

**A LOOK BACK,  
TO MOVE FORWARD...**

For so many, 2020 was a year of fear and uncertainty as the coronavirus ravaged the country and put the on-premise side of the industry through its worst year in history. The economy came to a halt as millions of Americans sheltered in place, and businesses were forced to close indoor spaces. The National Restaurant Association ([www.restaurant.org](http://www.restaurant.org)) has gathered some interesting statistics and trends I wanted to share...

About 110,000 restaurants across the nation fell victim to dining restrictions imposed due to the pandemic, closing either temporarily or for good.

According to the National Restaurant Association research, the industry lost some \$240 billion in sales and is still 2.5 million jobs below pre-pandemic levels.

Nevertheless, the on-premise side of the industry has persevered. By quickly switching to off-premises service, innovating operations, and adapting contactless technology, restaurants and bars have shown resiliency, doing everything they can to keep their businesses open and employees on the payroll.

Some converted closed dining rooms into grocery store staging areas so that customers could pick up supermarket staples and hard-to-get supplies along with their restaurant orders. Working through a different supply chain, operators often had access to supplies grocery stores couldn't keep in stock.

Technology that might have been "nice to have" before the pandemic suddenly became "need to have" to enable touchless transactions.

Alcohol-to-go service became a best-selling option for many struggling establishments as many state and local jurisdictions temporarily stayed regulations that prohibited such sales prior to the pandemic.

Many of the innovations deployed not only helped keep on-premise establishments afloat in 2020, they also signal the trends shaping 2021.



We now know that three things are certain: the pandemic tested the limits of operator creativity and knowhow, accelerated tech adoption and emerging trends, and confirmed that customers sorely miss their restaurant experiences.

From surveys of 6,000 restaurant operators and 1,000 consumers, the National Restaurant Association has identified how restaurateurs demonstrated resiliency, innovation and commitment as well as the food and menu trends likely to stick around.

**Top trends include:**

- Streamlined menus
- Overwhelming shift to off-premises dining
- Blended meals, part homemade, part restaurant-supplied
- Restaurant-brand meal kits
- Alcohol to go

If you're wondering what foods customers craved most, the National Restaurant Association asked operators to name their No. 1 selling item right now and 6,000 of them responded. Here are the **top sellers** from fullservice restaurants:

- Burgers
- Seafood
- Pizza
- Steak
- Chicken (excl. wings)
- Breakfast items
- Pasta
- Mexican food
- Sandwiches/subs/wraps
- Chicken wings

2021 Restaurant Trends is developed with the National Restaurant Association's State of the Restaurant Industry report, which will be available for download Tuesday, January 26. Visit [www.restaurant.org](http://www.restaurant.org) for more information. ■

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