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# MAKING LEMONADE

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F&B OPERATIONS ARE REDEFINING AND REINVENTING THEMSELVES IN REAL TIME TO KEEP REVENUE COMING IN.

Contributed by JEANETTE HURT



The Meritage Resort and Spa in Napa Valley, California, created an inviting — and safe — space for guests and locals to hang out with a bottle of wine. “We’ve made it Napa’s ‘beach,’” says Managing Director David Ryan.

**S**ometimes, creative solutions to drive F&B revenue and customer engagement come right from customers — if hoteliers are paying attention.

All nine tasting rooms and all but one of the restaurants at the 40-acre Meritage Resort and Spa in Napa Valley and its sister resorts were shut down when California went into quarantine. But guests and visitors could still purchase

wine, groceries, grab-and-go meals and snacks at the resorts’ grocery store.

“Someone would come in and grab a bottle of wine and some chips, and then they would walk out and see this huge lawn and just sit and stay there for an hour or two,” says David Ryan, managing director. “Then we saw families, and couples out with their dogs started coming.”

The hotel placed tables with

umbrellas on the lawn, and its food truck and ice cream cart, which usually come out only for special events, make appearances every weekend. “We’ve made it Napa’s ‘beach,’” Ryan says. An outdoor concert series is planned, when the situation allows.

“No one’s ever been through this kind of devastation, and when you come out of the ashes, I think the best thing is to go





The Rooftop by JG at the Beverly Hills Waldorf Astoria no longer uses printed menus — a cost savings — but replaced centerpieces and other decor with single-use linen placemats.

## ***“I WAS SHOCKED TO SEE THE NUMBERS OF HOW MANY PEOPLE WOULD ORDER THESE MEAL PACKETS ON A DAILY BASIS.”***

— HAIM SPIEGEL, DAN HOTELS

where the light is, and the light is where the customer tells you it is,” Ryan says. “It’s keeping your eyes and ears open.”

### **PACKAGING REVENUE**

At the Mission Point Resort on Mackinaw Island in Michigan, a new, US\$2 million deck and pavilion had been constructed, but dozens of weddings and events scheduled for this summer have been canceled or postponed.

“So we’re taking lemons and making the largest lemonade stand on the

island,” says Liz Ware, vice president of sales and marketing. Now, “the area resembles a beer garden with large flower pots and string lighting in the evening,” she says. The lemonade — and cocktails such as Michigan blueberry mojitos — are pre-packed in retro coolers, with snacks available to purchase.

With hundreds of high-tech workers in the Indian city of Bangalore working from home during quarantine, the team at The Den Bangalore delivered thousands of cooked meals, says Haim Spiegel, F&B

director for Israel-based Dan Hotels, the hotel’s owner. A bigger success: meal preparation kits assembled by the chefs. Packages feeding one, two or four people are delivered to a home, and the recipient watches a two-minute video on preparation.

“I was shocked to see the numbers of how many people would order these meal packets on a daily basis,” Spiegel says. Dan Hotels is looking to expand the practice to its properties in Israel.

Sometimes there are surprising cost savings, says Jacob Musyt, director of F&B at the Waldorf Astoria Beverly Hills. The Rooftop by JG, which just reopened, is no longer printing menus, and guests are scanning QR codes on their phones. “Depending on the quality of paper, a



## *“THE LIGHT IS WHERE THE CUSTOMER TELLS YOU IT IS.”*

— DAVID RYAN, MERITAGE RESORT AND SPA

hotel could save between US\$10,000 and US\$20,000, and that's just for the paper,” he says (75 leather menu binders, costing from US\$60 to US\$150, also require replacement every two years).

Restaurants have to be alert to change quickly, says Kevin Harmon, director of sales and marketing for Le Meridien Indianapolis, Indiana. The restaurant menu was initially adapted for takeout; then the restaurant started offering grocery items, including toilet paper, and the chef began bottling bolognese sauce and salad dressings, along with other everyday items. “Now, it's shifted again, and it's become more of a traditional gift shop with grab-and-go items,” Harmon says. “We are

transitioning, literally, again, as we speak.”

The Shangri-La Hotel in Toronto adapted its popular tea service to go in time for Mother's Day. “We wanted to capture signature elements ... while creating items that could travel well, sacrificing small, delicate garnishes in place of more stable embellishments,” says Malcolm Webster, executive chef. “We also sourced a three-tier disposable stand to help create an authentic tiered afternoon tea experience, and this came with guidelines on how to plate things.”

The tea boxes were so successful that the hotel offered a BBQ Box for Father's Day. “It's ready-to-grill at home or grilled by us at the hotel,” Webster says.



The Shangri-La Hotel in Toronto adapted its popular tea service as a takeaway item, complete with a disposable three-tier stand.



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