

## Meal Kits Offer New Opportunity for Foodservice



**Meal kits let operators maintain sales and customer loyalty. Make your own DIY kits similar to subscription plans. You'll get the income and customers get your cuisine. Win-win.**

Most consumers associate meal kits with grocery store self-serve cases and subscription plans like Freshly and Blue Apron, but these DIY dinner options have real traction for restaurants—especially in times of reduced dine-in business.

Recent special research by Datassential revealed that meal kits are generally thought to be the safest way to get someone else's food on the home table, compared with other solutions including takeout/drive-thru, grocery deli counters, and self-service food bars. In addition, many consumers cited an increased appreciation of cooking as a way to experiment with new ingredients and flavors, as a stress and boredom reliever, and as a way to spend quality time with families.

And that means meal kits have a lot to offer, both for consumers and for operators looking to replace or increase sales while building customer loyalty.

Packing up curated ingredients into a turnkey DIY kit makes sense for a lot of other reasons, too, including more productive use of inventory and prep time, maintaining relationships with suppliers, and the ability to keep staff on the payroll.

There are many options for what to offer, and these can easily stretch the boundaries of the existing menu concept. Individual components can be either pre-prepped, such as diced vegetables for a mirepoix, or they can be provided in whole form, such as whole carrots to be peeled, flavored with provided seasoning, and roasted.

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One of the most effective strategies is to provide complete kits, along with recipes, for your most popular menu specialties, so that customers can enjoy your food in their home. Not only are they getting a great meal, you've just built customer loyalty, and given people a reason to visit you for a dine-in meal.

According to Datassential, many consumers are looking to build more comfort foods and indulgent/treat eating, as well as better-for-you options, into their home-cooked meal repertoire, and DIY meal kits are a perfect venue for that. Offering less familiar vegetables, premium-quality meats, unusual flavor profiles, and heirloom/ancient grains can help set meal kits apart. Vegan or vegetarian meal kits can remove the intimidation factor from this type of eating.

- Take-and-bake comfort foods like lasagna, mac-and-cheese, and ready-to-roast chicken
- Build-your-own pizza, tacos, stir-fry, and burger kits
- Ready-to-grill steakhouse-style meats (trimmed, marinated, and seasoned) along with appropriate side dishes, such as foil-wrapped baked potatoes and prepared creamed spinach
- Themed "adventure meals," with all the fixings (plus detailed instructions) for items like Thai curries, Indian dosa, Greek stuffed vegetables, and other global favorites
- Curated boxes of prepped ingredients that can work for multiple meals or planned leftovers, allowing customers to stock up
- Farmers baskets of locally grown vegetables, meats, and artisanal cheeses—helping out small suppliers in the process
- Smoothie and juice kits
- Cocktail care packages
- Take-and-bake desserts, such as bread pudding, cobbler, and pies
- Decorate-your-own cakes or cupcakes
- Mix-and-match options where customers can select their own proteins and sides, plus additional choice of appetizer, salad, and/or dessert

Meal kits provide an excellent opportunity to help customers learn about new flavors, ingredients, and cooking styles that they wouldn't attempt on their own. Some operators are even providing how-to videos on their websites to demonstrate cooking techniques for more elaborate "project meals," such as barbecue or global specialties, to provide backup for meal kits.

That's good for building customer loyalty and engagement, as well as sales.

Source: Datassential COVID-19 special report series (April 2020)

*The information provided is based on a general industry overview, and is not specific to your business operation. Each business is unique and decisions related to your business should be made after consultation with appropriate experts.*

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## **GET STARTED**

- The Nestlé Professional family of brands includes a number of products that can be used in meal kits, from sauces, flavor concentrates, and dessert ingredients to fully prepared entrées and side dishes.