

10 STEPS

to boost your

OFF-PREMISES SALES



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If your business has yet to set up an off-premises sales system, or if the one you have hasn't produced the results you were looking for, here are **10 steps** that might help get things moving in the right direction.

Off-Premises Sales Steps

1. Setup
2. Menu
3. Packaging
4. Partners
5. Order Ahead
6. Delivery
7. Ghost Kitchens
8. Drive-Thrus
9. Promotion
10. Connect

See the full blog post here: <https://www.chart.org/training-tools-and-resources/members-blog/2021/07/15/10-steps-to-boost-your-off-premises-sales/>

1. SETUP

Because most restaurants were constructed before the off-premises boom, you may need to do a little rearranging to get everything set up: determining what the best place will be for the third-party tablet, how to communicate orders to the kitchen, where to stage orders once they have been prepared, etc. These decisions should not be made by company executives in a glass tower 100 miles away from the restaurant; they should be made on-site and include the recommendations of your front-line staff. The employees are going to know the ins-and-outs of the location better than anyone else, and that will make them your strongest ally when it comes to setting up a system that works well with the natural flow of the restaurant. And if you have already set things up without the involvement of the workers, go back immediately and ask them how they would improve things, because I guarantee you they will have some great suggestions.

Additionally, off-premises sales can lead to a host of potential snafus that you won't encounter from dining room sales, such as when a guest calls to say their delivery is late or they've been overcharged, when your tablet stops receiving orders, when the internet goes down, etc. Your managers will need to know how to respond quickly to these different situations, so you should bring together all the different departments involved in possible solutions – operations, IT, marketing, accounting, training – to determine the best paths forward and make sure your restaurant teams know exactly what to do so that issues can be resolved and guests are not left hanging.

2. MENU

One of the most important decisions your team will need to make is what menu items to offer for your off-premises program. You can certainly allow everything, but if you are just starting out, you may want to focus on foods that are popular with your guests, profitable, and travel well, and then build from there based on feedback you receive. Fountain drinks are a great example; they may be popular and profitable, but after sitting for 20-30 minutes in a delivery car, will the guest still enjoy the taste? Will they be happy with that purchase? Start slow and build your program with items that meet these three criteria, and then consider adding unique items that help to separate your brand from others, such as meal delivery kits, alcohol kits, specialized catering (such as boxed lunches), or ask your restaurant employees for ideas they might have, based on their experiences.

3. PACKAGING

Another key decision will be to consider what packaging to use for your off-premises food. You should work with your purchasing department or product provider to find boxes and bags that will keep your food fresh and hot (or cold, depending on the item) and will fit within your budget. If you don't know exactly how to start the process, try ordering delivery from your competitors and see what type of packaging they use for the items you are considering selling – you can get a lot of great ideas by just checking out what others in your restaurant category are doing. Once you have decided on the bags and boxes you want to use, think about getting them branded with your logo so that guests get a reminder of your company every time they open the refrigerator and see the leftovers. And if you cannot afford to print your logo directly on the packaging, consider using stickers, labels, or flyers with

your logo and any other company information that will be important, or have your employees write a thank-you message on the bag to provide a personal connection that can often be missing when it comes to off-premises dining. Finally, be sure to review the regulations in your city, county, and state to ensure that your packaging meets all the legal requirements (for example, if there is a styrofoam ban in your area, or that all to-go containers must be recyclable or compostable).

4. PARTNERS

The next big decision will be which third-party partners (if any) you will use: DoorDash, Uber Eats, Grubhub, Postmates, ChowNow, EZ Cater, etc. There are a lot! And there are also integration services such as Ordermark, Otter, and Chowly that will integrate your third-party orders all into one tablet or into your POS terminal that you may want to consider. If you are having trouble deciding, ask around to other restaurateurs that you know and trust about what companies they work with and find out what they like and don't like about each provider. Also, as with the packaging, order delivery from the companies you are considering and see if the food arrived on time and if the driver was professional and followed instructions. Look at the fees involved for these partner companies, find out if any negotiation of those fees is possible, and make sure to consider what the fees will be after any local caps have been removed.

After you select a vendor, you will need to set up your online site, and you will definitely want to include photos of your food items and brief descriptions so that the guests can develop an expectation of what they will be receiving. You will also need to set prices for each item, extra, and upgrade, and note that these prices do not need to be the same as the ones for guests who come into the restaurant; your online menu prices can be higher to help cover the third-party vendor fees you are paying.

Finally, make sure to properly train your staff on the new system once it has been set-up; don't just toss the tablet down and expect them to know exactly what they should do with it.

5. ORDER AHEAD

If online ordering and pickup/takeout is an option you are considering, your goals should be to make it as easy as possible for guests to find their order upon arrival. Make sure they are told during the ordering process exactly where they should go – do they come into the restaurant (and do they need to wait in line), do they wait in their car, do they go through the drive-thru, etc. The last thing you want is to make them wait for their food when the whole point of online ordering is to speed up the process. Many restaurants have installed pick-up cubbies or shelves to make it easier, and these can be alphabetized for busy locations so that guests know exactly where they should be looking. You can also offer curbside service, but if you do, make sure the guests are told where to park and how to alert the restaurant staff when they have arrived. One suggestion might be to set up a cell phone inside the building so that guests can text either which spot they are in, or the make and color of their car. If you do offer curbside, one other suggestion is to consider purchasing safety vests for the employees taking out the food so that they can be easily seen in the parking lot (especially during evening hours).

6. DELIVERY

As with ordering ahead, delivery is another option to consider for your business, and the first big decision will be whether to employ your own drivers or to use those from your third-party vendor. There are pros and cons to both options, so weigh your decision carefully and ask others in your network who have already made the decision why they chose their particular path. If you go with third-party, again, I would recommend you test out the potential services by ordering from other nearby restaurants to see how long their response times are in your area, because you want to make sure there are no long waits due to driver shortages. Other considerations for third-party drivers are when should you start the order (right after it is placed vs. when the driver actually arrives) so that you have enough time to prepare it and the food is still fresh for the guests, how you will stage the delivery orders so the drivers can find their food quickly and easily, and who in your company will be monitoring feedback from the third-party services so that you can make sure to take care of any guests who have had disappointing experiences.

7. GHOST KITCHENS

These types of restaurants, which are also called dark kitchens or virtual kitchens, don't have typical storefronts with large dining rooms, but rather exist online on a website or a third-party app and are designed only for delivery or pickup orders. A ghost kitchen can be a profitable option for a business that has unused capacity – for example, if you have catering production area that has been slow since the pandemic, or if you have one busy meal period and one slow meal period. If this sounds like your restaurant, you could create a new product line to take advantage of this extra space/time and offer new menu items under a different brand that would appeal to the guests living in your area (DoorDash regularly puts out reports with some [great information on food trends](#)). If you're interested in giving this idea a try but don't have the resources to develop a new brand, check with your third-party partners or companies such as NextBite for turn-key brands that have already been created and can be easily started up.

8. DRIVE-THRUS

Between April and August of 2020, it was reported that America's drive-thrus showed a 43% increase in business because they offered a safe and convenient way for guests to pick up food during the pandemic. If you don't have a traditional drive-thru at your restaurant, you might want to think about setting up a non-traditional one as long as you have the space available in your parking lot. You would need signage and guidance for the guests so they know where to go, as well as a method for them to order and pay (there are vendors who will help set up QR codes to allow guests to pull up menus right on their phone and pay for orders without downloading an app). Pick-up could be handled at a side window, if available, or under a tent in the parking lot if more convenient. As with the other suggestions I have listed, asking your restaurant teams for their input on this idea is a great place to start; they are going to know the customer flow better than anyone else and will undoubtedly have some ideas for a successful implementation.

9. PROMOTION

Once you have your off-premises sales system set up, you will of course need to promote it to your guests. You can use traditional in-store methods of posters and banners, or you could let the world know via email (either using lists you have cultivated or purchased), social media, on your website, or offers on your third-party sites. If you have a Google Business listing (and you should!), follow the online instructions on how to add Order Pickup and Order Delivery buttons to that listing so guests can order from your location immediately after googling “restaurants near me.” One quick note about other promotions you may have developed on your own, such as a coupon, or if you offer gift cards: you will want to make sure you are clear to guests that these offers can only be used when ordering at the restaurant from the cashier or server and NOT when ordering from a third-party provider such as Uber Eats or ChowNow. You don’t want guests to get excited about using your coupon or gift card to order food for delivery only to be disappointed later on when they realize it won’t work.

10. CONNECT

Off-premises sales has changed a lot in the last year, and it’s going to continue evolving as we move forward, so it’s essential that you stay in touch with what’s going on. You can do so by joining national organizations such as CHART (Council of Hotel and Restaurant Trainers), the National Restaurant Association, or local groups such as state hospitality associations or local roundtables. I would also suggest you subscribe to the free periodicals that cover your section of the industry, and follow all of the above groups on social media (especially Twitter) to get updates on what’s happening out in the world. Finally, keep talking and listening to your guests and your staff about off-premises sales so you have a solid understanding of their opinions about how you can improve the process in your organization.

View Patrick Yearout's recorded webinar on the same topic from the National Restaurant Association's Show To Go, April 28, 2021
https://www.bigmarker.com/NationalRestaurantShow/10-Steps-to-Boost-Your-Off-Premise-Sales?utm_bmcr_source=ShowToGo

See the full blog post here: <https://www.chart.org/training-tools-and-resources/members-blog/2021/07/15/10-steps-to-boost-your-off-premises-sales/>