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**RE-OPENING
RESOURCE
GUIDE!**



BAR PREP BASICS: Readying for an eventual REOPENING

BY ELYSE GLICKMAN | Bars have always been at the center of the hospitality industry. They're gathering places, profit centers, and stages where mixologists showcase their increasingly entertaining cocktail-making skills.

But in March 2020, that changed in an instant. Bar stools stood empty, beer taps shut down, and mixologists were sent home, waiting for word about when life at the bar could be revived.

To get through the crisis, some bars have turned to carryout liquor sales, pre-batched cocktails and cocktail kits to go where loosened liquor laws have allowed. Others have tapped social media, offering virtual cocktail classes to engage and

inspire their fans.

But what happens post-pandemic? How can a bar manager or mixologist plan for the wakeup call they'll have to answer somewhere down the road when it's only the equivalent of about 2 a.m. right now?

"I would caution owners to slowly reopen, as it is likely that demand will be slow for some time," says Zachary Weiner, founder and CEO of RestaurantAccounting.net. "Use this opportunity to retrain staff, ease employees back into new norms and clean the facility. Reach out to other local restaurateurs to gauge the feeling in your area. Understanding what sales are like around town will help you optimally reopen your business."

Back Behind the Bar: A REOPENING CHECKLIST

Wasserstrom, a leading foodservice equipment distributor based in Columbus, Ohio, offers this helpful checklist for re-starting bar and beverage service:

- ☐ Inventory liquor, place order
- ☐ Check and replace pour spouts as needed
- ☐ Dust all bottles and shelves
- ☐ Clean and sanitize bar ice bins, refill bins
- ☐ Clean, sanitize and re-start frozen beverage machines per manufacturer's instructions
- ☐ Wipe down all under-bar units, inside and out, and restock as needed
- ☐ Inventory and clean all glassware, cups, and saucers
- ☐ Clean bar caddies and restock with napkins, stirrers, straws
- ☐ Clean and sanitize all soda and beer lines, pour several servings to clear lines
- ☐ Clean and fill fruit caddies
- ☐ Wash bar service mats
- ☐ Investigate lever or sensor operated ice & beverage dispensing

*Wasserstrom's Reopening A Restaurant:
A Practical Guide (wasserstrom.com)*

In addition to retraining staff on safety protocols; ordering masks, gloves and hand sanitizer; updating cleaning and sanitizing procedures; and setting up the bar area to allow for social distancing, there are bar-specific steps establishments are taking as they work toward a full reopening somewhere in the hopefully not-too-distant future.

REIMAGINING YOUR MENU

When California's shelter-in-place order went into effect March 19, Alexa Sol, general manager of California's Quinto Sol in Redwood City and a partner in Sun of Wolf in Palo Alto, realized adapting her bar programs would be necessary for fu-



A cocktail-to-go kit from Quinto Sol

ture success. Deciding what to keep and what had to go was the tough first step.

"I wanted to cry as we were adding just-made things such as garnishes and our own fresh fruit purees to the compost pile," says Sol, whose house-made syrups and purees were a major draw at both bars in pre-pandemic days.

Sol says she won't be garnishing drinks with fresh fruit in the immediate future, but instead will create house-dehydrated citrus slices, which last longer. And she is turning to a producer in Sonoma to buy purees she can use to create drinks in fewer steps.

The cocktail menu, which already had been moving toward simpler recipes, was streamlined even more. Sol revised her Margarita program with help from Tanteo distillery; it now includes only customer favorites/best-sellers. She also has embraced tequilas infused with ingredients like jalapeños and habaneros, which adds complex flavors with fewer ingredients, makes batching easier, and ensures consistency in her to-go cocktail kits, and in drinks made on-site once things re-open.

"We are now very careful to not order more than what we will use, and what's in stock will be used immediately. We have to balance simplifying things with providing customers those special details that

set our cocktail menu apart," she explains.

And how is she managing inventory in such uncertain times?

Sol says she's "pretty old school" and has never used an app to figure out inventory. "I created my own Excel sheet, and pre-Covid was very involved with watching how inventory moves and created a

very lean inventory."

The new, simplified, Margarita-focused menu helps ("The beauty of that is my fresh product is [only] limes," she says), as does having the bar menu incorporated into the dinner menu. "This keeps my fresh product inventory versatile," Sol explains.

Revised garnishing rules and a possible downsizing of the beverage menu also are part of the reopening strategy at El Torito, the flagship concept in California's Xperience Restaurant Group, which also includes El Torito Grill, Acapulco, Las Brisas, Sinigual, Who Song & Larry's, and Chevys Fresh Mex.

"We will no longer use garnishes for cocktails, and while the number of craft cocktail selections has not been reduced, that could change," says Cristhian Salazar, director of culinary operations for Xperience. "Produce used in the bar will be replaced daily to ensure freshness. When fruit is required, bartenders will cut and process produce on site, wearing gloves and facemasks, with single-task practices. This means that time is dedicated *only* to cutting and processing produce to avoid cross contamination."

Paying close attention to wine that's been opened is also important. "Vacuum pumps will be used to remove any

oxygen from the bottle if left overnight," Salazar says.

BRINGING BACK ON-TAP BREW

How to handle beer on tap is another issue, since most bars shut down brew lines as carryout and delivery became the only allowable options.

"We've not used the beer lines for a while, and I just got an email from one beer distributor informing me it would now cost \$200 to clean them," Sol says. "While I can afford it, spending this money doesn't make sense since quality canned and bottled craft beer is widely available at nearby shops."

Some restaurants say they will rely on their distributors for help with the beer lines.

"Our beer distribution companies are great resources in cleaning beer lines, which will also help when it's time to reopen," says P.J. Brill, managing partner at California's Buckhead Group, whose Mexican properties include El Tejano North Hollywood, El Tejano Downtown LA and Tejano's Rockin' Cantina in Glendale.

Jake Barnett, co-founder of the Old Fashioned Beverage & Hospitality in Kansas City, Missouri, agrees.

"It's important to make sure you have a good schedule in place with your distributor reps to ensure they can come in and clean the draft lines for everything you are sourcing from them," Barnett says.

MORE HELP FROM DISTRIBUTORS

Cleaning long-shuttered beer lines isn't the only back-to-business role liquor distributors can play. As Barnett notes, they're an important piece of the bar management puzzle, which means managers should communicate with their distributors as their bars slowly come back to life.

Operators need to make sure bottles of spirits and other liquids have been

sealed properly during the closure and that they're checked for expiration dates before reopening.

And what of the product that's been sitting behind shuttered bars?

"You should also check to see if they have buy-back programs for things that may have expired or will rotate out expired products in exchange for fresh ones," Barnett advises. "Most will be happy to go through your stock to ensure nothing you've gotten from them is out of date."

TAPPING TECHNOLOGY

Specialty apps are another tool that can ease reopening.

Apps that allow instant access to drink recipes can help management make restocking decisions, especially if the menu has been streamlined to include fewer, and possibly simpler drink recipes as a result of

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the Covid-19 crisis, according to Shandee Chernow, founder and CEO of CertiStar.

"You can ask distributors for recommendations on what to stock based on the type of menu you want to reopen with and how you can make substitutions when addressing allergy and health issues during your re-launch," she says. "Even if you have a dedicated bar manager who is responsible for figuring out things like modifying a house Margarita recipe for certain customers, this provides an extra resource that will help you and the rest of your staff."

Los Angeles-based Chicas Tacos—a fast casual concept that only offers Margari-

tas, beer and wine, and doesn't have a traditional bar—turned to Jolt.com to help manage inventory, according to partner Chris Blanchard. The app, which the restaurant also uses for kitchen inventory, helps personnel track the ingredients that go into every cocktail.

Every item is issued a use-by date and monitored for freshness and temperature. "When we juice our limes, for example, we apply use-by dates," Blanchard explains. "The Jolt system logs all of this data, which helps our team better monitor and track all inventory and aids considerably during a health inspection, as all information is readily available on a tablet."



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