

From Peak Hour Panic to Peak Profits:

A Playbook for Restaurant Success



Waste Not,
Want Not

Seating
Smarts

No Ingredient Left Behind



Three
Strategies

It's 9 p.m. on a Saturday night. Do you know where your wait staff is?

While that might sound a bit dramatic, inadequate staffing is a real issue during the already stressful peak hours. Combine that with the challenge of maintaining food quality and minimizing wait times, and you've got the recipe for a major meltdown.

Sure, every restaurant owner knows the pressure of peak hours, but what if those stressful times could be your biggest opportunity to shine? What if you could turn the chaos of a crazy busy night into controlled success and surging cash flow?

With the potential to generate two to three times more revenue per hour during peak times, making these hours run smoothly should be your top priority. Fortunately, achieving this isn't as complicated as it might seem.

Serving your customers — and your community — with flying colors even during periods of peak demand isn't just possible; it's probable when you implement these three proven strategies:

- ◆ **The Waste Not, Want Not Strategy**
How Rotating Specials Can Save Your Peak-Hour Profits
- ◆ **Seating Smarts Strategy**
How Strategic Table Assignments Can Keep Your Restaurant Running Like Clockwork During Peak Hours
- ◆ **No Ingredient Left Behind Strategy**
Transform Peak-Hour Surplus into Community Impact and Profit



The Waste Not, Want Not Strategy

How Rotating Specials Can Save Your Peak-Hour Profits



[Ninety-two billion pounds](#). That's how much food doesn't get consumed each year in the United States.

We'll put that into perspective for you: if just [30 percent of the food currently wasted](#) in the U.S. was recovered and donated, it could feed every food-insecure American. More than [11 million households](#) in this country experience low food security, causing debilitating consequences such as muscle weakness, tiredness, and lack of concentration.

We're not suggesting that you can solve this problem on your own. You can, however, play a part in reducing the country's overall food waste.

You may also be surprised to learn that the benefits of reducing food waste go beyond feeding food-insecure Americans and producing a positive environmental impact. For every dollar restaurants invest in lowering food loss and waste, they save [\\$14 in operating costs](#). Talk about icing on the cake!

What if your restaurant could turn leftovers into cash? A simple rotating menu special is one way to slash waste and keep your kitchen cranking out customer favorites during peak hours. If your establishment is encumbered by too many menu options, rotating menu specials — especially those that have high-profit margins — allow you to showcase seasonal flavors and simplify your ordering process.

Ingenious Utilization of Existing Ingredients

That sirloin steak that sold out last week is now sitting unused in your cold storage. It's too expensive to be discarded, which is why letting your chefs create unique flavor combinations and presenting them as limited-time specials should be a part of your recipe repertoire.

These specials create exclusivity, allowing you to feature dishes made with ingredients too expensive to waste, while also boosting your sales. Additionally, it's an opportunity to include your staff in the experience and cultivate a more cohesive team culture.

Another option for optimizing your inventory of ingredients is coming up with ideas for cross-utilization. Whether it's

potatoes or pork, adding them to multiple menu options lets you more quickly put your perishable inventory to use and accurately adjust food production during peak dining periods.

Sometimes whittling down how much food you waste can be as simple as following the First-In, First-Out model. In addition to ensuring that older food gets used first, it reduces the risk of serving spoiled food, allows your customers to consume fresher ingredients, and saves you money by limiting how many supplies you have to order.

You can also use dynamic pricing to clear out surplus at the end of the day. Offering late happy hour specials using otherwise expiring ingredients means more money during a time when your restaurant typically isn't too busy.

The Perks of a Zero Waste Partnership

Restaurants can help recover [390,000 tons](#) of food annually—equivalent to 643 million meals.

To tackle this avoidable issue, many restaurants are becoming certified as zero waste. To earn this certification, they must divert 90% of their waste from landfills by reducing and reusing all resources in their establishment in the past year.

Zero waste partnerships permit restaurants to promote social responsibility while contributing to the communities they serve. For example, by partnering with food banks and farmers, they keep their business local and reduce the need for environmentally unfriendly shipping resources.

This commitment to minimizing food waste doesn't go unnoticed by consumers of the culinary arts. According to the National Restaurant Association, roughly [half of customers](#) say they are starting to consider restaurants' efforts to reduce food waste and recycle when choosing where to dine.

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Seating Smarts Strategy

How Strategic Table Assignments Can Keep Your Restaurant Running Like Clockwork During Peak Hours



Is your restaurant packed — but profits are lagging? The secret might be in how you seat your guests.

Poorly managed customer flow and seating assignments can overwhelm servers during peak hours, slowing service and frustrating customers. Lengthy wait times combined with a dollop of stressed restaurant staff detract from customer loyalty, often leading to a blow in your bottom line.

Staff shortages certainly make table management more tedious, but allocating servers accordingly during your peak business periods is crucial for alleviating faulty customer flow. Keep the lines of communication with your team open and solicit suggestions and feedback for improving your establishment's traffic patterns.

Similarly, keep your staff apprised of any areas for improvement, whether it's avoiding misused tables or turn times that are too long. Ensure they accommodate customer preferences without disrupting the overall flow or creating more problems than solutions.

Many successful restaurants employ staggered seating because it enables them to better balance the demands placed on the serving crew and kitchen. It typically results in a more consistent flow of customers, gives your staff a breather in between diners, and prevents occurrences of overbooking.

Reserving a portion of tables for walk-ins can help fill seats left empty by reservation no-shows. Along with quicker table turnover, you benefit from recouped revenue and a possible expansion of your loyal customer base.

Technology for Table Management

Approximately [75 percent of diners](#) believe that restaurant technology plays a vital role in enhancing their overall guest

experience. It makes sense, then, to add table management solutions to ensure your customers' experience at your establishment encourages them to return.

Many restaurants already invest in appointment scheduling and waitlist systems to control their queues. These tools let your customers take control of their reservation requests and empower you to more easily manage the flow of diners, even during peak periods. A bonus to having these tools is gathering data to record and analyze customer preferences and behaviors and customize promotions accordingly.

Table management technology also tracks flow patterns and identifies trends, improving your restaurant's operational efficiency and ensuring a smooth experience for diners. These systems give you visibility into your entire dining operation, tracking how many guests are seated at each table, which tables are available, and average turnaround times.

Picking a table management platform that integrates with your point-of-sale (POS) system is key. Why? This type of technology allows you to provide real-time status updates on table availability, optimize table assignments and more easily seat larger groups, all of which lead to increased customer satisfaction.

Another alternative is leveraging a [customer intent platform](#), which can efficiently handle phone reservations and to-go orders. It enhances the guest experience by optimizing customer flow and allows you to maintain a steady pace of service, even during peak operating hours.

Whichever technology tools you choose for your restaurant, it's essential that they integrate with the other systems you have in place and your staff should be thoroughly trained on such solutions — otherwise, you'll have more problems on your plate.

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No Ingredient Left Behind Strategy

Transform Peak Hour Surplus into Community Impact & Profit



Wouldn't it be nice if your kitchen's peak-hour leftovers could become a community asset instead of a costly problem? Your commitment to your community and sustainability principles can combine for an array of advantages aimed at improving your piece of this planet one bite at a time.

Peak-hour rushes can lead to over-preparation, resulting in significant food waste at the end of the shift. Whether it's repurposing food prep or modifying the process, proactively eliminating excess ingredients is an effective method for eliminating unnecessary waste.

In addition to lowering overall operational costs, reducing food waste helps restaurants minimize recurring disposal fees, make the most of their resources, and better comply with environmental regulations — without incurring additional costs. According to a report from Champions 12.3, a coalition of global leaders dedicated to accelerating progress toward achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the [average cost to invest in food waste reduction](#) is only 0.4% of annual food sales.

The Fundamentals of Food Donation

If food donations can improve a restaurant's reputation while reducing operating costs, even slightly, why aren't more owners getting on the bandwagon? More than [one in five operators](#) donate edible leftovers to charity, but a majority lack knowledge of the legal protections available.

The Bill Emerson [Good Samaritan](#) Food Donation Act of 1996 provides limited liability protection for persons (including restaurants) who make good-faith donations to nonprofits that feed the hungry. Furthermore, the FDA's [2022 Food Code](#) clarifies that food donations from retail food establishments are acceptable as long as proper food safety practices are followed.

Donating food can also reduce a restaurant's tax burden while benefiting the community. [Internal Revenue Code 170\(e\) \(3\)](#) outlines the enhanced federal tax deduction available to operators to help them offset any costs from donating food to a qualified nonprofit.

There are other, less obvious rewards as well. Participating in food donation programs can strengthen community engagement, attract employees passionate about social responsibility, and boost staff morale by offering them the chance to contribute to a local cause. Catering to the community can provide you with a competitive advantage by attracting customers who prefer to eat at an establishment invested in their local area.

Although you can create your own operation, teaming up with a reputable food donation recovery partner means surplus supplies are given to the organizations that most need them. These matching organizations understand food handling best practices, coordinate pickups, and assist in transporting the goods to wherever they're going.

From Panic to Profits: Your Restaurant's Path to Peak-Hour Success

Your peak hours don't have to be a source of stress — they can be your biggest opportunity for boosting revenue. By implementing these game-changing strategies, you can take the first step towards smoother operations and higher profits.

Building a blueprint for optimizing your operational efficiency shouldn't come at the expense of your customers. It should serve to enhance their overall experience and lead to loyalty that drives profits and delivers a lasting positive reputation.

When you achieve sustainable success and at the same time can make a positive impact on the environment by trimming the amount of food you waste, you showcase your commitment to your community and your employees who live there.

You can't solve all the world's problems yourself, but being responsible for your piece of the pie is a great place to start.

Interested in reading more about how to turn potential into profits? Check out ["The Secret Ingredients for Building the Best Restaurant Employees."](#)