How to Use Restaurant Tech to Supercharge Reopening Post Pandemic

This guide is brought to you by:

BACK OF HOUSE   +   **Gordon** FOOD SERVICE

As you prepare to reopen your restaurant after the coronavirus pandemic, it has become clear that operators utilizing technology have had an easier time pivoting business models quickly and are leveraging technology to thrive in a post-COVID world. As you prepare to open, no matter the concept, size, and location of your operation, there's technology that will enhance your current and new customer's experience, and make it faster, easier, and more economical to run your business.

We made this guide to highlight some of the most dynamic and essential types of restaurant technology on the market today, and to help operators think through how tech can optimize and amplify their post-pandemic comeback.

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Before you begin selecting your technology, ask yourself...

1. Will you offer off-premise services?

2. Do you have existing technology that you want to integrate or do you plan to integrate with other platforms in the future?

3. Do you need flexibility with technology costs?

4. Do you want data and analytics about your customers?

5. Do you need support from your service providers?

SECTION ONE

Technology to Enable Your Customer Experience

1 Deliver a strong online presence

Give your customers an easy way to interact (and transact) with your restaurant online. Over 90% of customers browse for dining options using their phones, so every part of your online program should also be optimized for mobile.

Website builders

Build out a professional, easy-to-maintain digital hub for your restaurant using purpose-built software to save time and unlock future revenue potential.

Here's a list of streamlined website platforms to consider,
many of which contain ecommerce platforms:

Restaurant-Forward Options

Sociavore
From easy set-up, to online ordering, social media integration and easy integration with
other third parties, this platform was designed by restaurateurs for restaurateurs.

BentoBox
This site enables a great dining and operator user experience, and is used by some of
the most famous operators as well as family-owned operators. From the front-end to
back-end, this saves time and provides a great view of an operation with data.

The Leaders

SquareSpace
This site delivers a great experience for guests and enhances your operation with
eCommerce functionality, automatically connecting with OpenTable, and integrating
with other services, and has built-in SEO. It also connects with your POS. But all of this
functionality means it also requires a bit more experience by the user to navigate it's
features and benefits.

Wix
Great for beginners or more experienced designers who also care about a high-design
experience. What we also love is the help and support Wix offers to their users.

For On-the-Go Operators

Flavor Plate
Great for on-the-go operators who need to edit on the fly from their phones and are busy
traveling between multiple locations. No online ordering enabled.

Built for eCommerce

Weebly
Weebly's ecommerce platform is powered by Square, which provides a robust ecommerce
platform for operators.

For Simplicity

Gloriafood
GloriaFood offers a very economical package, and allows designers to create a one-page
website that also embeds online ordering.

2 Be Visible

You spent all of this time building your website, now you want to make sure people visit.

Search

You can optimize your restaurant's search visibility without a cash outlay if you're willing to invest some upfront time. As you prepare to reopen, consider using a free restaurant SEO guide like this one to give your business a boost in search.

Marketing

Efficiently communicate with old and new customers with clear, compelling messages on digital platforms they already use.

Social Media

Focus on mastering your restaurant's presence on Instagram and Facebook. Check out Eat.News' comprehensive marketing guide for optimizing your online messaging during and following the pandemic. Use free resources to hone your Instagram approach, and don't forget to integrate direct-from-app ordering.

Check out Facebook's restaurant-specific guides for page management. Consider implementing a chat feature to help customers find answers to basic questions, which can reduce your customer service lift.

Creating Ads and Assets

Reduce your marketing spend by creating more of your own marketing materials and digital content with freemium design software like Canva or Snappa. Both design platforms have similar features and identical pricing structures (for their premium offerings.)

Review Sites

Another best-practice is to ensure your listings are complete and accurate on key review sites. Use a free guide like this one and apply the practices to sites like:

Yelp
TripAdvisor
Google & Google Maps
Facebook

Other resource links:

Search Engine Journal
9 Quick Restaurant SEO Tips to Boost Your

Google Search Visibility SEO Hacker
How to Optimize for "Near My Area" Search Results

Pro Tip!

To improve the quality and professionalism of the assets you create on these platforms, make sure to take full advantage of their (free!) tutorials, plus templates specifically built for common social media applications (like Facebook cover photos, Instagram Stories slides, and more.)

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Online Ordering, Delivery + Online Stores

Online Ordering

Today, most web-building platforms enable eCommerce and web ordering. Most of the options listed above include online ordering capabilities. And remember, many of the leading POS systems have incorporated online ordering as a functionality, so if your restaurant uses Toast, Upserve, Revel, or Shopkeep, you've already got online ordering capabilities! But even if you don't, there are a couple systems you can leverage as a la carte add-ons:

Built for restaurants

Swipe.by, SkyTab
These food & beverage-focused, app-based platforms offer stand-alone ordering solutions for small businesses hoping to avoid retooling the rest of their tech mix on-the-fly.

Built for everyone

Shopify, Square
These mobile payment leaders boast webstore functionality that can be deployed by restaurants, bars, and breweries—especially ones selling shelf-stable goods that require little customization. They're web-based, functional, and easy to use.

Delivery

The most cost-effective way to stand-up a delivery operation for your restaurant will likely be to utilize either a third-party delivery app or pre-existing white-label delivery management software.

We've created an entire how-to guide for optimizing delivery to help you quickly parse options and select a service.

Turnkey set-up

SkiptheDishes, DoorDash, UberEats
These apps capture consumers on their platform directly and charge restaurant operators a transaction fee for each order. With no monthly fee and lots of existing customers, they're a good bet if you're looking to stand-up delivery ASAP.

Full-serve options

Olo, ChowNow, Onfleet, Ueat
White-label software platforms allow you to engage with your customers directly through a native website and/or mobile application. They require monthly fees and more tech investment, but give you greater brand control and better margins. These platforms either rely on local contractor networks (Olo), develop their own app-based driver network (Onfleet), or leverage DoorDash's network (ChowNow) for fulfillment.

> **Pro Tip!**
>
> While customers love delivery, fulfillment can be challenging. Check out this case study highlighting customers' most common frustrations with delivery to avoid pitfalls.

Catering

As customers slowly return to on-premise dining, full-service, event-based catering will likely be one of the last categories to rebound. But some restaurateurs are having success leveraging their brands into drop-off, package-based, cold and hot catering targeted to families at home and other small groups.

You can tap into this revenue opportunity using purpose-built software like Curate.co or Infor's sales & catering suite to manage sales and fulfillment and track efficiency—or for an even more no-frills approach, list no-substitutions packages (like cheese plates, pastry baskets, etc.) on your online-ordering portal.

E-commerce/Shop

Offering e-commerce directly through your website allows fans of your restaurant to purchase gift cards and high-margin merchandise passively. Most of the site-building platforms we've listed above all include e-commerce integrations with shopping platforms.

Choose a platform that works for you

The industry-standard

Shopify
Review after review indicates that Shopify is still the best (or at least one of) for out-of-the-box e-commerce solutions. It's versatile, intuitive, and can scale to fit the needs of any restaurant.

Keep it simple

SquareSpace, Wix, Square
There's something to be said for an all-in-one solution, so if you'd rather not bother with integrating a webstore with your existing website, the site-building platforms offer their own vertically integrated e-commerce functions, too.

Small-business sleeper pick

BigCommerce
You may not have heard of it, but e-commerce experts are very familiar with BigCommerce, and love it for its breadth and flexibility for small-business owners.

The on-the-house approach

BigCartel
Want to sell just a handful of very-basic products, like keychains and koozies? You might qualify for BigCartel's freemium tier.

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Technology to Create a Safe + Efficient Front of House

Social distancing rules and expectations are changing the way the staff engages with customers. From seating arrangements, to menus, to payment, businesses are adapting with a variety of technology options.

Digital Menus

Projecting menu offerings on a screen may not be a fit for every type of concept, but if you run, for example, a counter-service restaurant or sports bar, this approach can be an effective way to reduce the hassle—and contamination potential—of printed menus.

There are various approaches to implementing digital menus in your restaurant:

Smartphones

If your menu is already online, communicate with your customers to use their phones to review, or provide QR codes on table-top signage for your guests to scan that take them to your menu.

TVs
A centrally located TV screen, typically mounted in the window or near the point-of-sale (or both.) This approach works great for fast-casual restaurants where customers expect to order and pay prior to their meals. Find a flatscreen that works with your budget.
As for presentation:

For big menus with lots of options
ScreenCloud, NoviSign, YoDeck
If your offerings are extensive, consider a digital signage vendor that provides timed scrolling, dynamic inventory & pricing, and multiple service options. These web-based software options also integrate with layout creators (some of them free!), so you won't have to create your own themes from scratch.

A DIY approach for simple menus:
PowerPoint, Google Slides
If your offerings are straightforward and don't often change, you can potentially use free presentation software to create a static menu that can be broadcast on your screen.

Pro Tip!

Check out this easy-to-follow YouTube tutorial on how to quickly DIY a digital menu for your restaurant using PowerPoint.

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Tablets

Tablets that sit either at a counter (like BouncePad and OrderCounter) or on your restaurant's tables (like Presto or Ziosk) may work better for sports bar/casual dining restaurants where customers expect some semblance of a conventional ordering experience.

Good to know

Tablet-based systems require more contact than wall-mounted menus, but less than traditional menus. Plus Restaurant chains that have leaned into tabletop tablet systems, like Outback steakhouse, have reported upticks in sales to the tune of 30% or more.

Contactless Payments

Reducing physical interactions between staffers and customers is a critical part of creating a safe environment in your restaurant. Leveraging contactless payment will cut down on the amount of materials your guests and servers have to touch, concentrating the payment process to centralized, easy-to-clean devices.

Reduce contact with mPOS devices

Clover, Presto, SkyTab, Square
Your restaurant's FOH can process credit-card transactions tableside with specialty hardware from companies with POS expertise—so-called mobile POS, or mPOS systems. This eliminates the need to handle cash (a strong vector for pathogens that cause sickness) and reduces the number of surfaces/points of contact between servers and customers. Plus, with 69% of customers reporting that waiting for their check is the most frustrating part of the dining-out experience, this solution is likely to be popular with diners!

Pro Tip!

Consider bundling this solution with digital tabletop systems like Presto to save money and maintenance on devices.

Go 100% contactless with NFC, QR integrations, and mobile wallets

If your goal is to eliminate contact from the payment experience at your restaurant, consider a solution that allows guests to pay their tabs completely online.

Near-field communication (NFC) technology allows you to accept payments directly from your customer when they use their mobile wallets (Apple Pay, Google Pay, Samsung Pay, etc.) to transact with your NFC-enabled POS. (Every POS system we've detailed in this guide is NFC-compatible, by the way.)

QR integrations—like the ones between Clover and Apple Pay and Revel and Zapper—allow customers to use either a dedicated app or pay bills that your centralized POS prints with special scannable codes.

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Vendors like SevenRooms allow your guests to order and pay from their table, without having to stand in line or wait for the bill.

Worth thinking about

Restaurants with fiercely loyal customers, multiple locations, or both, might consider the "stored value" approach. Using a QR code, customers add money to their account at your restaurant, then scan the code to debit that account when they want to pay their tab. This likely wouldn't be a good fit for smaller, independent outfits, but if you operate multiple locations locally or regionally, stored value is a great way to increase customer loyalty, gather valuable marketing data, and drive additional spending with tech.

Waitlists + Reservations

Scheduling systems can help manage your dining-room while capacity is limited, and help optimize it for turnover in the future.

Reservation systems help you maximize covers, provide analytics on how and when your customers like to dine, incentivize more online reviews, and generally increase the efficiency of your restaurant. The systems also help you gather valuable CRM data to provide better customer experience.

Pick a vendor that works for your business

Most restaurants use

OpenTable, Resy, Yelp
The leaders are the leaders for a reason: they operate massive, optimized web platforms that diners visit to decide where to eat and offer the greatest breadth of integrations and marketing partnerships (like Google Reserve.)

For specialty/niche offerings

Tock
Its premium brand positioning, deposit and prepaid emphasis, and functionality to sell add-ons at booking (think: wine pairings, cookbooks, merch...) have quickly earned this relatively new platform from longtime F&B professionals a strong following.

Allow for Personalized Experiences

SevenRooms
SevenRooms enables multi-channel reservations and communication with guests, and enables operators to own all of their guest data that captures details like allergies, preferences, and total spend to deliver personalized experiences.

Budget-conscious pick

Eat App
If you're introducing a reservation system for the first time and want to minimize risk, Eat App's monthly fee ($129; $219 for POS integration) and lack of per-cover fee is hard to turn down.

Waitlists

If your reservation system doesn't already include it, waitlist software like TablesReady and WaitWhile offer time and money savings by reducing friction at the host stand, avoiding coaster-pager hardware, and increasing seatings.

Fine-tune the front-of-house

Pick out a POS system to improve customer experience and capture more payments. If you don't have a point-of-sale system yet, now is the time to think hard about implementing one.

Beyond basic payment-processing functions, a good POS system will help you manage inventory effectively, send digital receipts, drive customer relationship management, generate invoices, and more. Popular providers include:

Revel
ShopKeep
Toast
TouchBistro
Upserve

To vet these systems and choose the one that's right for your business, check out this comprehensive POS review from Nerd Wallet.

Consider a mobile POS system (mPOS), which empowers your FOH staff to process payments at the table, leading to faster turns, more covers, and higher reviews. Platforms like SkyTab and Presto offer turnkey hardware/software platforms that can reduce FOH labor costs and increase check sizes.

Make sure any POS you implement is EMV-compliant ("Europay, Mastercard, Visa" chip-enabled cards are replacing magnetic-strip cards) and is capable of processing near-field communication (NFC) contactless payments with smartphones and smart watches.

Offering contactless payment can result in higher check sizes and efficiency, especially at fast-casual and counter-service style concepts. It also enables you to better track loyalty to focus CRM initiatives on your most valuable customers.

Tablet-based payments with predetermined tip amounts also tend to yield higher tips, keeping your workforce happier and reducing churn.

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Technology to Optimize your Back of House

1   Help out the kitchen

Use data to get smarter about what you offer and how you order.

Proactively managing the cost of recipes using software makes it a lot easier to decide what dishes can be tweaked for a better margin. Effective food-costing is critical to identifying drags on your bottom line.

Free food cost calculators, like this one from Upserve, can help you assess individual meal costs. Gordon Food Service customers also have access to Recipe Manager, a software that offers holistic cost-management across your entire menu and provides real-time pricing on ingredients

Menu revisions

Proper food-costing will also put you in position to make smart calls about how to revise your menu, identifying the "winners" and culling the "losers."

You can also use a menu engineering platform or spreadsheet to increase overall profitability:

1. Download a spreadsheet (like this one from QSR, available with an email sign-up) or consider implementing software from a vendor like Crunchtime.

2. Toast also offers free menu engineering courses.

Inventory management

Using software to manage your inventory will help you cut back on hidden food costs like spoiling, waste, and theft. The restaurant industry wastes $162 billion in food each year, and poorly inventoried restaurants may lose around 5% of total sales due to waste.

Many POS systems offer inventory management functionality as part of their platform, including Toast and Upserve. Fully integrated restaurant systems, such as Restaurant365, often offer this function as well.

Gordon Food Service customers also have access to Inventory Manager.

2　Upgrade the back-office

Staff Smart

Staff smart to avoid unnecessary overhead and create frustration on your team. Staff turnover costs the average restaurant $146,000 in unrealized revenue. Investing in a good system that respects your workers' time and keeps them from unpleasant administrative tasks offers great savings potential down the road when they stick around.

Software can help you schedule your existing staff more efficiently to cut down on wasteful overlap and paperwork. Consider a program like: 7shifts, Deputy, Homebase and WhenIWork.

Find temporary help quickly and effectively using purpose-built apps and programs, like Staffy, that surface FOH/BOH gig workers with the skills your restaurant needs. You get qualified workers to fill key holes and maintain productivity, which helps your bottom line and keeps your team happier.

Get your financial house in order

Bank smart by banking online

If you don't yet, now is a great time to put into place a banking solution that allows you to execute basic functions, like deposits and transfers, digitally. Nearly every major bank, including regional banks and credit unions, have online business banking solutions. Check out Small Business Trends: How To Choose A Bank For Your Small Business.

The right accounting software helps you save time and money

Restaurant-specific software like Restaurant365 can save you substantial time and money by automating intensive bookkeeping tasks like reconciliations and report creation.

Even if you're not ready for an all-in-one FOH/BOH management solution, major accounting programs like QuickBooks Online will offer many valuable integrations with restaurant-specific programs.

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This content was brought to you by our partners at Back Of House.

Like our content on Eat.News? Then say hello to the platform powering it: Back Of House, a new project (from the same team at RelishWorks!) built to help independent restaurateurs compare and select the solutions their businesses need to succeed.

Though the site is still very much in beta for now, we wanted to share it with you first to give you a little preview of what's to come— solutions reviews from a community of independent operators across the continent, plus helpful, accessible, and free editorial content written by our research team.

We hope Back Of House will be a powerful resource as you pick solutions to make your restaurant smarter, faster, and better.

Sign up for our mailing list now to be the first to check out Back Of House once it's ready for primetime at Eat.News/Boh.