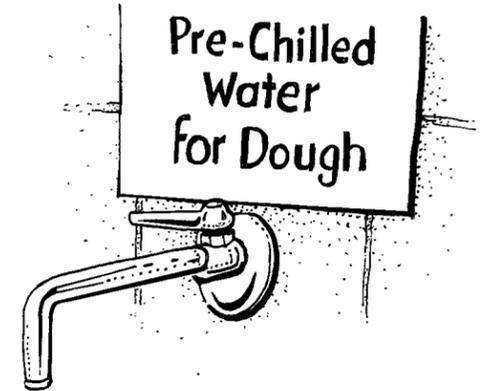
KEY IDEAS: CONSISTENT OPERATION

Pre-Chilling Dough Water

When Brooklyn pizzaiolo Salvatore Cicciarella moved to Texas in 1971, locals said baking New York pizza in Houston was impossible "because the water is no good." But to Salvatore, the biggest difference wasn't flavor **but its temperature out of the tap.** Unlike ice cold NY tap water, Houston's was tepid. To prove his point, Sal started making his Brooklyn dough with iced Houston water, and it came out perfect! From then on, a coiled water line running through his refrigerator carried perfectly pre-chilled dough water to a tap next to his mixer!



Salvatore Cicciarella, Owner
Giannina's Pizza and Catering
Cypress, TX



Precision Prep

To keep his food prep exceptionally consistent day after day, Joe Leroux placed electronic scales at each station along his make line. Short-handled peels then carry sauced dough skins from scale to scale. Adding cheese and toppings by predetermined weights ensures that Joe's patrons always experience the exact same flavors and generous portions. Closely tracking high-value meats and cheeses also reduces costly waste/shrink. Emphasizing precision also helps Joe's team internalize his "consistency mindset" throughout the rest of his operation!

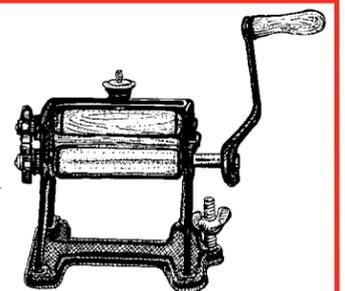


Joe Leroux, Owner
Amadeo's Pizza
Mississauga, ON



About Lasagna

Many families have their own cherished recipes for this comfort food. Today most versions include tomato sauce. But baking layered lasagna (la-san-yah) noodles was popular long before the 1500s when tomatoes first arrived in Italy. While less common, the plural spelling "lasagne" (la-san-yay) is technically also correct. (Think "noodle" vs. "noodles.") Either way, the results are delicious.



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!



BUONA SALUTE È LA VERA RICCHEZZA ■ AMICI E VINI SONO MEGLIO VECCHIE

AMICIZIE E MACCHERONI, SONO MEGLIO CALDI ■ NULLA SI FA SENZA VOLONTÀ!