



**BRIGHT
BROTHERS**
STRATEGY GROUP

Winter Recovery Trends

January 2021



RECOVERY TRENDS

JANUARY IS OFTEN THE HARDEST TIME OF YEAR for small businesses, but difficult times have sparked a golden age of business creativity.

RESTAURANTS

Savvy restaurants are taking a cue from the weather and providing fridge and freezer-ready meals. When guests order takeout or delivery, they're encouraged to stock up for lunches or days they don't want to venture out. Many dishes from the regular menu are best served fresh, but restaurants can create simpler dishes "inspired" by popular menu items. Market this menu as an upsell and an extra way to show that the restaurant cares about their guests.

Personal stories about business owners and employees have performed exceptionally well during the pandemic. People who need help are happier when they help others. Beyond sharing stories on social media, we're seeing more owners and chefs becoming more actively involved in the front of the house, bringing out to-go orders or even (occasionally) delivering food themselves! These moments of personal connection create lasting loyalty. Most guests will share the moment with friends or post a review if asked.

Speaking of personal asks, some restaurants are straight-forwardly asking people who order online to order a pricier dish or bottle of wine and explaining that it helps the restaurant stay open. Many guests are happy to treat themselves to a steak while feeling good about helping.

Bars that count on full houses during football and basketball games are taking a page from clubs and selling modestly-priced "VIP booth" experiences to groups. It keeps the energy high, helps keep tables filled and distanced, and can be easily scaled so as not to offend regulars.



ACTION ITEMS

TRAVELING TOGETHER

Leisure travel is still predicted to pick up in Q1, and most families are expected to vacation more in 2021. Most of these vacations will be to places where nature is the main attraction, but many trips will include visits to family members they haven't seen for a year. Businesses that rely on tourism should take stock of what they can offer to families and speak to their needs. "Free for kids" offers will perform especially well.

Pods of families will also be traveling together, often for multi-week trips, which can provide unique challenges for places with occupancy restrictions. Some hotels have begun experimenting with selling blocks to leisure travelers; it can be reassuring for families to know they'll have a whole wing or floor to themselves. Others have created additional business centers that cater to kids in school as well as their parents who work remotely.

CONFRONTATIONS

Not every customer is happy about COVID restrictions – or their stress level is just high that day - and they can take that out on employees or in reviews. Don't respond to the reviewer directly. Instead remind the readers of the review that tensions may be higher than usual, but don't apologize or equivocate on your team's safety. Not only do the vast majority of people understand that restrictions aren't your fault, but it can help reduce the number of unpleasant customers.

MEDIA PARTNERS

The media is increasingly taking a more proactive role in promoting local businesses rather than treating PR as competition to advertising. In Paris, news sites feature a large banner at the top encouraging readers to support specific businesses that need the help. Alberta has even gotten local weather forecasters to find creative, upbeat ways to talk about the freezing weather!