



12

SECRETS to “Cutting Corners” without jeopardizing **QUALITY** or **CUSTOMER LOYALTY**

Like every other restaurant, your operation is competing for the 12.6% of annual income that Americans spend on dining out. While getting dollars through the door is a measure of success, how well you reinvest profits dictates longevity in the highly competitive restaurant industry.

However, in the age of shrinking margins [managing a restaurant to peak efficiency](#) can sometimes mean being faced with “cutting corners.” The practice can carry negative connotations, but if done strategically, operators can realize valuable benefits without sacrificing food quality or the customer experience.





6 Low-Risk Cost Cuts

It's easy to overlook ingrained but inefficient habits or dismiss "little things" that seemingly have no impact on the bottom line, but there are several simple changes you can implement to improve operational efficiencies without disrupting customer service or satisfaction:



1. ECONOMICAL ENTERTAINMENT:

Just because the pizzeria across town has weekly live music and a roomful of video gadgets doesn't mean you have to match suit. Save money without skimping on customer entertainment. Coloring books for kids and trivia cards or tabletop crossword puzzles for adults help pass the time without breaking the bank.

2. DUTIFUL DISPENSERS:

Including napkins and straws with every order is convenient, but not every customer needs them — so the practice is also wasteful. Stocked dispensers placed at either a centralized location (like at a serve-yourself soda station) or on the tabletops make the items available without an undue amount winding up in the trash can.



3. PRUDENT PREP:

Dedicating team members to scratch-making dough can really put a dent in time and labor resources. Pre-made dough balls eliminate this need, and also save precious storage space since you aren't stocking bulk ingredients like flour and sugar. There's also the significant benefit of not having to worry about inconsistent pizza crust quality, texture or flavor across shifts or locations — glaring errors that your customers will notice.

4. THOUGHTFUL TRAINING:

Onboarding team members is time-consuming, especially if you have no structure around training. Develop and implement standard operating procedures (SOPs) that can be used as new employees are learning, and can be referenced as "process refreshers" ongoing. SOPs are also a handy tool for cross-training, as familiarizing employees with multiple roles can help you fill gaps without outside hires and without stressing team members out when they're asked to pitch in.





5. LIMITED LAUNDRY:

If you send your soiled restaurant laundry out to a commercial cleaner, cleaning charges can rack up on a weekly basis. To keep costs under control, consider limiting the number of aprons and towels your back-of-the-house staff uses during a shift (as need dictates). You may not want to be so rigid as to assign individual aprons and towels, but reminders about usage could lead to savings.

6. GUARDED GLASSES:

Loose glassware bussed from tables and stored in tubs with other dirty dishes is breakage just waiting to happen. Invest in glass racks to store dirty glasses. It will make turning tables and dishwashing easier, plus you won't have to regularly purchase replacements.



6 High-Risk Cost Cuts

When it comes to cutting corners, there are some non-negotiables. Compromising on any of the following means risking your reputation and alienating customers:



1. PIZZA INGREDIENTS:

Sacrificing the quality of pizza ingredients to cut costs has ripple effects. There's serving substandard food to grapple with, of course, but you're also sending a message to your customers that you don't value their patronage or particularly care about their experience. Work with your distributor to find [wholesale pizza crust and other pre-made products](#) from suppliers with proven track records of providing premium quality products at agreeable prices, like the crust experts at Alive & Kickin' Pizza Crust.

2. FACILITY MAINTENANCE:

Putting off the upkeep of your building will eventually result in expensive repairs. Take an objective look at your shop. Is it aesthetically pleasing inside and out? Are all windows, walls, floors and anything else customers see or use in good working order? Going beyond daily cleaning to regular building inspections will keep big problems small, and fixes far more manageable.



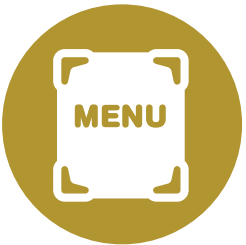


3. FURNISHINGS:

Your dining room furniture should set customers' expectations about the quality of food, service and overall experience. Furniture that has clean, durable and tear-free upholstery is a must. For pizzerias, vinyl seat covers may be the way to go as sauce drips and topping drops can be easily sponged away with mild cleansers and no stains are left behind. Fabric treated with Scotchgard™ or a similar repellent can also be a workable solution, but keep in mind that you may have to have upholstery professionally cleaned on occasion to maintain its vibrancy, which is an added expense.

4. TABLETOP CONDIMENTS:

Pizza fans are big on taste, and offering a variety of tabletop condiments lets them enhance a pie's flavor or get a little adventurous. Staples like pepper flakes and Parmesan cheese — along with the ubiquitous salt and pepper — have broad customer appeal. They also have long shelf lives, which keeps you from having to routinely replace them, provided they are maintained to preserve flavor and kept in containers that can be wiped several times a day to prevent the spread of germs. Customers expect this offering, so cutting tabletop condiments means you'll risk looking cheap.



5. MENU DESIGN:

Your menu is a reflection on the quality of your establishment — from the food to the entire customer experience. Letting a menu update slide to save money sets you up for disappointing customers if you have to inform them certain items are no longer available. Also, how your menu looks sets customer expectations. Cutting corners with do-it-yourself menu design sends a clear — and not so enticing — message. Enlist the services of a professional menu designer to nail down the proven design methodology that helps [keep a menu looking fresh](#) and free from customer turnoffs like typographical errors and unappetizing food photography and descriptions.



6. MARKETING:

Advertising is usually the first casualty in a budget crunch, but resist doing yourself a disservice. You may be pinching pennies upfront, but the ground you're losing to your competition by having a limited or nonexistent presence in customer mindshare – especially in the era of [social media marketing](#) – can be costly to make up. Instead of axing your marketing budget, be mindful of how it's spent throughout the year. Focusing the majority of your dollars on one or two specific holidays or events isn't a good strategy, and it could actually cost you money. Halloween, for example, is particularly popular among pizzerias. Putting a marketing push behind it isn't necessary to stimulate traffic. Plus, it puts you in a position to offer some type of discount or deal to get customers to choose your restaurant over others, effectively cutting profits on a traditionally busy day when customers are willing to pay full price. You don't need to ignore holidays, but allocate dollars to slower times for balance and maximum marketing impact.



All told, keeping the customer experience top of mind when it comes to making decisions about cutting corners is a great guide toward doing what's right to make your operation more efficient and profitable.



Want to learn more? Check out our resources library for more tips on how to keep your pizza operation running smoothly: akcrust.com/resources



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