

Catering for the cost of living crisis



Top tips to raise your game and reach new customers



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The state of play

There's no escaping the fact that these times are about as challenging as they get for restaurants and takeaways.

With energy bills in hospitality rising by an average of 300%, inflation high and wages on the up, more than 100,000 job vacancies across the sector, soaring food and drinks costs, and supply chain fragility, it is no wonder that operators at all levels are having to adapt the way they run their businesses.

This guide is designed to provide you with insights and tips on how you can adapt your business to navigate these difficult times. For while consumer confidence is undeniably challenged there are also opportunities to be seized.

June's like-for-like sales at Britain's top managed restaurants, pub and bar groups were 5% ahead of the pre-COVID-19 levels of June 2019. We have also seen a huge growth in delivery sales – now 275% higher than three years ago, according to CGA data.

So, yes, customers will be closely monitoring their spending but, following the pandemic, there remains a strong desire to socialise and dine collectively. Adapting to these unprecedented times is certainly no piece of cake for restaurants and takeaways, but it is vital to ensure your success now and in the future.

We trust this guide will help you along the way.

Delivering for your customers



Small changes can make a big difference. Here are **10 tips** to help you save cash at the same time as making more money while keeping on top of your game.



1. Taking stock

If you have the space to stock up on dry goods, buying in bulk can keep costs down. There are also hospitality technology options available to help you manage and monitor stock levels and to identify what is and isn't selling.



2. Cost savers

When you know what's working and what's not you can reduce menus and replace or remove unpopular dishes. This reduces staff workload and saves on waste.



3. Talking about menus...

The other way of 'reducing' menus is to replace paper versions and just host them online to be accessed via QR codes. This will save a small fortune in printing and paper - particularly as costs are changing so often and affecting menu prices.



4. 'Tis the season

Plan or tweak your menu around seasonal dishes and ingredients, which offer better value and availability and showcase your commitment to reducing your carbon footprint.



5. Premium offer

Customers may be going out less but when they do, they often trade up for a premium experience, something which we've seen in previous economic downturns. Keep quality of meals and ingredients high to justify menu price and maintain the loyalty of regulars.



6. Five star hygiene

If prices are going up, standards can not slip. Savvy customers are well aware of hygiene ratings - more so than ever since COVID - so go for that five star rating.



7. Meat free options

Veggie and vegan meals are gaining in popularity. Take a look at what you are providing in this department because not only do they offer a better margin but the vegetarian in the group often has a big say on where everyone dines.



8. Opening hours

If there are quiet trading periods it may be wiser to shut up shop and save on costs and wages than open the doors. According to recent UKHospitality figures half of operators are cutting trading hours or even days.



9. Energy-savers

Every move you can make to keep energy costs down is going to help. Consider how green you can go by using LED and only turning on the ovens once orders are in.

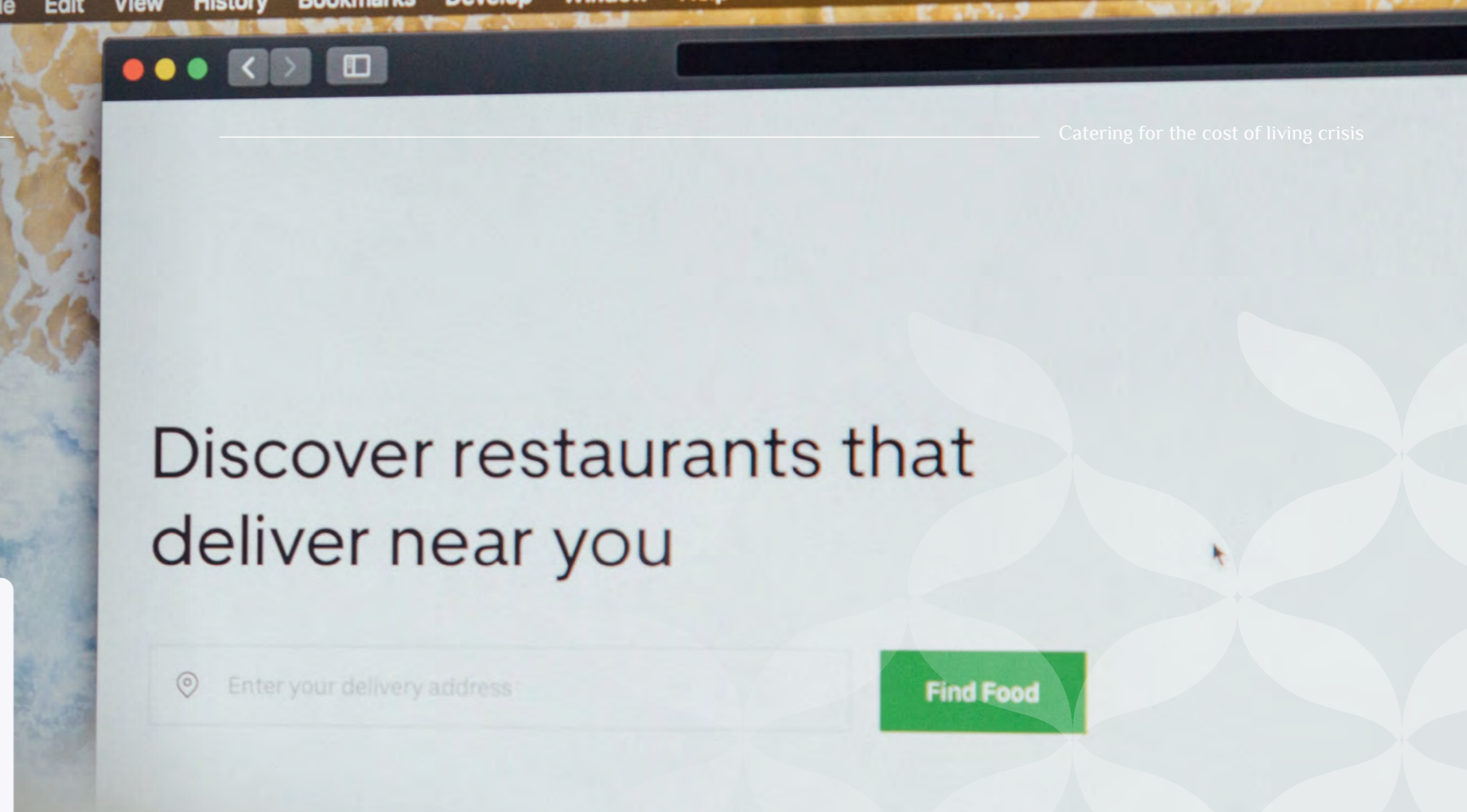


10. Make cold calls

Rather than stopping offering food altogether in quieter periods (as some operators are considering according to a recent UKHospitality survey), why not create dishes that can be made without heat and can easily be prepared in advance?

Make more of Marketing

Having the right offer is one thing but you've also got to get people through the doors to enjoy it. The temptation when times are tough is to cut down on marketing but there are plenty of examples to show businesses that maintain or increase activity during such times, reap the rewards and emerge the strongest. It doesn't need to involve eye-watering sums of money either and these tips will help you plan a marketing strategy and grow your reach with only modest investment.



1. Google Business

It's the first place most people will find you online. Increase your online visibility by signing up for a free Google Business Profile. This will enable customers to see you on Google Maps, write reviews, upload images.



2. Online reservations

Make it as easy as possible for customers to take a seat with you. Signing up with table booking services such as The Folk and Open Table will help you reach new customers. Brands that offer direct-to-consumer online ordering are seeing up to 40% of sales taking place on these platforms.



3. Direct delivery

The delivery market has boomed in recent years, with CGA stats showing that sales are 275% higher than three years ago. This has become a welcome additional revenue stream for many hospitality operators and could become a crucial one in a cost-of-living crisis, as consumers look to affordable treats. Make the most of this market by exploring delivery services such as UberEats and Just Eat.



4. DIY digital

With so many tools available it has never been easier to develop your own website and ordering apps and save on third party costs.



5. Doing a lunch deal

Think about the times of day when you can drive new business and offer incentives, such as capturing the work from home crowd with lunch deals.



6. Go dark

Not by turning off all of the lights but you could consider opening up the kitchen for takeaways only at quieter times of the week.



7. This goes well with...

Match-up drinks with meals on the menu to make life easier for customers and to encourage them to trade up.



8. Celebrate seasonal events

Customers will need good reason to leave their homes and spend money when they are watching their wallets. Make the most of key calendar dates by packaging up meals with special occasions... Then spread the word with your great new marketing strategy.

Find out more

Westmill Foods is one of Europe's largest specialist food companies, manufacturer and supplier of authentic Asian and Afro-Caribbean food. We serve the chefs and owners of restaurants and takeaways as well as offering a diverse consumer portfolio.

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