

FCSI WHITEPAPERS



**The role of
foodservice
management
consulting
in the 'new
normal'**

FCSI The Americas Professional members will be faced with a vastly changed foodservice landscape in the wake of Covid-19. This whitepaper, produced for FCSI by Progressive Content, explores how management consultants can adapt and help clients to thrive in a post-pandemic world

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this whitepaper is to address the changing foodservice operation landscape as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic and how FCSI management advisory services (MAS) consultants can adapt to help clients thrive.

All professionals in the world of foodservice and hospitality can agree that we will see major changes as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, but at this point few of us have clarity on how roles will be reshaped in a post-pandemic world.

For FCSI MAS consultants, this time will bring challenges as well as opportunities and certainly some requirement to adjust working methods. With millions of job losses expected in the sector and foodservice in need of reinvention, there is no going back to business as usual.

Eager to gauge a glimpse of what our future might look like in the Americas region, we might first look to Asia, where some countries – already over the worst of the pandemic – have started to emerge from lockdowns and dining rooms open again.



How might foodservice look in a post-pandemic world? New measures such as Perspex® dividers in dining rooms, measuring customers' temperature at the entrance, limiting dining room capacity, blocking off seats and serving employees wearing personal protective equipment are just some things that have been suggested.

Regardless, FCSI MAS consultants across the Americas – from Canada to Argentina – will play a big part in helping to shape the foodservice sector as it moves on from the pandemic.

PIVOT AND GAIN

There's no doubt that many restaurants will simply not be able to reopen at the end of this period. Others, however, will have discovered new avenues of business as the crisis has forced them into a focus on delivery and take-out.

According to analysts Technomic, 39% of operators shifted to delivery and 47% shifted to takeout when the virus forced a shutdown. The operators that have

There is no going back to business as usual in the 'new normal' of hospitality

successfully pivoted to carry-out and delivery, will find that their effort will benefit them long after Covid-19 has been.

“For a full-service restaurant that had never before done delivery or carry-out, now that they are doing they are not going to stop; it will just be a new segment of the business,” says Rudy Miick FCSI, founder and president of the Miick Companies. He believes that a wider group of diners, including seniors, will start to value delivery food. “Some of the marketplace is going to realize they can eat this quality of food in their house, so they don’t want to go out, they want to eat in.”

He says 90% of his work at the moment is pro bono. “There’s a lot of outreach to clients and to the community at large – just being a supporter to people in the midst of radically changing their business models,” he says. “For some FCSI colleagues there is some paid-for work, but the majority of us seem to be doing more pro bono work than paid work, with the belief that this will come back to us in spades.”

He has been talking to clients for weeks now about what’s next. “My colleagues and I are clear that even though we are in the midst of the pandemic, the companies that are nimble, stable and smart – even if they are not well funded – are already ahead. We are thinking six months to a year from now,” he explains. “The smart companies are already anticipating where things are going and I am up to my neck in questions about what’s next.”

THE ROLE OF THE MAS CONSULTANT

But will the Covid-19 crisis throw up some opportunities for consultants? FCSI Associate Fredrick Gordon, owner of Gordon Restaurant Consulting and based in Houston, Texas, believes so. “Previously the role of a consultant may have been undervalued to some degree and now the consultants are the ones who will figure this thing out,” he says.

“On the surface consultants will benefit from this because there are so many new changes that will have to be applied in the industry that is not necessarily second nature. It is going to require a little bit more than what the typical daily operation of a restaurant would be. That is why consultants were perhaps not as valued before – people [often] just figured it out themselves.”

Post-pandemic, says Gordon, it might be harder for independent operators to figure it out. “There will be so many moving parts and owners are going to have to reach out to those who understand, teach it well and get the best results from employees. If we do figure it out, consultants might be a lot more valued than they were before.”



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Trust between consumers and operators will be more pivotal than ever in the future

BUILDING TRUST

Trust is clearly going to be key to getting back to business for operators – diners need to be confident that they are going to be safe. Sanitation will be instrumental. *Business Wire* reports that 87% of consumers prefer touchless or self-checkout in the wake of the pandemic. It's hardly surprising – according to Nielsen sales of hand sanitizer was up 212% in March 2020.

Miick thinks the public will demand a more visual demonstration of the attention paid to sanitation. “My sense is that the public is going to be more conscious of clean hands touching plates and tables that are dirty. They’ll wonder, ‘can I see [the server] washing or sanitizing their hands before they carry out clean food?’ That awareness is going to be heightened,” he says.

As part of the new set-up in a post-pandemic world Miick sees sinks as a physical part of the dining room. “A nuance of new constructions will be that we are going to put sinks on the dining room side of the pick-up line, so the table can see me bus a table, wash my hands and pick up clean food. Something as pragmatic as that will be prevalent.”

This focus on safety will affect how marketing campaigns are executed too, according to Gordon. “Before you would show the food and your plates. That is not what people want to see anymore; they want to see your safety practices – are you wearing gloves where before you didn’t have to do before? Are you wearing masks, which is nowhere near any of the existing guidelines on what we have to do? Are your workers distancing themselves? Those are the things people will want to see,” he says.

“That trust is what is going to separate those that are going to be successful and those that are not and consultants will play a huge role in that. In a restaurant you don’t have the time to think about that, but, as a consultant, we do have the time to think about how we got to this point and how we move forward with it.”

ASKING QUESTIONS – AND MOVING AHEAD

Finally, MAS consultants will play a big part in helping businesses investigate their purpose after the pandemic. This involves owner managers re-evaluating how they treat staff, says Miick.

“What is the definition of a restaurant? It is a place someone goes to be restored. So, I look at a post-Covid world and I look at the dish washer – and they are not just the low person on the totem pole we are going to throw plates at and swear at. Without that person we have no sanitation,” he says.

“How do we realize that you look like a dish washer but you are actually a restorer of soul? You are an essential worker and we celebrate that work – the same goes for the prep cook, the pizza cook and the soup maker.”

Joe Schumaker FCSI, CEO of Foodspace, believes all consultants will have to “retool their business” as they get to grips with a vastly changed hospitality landscape after the pandemic.



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A post-Covid world will see the value increase of those responsible for sanitation

“We, as consultants, are in for a big reset too. Design consultants who don’t traditionally do MAS maybe are doing more of it, or they need to do a little bit more – maybe not as much financial planning, but strategizing with clients,” he says.

“It means we have to be agile and capable of doing things outside the world we are used to. If your sector is X, Y or Z – even restaurants and you are used to opening new restaurants – you need to get used to looking at doing some remodels and reengineering in terms of how dining rooms are put together and how they flow.”

NEW WORLD, NEW MESSAGES

As far as the longer-term future is concerned, there is one new area that MAS consultants must include in work with clients: planning for another pandemic.

“The permanent change will be the need to strategize for pandemic-proofing your business – if there is another pandemic, how do we create agile businesses that are capable of surviving? It could be decades before we see anything else close to this and it could never happen,” says Schumaker.

“But I think consultants have to lead the effort on discussing what a restaurant or foodservice establishment can do to be prepared for another pandemic in the future and I don’t think we have talked about that ever. You do scenario planning, but not to the extent that you look at what a complete shutdown of the economy would mean for a restaurant. So, likely at a minimum, those conversations start happening and consultants need to be versed and capable of having that conversation.”

NEED TO KNOW:

- FCSI MAS consultants are in a unique position to use experience to help foodservice clients. Now is a time for expertise, not operating on gut instinct.
- The foodservice operators who survive the pandemic by exploring other revenue streams, such as delivery and carry out, will be in a stronger position to capitalize on these and grow once business returns.
- Safety and sanitation will be key to building trust with consumers who need to be reassured before they return to dine-in.
- The pandemic presents an opportunity to re-evaluate business purposes and examine priorities.
- Going forward, FCSI MAS consultants will need to help clients implement comprehensive pandemic proofing in future scenario planning.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

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