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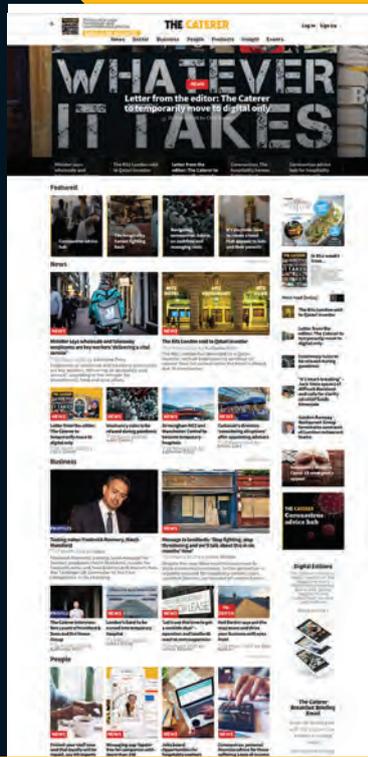
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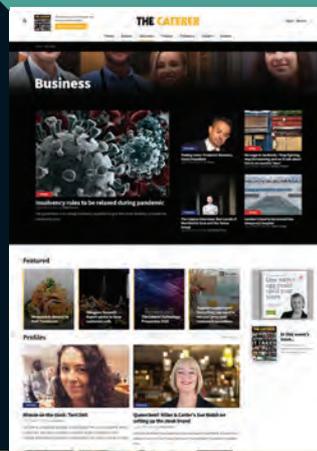


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Arrivals quarantine will be ‘catastrophic’, say hoteliers

Fourteen-day UK quarantine with no end date in sight will decimate tourism, say operators



Joanne Taylor-Stagg said a quarantine would mean that potential guests would holiday in other countries

By Emma Lake

Hoteliers have described the introduction of a 14-day quarantine period for international arrivals to the UK as “catastrophic”.

The measures, set to come into force on 8 June, were announced by home secretary Priti Patel last week as a means of controlling the spread of Covid-19. The government has said breaches will be punishable by a £1,000 fine, and has given no indication of how long the requirement will remain in place.

Stuart Procter, chief operating officer of the Stafford Collection (comprising the five-red-AA-star Stafford London hotel in St James’s, the four-red-AA-star Northcote hotel in Langho, Lancashire, and Norma restaurant in Fitzrovia), said the announcement was “catastrophic”.

He told *The Caterer*: “Eighty-five per cent of the luxury hotel business in W1 [incorporating

Mayfair and the West End] comes internationally; for tourism in London and nationally it will be significantly damaging.

“We’re informed this is going to be short and sharp and will only be in place prior to us being allowed to reopen, but there are so many ifs and buts. People are saying they’re seeing bookings coming into their hotels – they’re lying. If there’s a two-week quarantine in place, you wouldn’t book a trip to England, let alone London.”

The home secretary said the government will continue to “work with and support” the tourism and leisure industries, describing the sectors as “incredibly dynamic”.

So-called ‘air bridges’, which would allow travellers from low-risk countries into the UK without quarantine have not been ruled out, but “are not for today”, Patel said.

Joanne Taylor-Stagg, general manager of the Athenaeum

Hotel & Residences, said: “There will be domestic travel, but I fear London properties are less likely to pick up that domestic business. It’s going to be an absolute disaster and they might as well keep us closed.

“My real worry is that as other countries are opening up – Sicily, for example, is offering to cover half the cost of flights – we’re going into a lockdown, so we’re going to lose any people looking to have a holiday to other countries and that’s just going to tie our hands even further.”

UKHospitality chief executive Kate Nicholls said: “The basis of any quarantine conditions must be science-led and backed with a clear set of criteria for the length of their imposition. The imposition of a quarantine period will inevitably damage international visitor travel, and the longer it is in place, the more damage it will wreak.”

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Barclay nephews claim Ritz offer was best on the table

Aidan and Howard Barclay, sons of Sir Frederick’s twin brother Sir David, have hit back at claims they sold the Ritz London hotel to a Qatari buyer in March for “half the market price”.

It is the latest episode in an increasingly bitter dispute, which has seen Sir Frederick launch a High Court battle against three of Sir David’s sons, Aidan, Howard and Alistair, over secret recordings made at the five-red-AA-star, 136-bedroom Mayfair hotel.

Earlier this week, Sir Frederick released a video that he said showed Alistair handling a bug placed in the conservatory of the Ritz, which he said was part of a “deliberate and premeditated invasion” of his privacy.

In a statement through Ellerman, the company behind the Barclay family’s assets, Aidan and Howard said: “Sir Frederick’s conduct relating to the Ritz sale process has been particularly concerning. Despite having no relevant legal interest or involvement, Sir Frederick has used the media to issue unwarranted threats of legal action which risked disrupting the process.

“It is simply untrue that any bidder made any formal offer for the Ritz of anything close to £1.3b. Had there been such an offer, we would have been delighted to accept it. But in the unanimous opinion of the independent advisers who ran the process, the successful bid was the best and most deliverable offer on the table.”

At a High Court hearing earlier in May, Sir Frederick and daughter Amanda’s lawyers claimed that the Ritz had been sold for “half the market price”.



The Barclays said there was no offer for £1.3b made for the hotel

Reduction in social distancing to WHO rules could save ‘thousands of jobs’

By Emma Lake

Leading operators including chef Raymond Blanc, Wagamama chief Andy Hornby and Hospitality Union’s Jonathan Downey have said reducing distancing requirements to one metre would see more businesses survive the Covid-19 crisis and save “thousands of jobs”.

Calls have been made for the government to follow the World Health Organization’s (WHO) recommendation of one-metre distancing, rather than the two metres currently prescribed by Public Health England, with business leaders saying that for many it could be the difference between survival and failure.

Blanc, behind Belmond Le Manoir aux Quat’Saisons in Great Milton, Oxfordshire, and the Brasserie Blanc group, said: “If the government demands two metres between each table, even at Le Manoir where tables are already a metre or more apart, we would struggle. It would be 40 guests instead of 80.

“In most businesses tables are 50cm to 60cm apart. Brasserie Blanc is very successful, yet we don’t know how we will do it. We make our money through volume. We buy expensive produce, from the same suppliers as Le Manoir – to then serve one-third of the



Operators to speak out about the difficulties of two-metre distancing include two-Michelin-starred chef Raymond Blanc, the Restaurant Group’s Andy Hornby and Hospitality Union’s Jonathan Downey

guests will mean it’s not a business model any more. We will battle on but it’s going to be very, very hard – there will be a lot of hardship and misery.”

There was some hope last week as professor Yvonne Doyle of Public Health England told the Commons science and technology committee that the advised distance would be the “subject of continued investigation”, following reports of other countries advising shorter distancing.

Blanc added: “The French have decided to do one metre – are we too cautious? I think two metres will mean a high rate of

failures, while one metre gives you a chance to a succeed and lay off the minimum people.”

Jonathan Downey, founder of Hospitality Union and chief executive of London Union, said: “It would make a massive difference; it will mean first that more businesses will open and people can come off furlough, and second that more businesses can open profitably or won’t lose so much money.”

Andy Hornby, chief executive of the Restaurant Group, owner of Wagamama and Frankie & Benny’s, believes the move could affect thousands of

hospitality employees. He added: “Our number one priority is the safety and welfare of our customers and colleagues. We are working on a wide range of safety measures, including social distancing, use of screens, ordering from tables and use of PPE.

“If the social distancing guidance was to be set at one metre, in line with WHO’s guidelines, then the industry should be able to operate at around 70% capacity and thousands of jobs will be saved.”

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Nathan Outlaw’s Goring restaurant will not reopen after lockdown

Nathan Outlaw’s Siren restaurant at the Goring hotel in London’s Belgravia will not reopen when lockdown restrictions are lifted.

The hotel has confirmed that it will reopen with a reduced F&B offer, which will not include the seafood-focused restaurant. Siren was launched last year, becoming the first new dining offer in the hotel’s 109-year history.

Outlaw has said he will initially need to focus his efforts on his Cornwall restaurants – the two-Michelin-starred Restaurant Nathan Outlaw and one-Michelin-starred Outlaw’s



Nathan Outlaw and Jeremy Goring

Fish Kitchen – but is hopeful that the space will reopen again in due course.

Jeremy Goring, chief executive and fourth-generation incumbent of the hotel, said: “Due to the situation that all of us in UK hospitality find ourselves in, we are going to have to operate differently for a while in order to protect the business and its staff in the long term. For this reason, when we eventually reopen the Goring, it will be with a smaller F&B department, and, very sadly, we will not be able to reopen Siren.

“This restaurant has been a

real adventure: scouring Cornwall for the very best fish I’ve ever seen, and putting together something really special both in the room and on the plate. Also, working with some of the best in the business both out front and in the kitchen: what a privilege. I’m looking forward to the day some time in the future when we can do something exciting together with Nathan again.”

The opening of Siren involved a £4m building project to create the new restaurant and kitchen and to transform the bar, making it the largest single investment in the history of the property.

Scottish lockdown exit plan branded 'illogical'

By Katherine Price

UKHospitality has described Scotland's route map for exiting lockdown "illogical", with the potential to do "serious harm" after first minister Nicola Sturgeon last week announced that hospitality businesses will be able to open outdoor spaces earlier than indoor spaces.

UKHospitality's executive director for Scotland, Willie Macleod, said: "We are seriously concerned that the Scottish government's plan for reopening will do more harm than good. It appears not to be based in any logic and has the potential to create a two-tier sector with many already-hammered businesses being left behind."

Edinburgh restaurateur Tom Kitchin (pictured right) pointed out to "bank everything on the weather is very difficult" and that many businesses do not have outdoor space.

Speaking to *The Caterer*, he said: "You've got to staff these things. With outdoor space in Scotland – you look outside and it's blue skies, so then you try to staff for a busy day. It will be peeing it down within half an hour... As soon as you start bringing people off furlough, you can't just switch them on and off."

Pubs and restaurants will be able to open outdoor spaces during the second phase of lockdown easing, according to the roadmap, which suggested Scotland's hospitality businesses could reopen on a different time frame to those in England.

Hawksmoor, which has one site in Edinburgh and eight across London and Manchester, is prepared for a staggered approach to reopening, but co-founder Will Beckett has concerns over how the different timeframes will exist alongside the UK-wide Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS).

Beckett said: "The Scottish plan is comprehensive except



Nicola Sturgeon said Scotland won't open indoor spaces until 11 August



it's not in step with the financial plan that the UK government has in place, and it doesn't help us work to a date.

"It helps knowing 4 July at the earliest [in England], because

that's the same as saying 'be ready'. The date after which the CJRS ceases to exist in its current form is 31 July. Is the implication that the British government will say that all employers have to contribute towards their furloughed staff costs from 1 August, but the Scottish government will say that no restaurant company can take any revenue?"

Martin Williams, chief executive of Gaucho and M Restaurants, added: "If they delay opening, is the Scottish government going to step in?"

Schools are anticipated to open on 11 August as part of the third phase. This will also be the phase when pubs and restaurants will be able to open indoor spaces with physical distancing, and restrictions on hotels and B&Bs will be relaxed.

Macleod said: "Reopening hospitality businesses should be phased according to agreed protocols to ensure healthy, hygienic and safe spaces for

staff members and tourists. The Scottish government's plans rest on whether businesses have an outdoor space or not; not whether they are able to operate safely with social distancing guidelines in place. Subjecting businesses that do not have outdoor spaces but could operate perfectly safely to further forced closure is illogical and will do serious harm."

Kitchin added: "It's really important that the government allows the sectors to advise. They can't just come up with these rules without really understanding the industry."

The restaurateur, behind Edinburgh's Michelin-starred Kitchen restaurant, as well as Southside Scran, Bonnie Badger, Scran & Scallie and Castle Terrace, is one of the operators backing a letter to the Scottish government calling for a host of support measures for the industry.

Kitchin, Gordon Campbell-Gray, Carina Contini, Martin Wishart and Nick Nairn are calling for an extended furlough, an extension of the business rates holiday, a 12-month rent-free period, a Scottish independent hospitality development fund, and VAT reduction.

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Shearings owner enters administration

Shearings owner Specialist Leisure Group has fallen into administration after failing to secure a rescue deal.

As well as the 117-year-old Shearings coach holiday brand, the group owned and operated two Country Living-branded hotels, the Lansdown Grove in Bath and St George in Harrogate, 11 Coast & Country hotels and 31 Bay Hotels. None of the hotels will reopen.

Chief executive Richard Calvert said: "In the most trying of circumstances, we have fought tooth and nail to save the group and the jobs of our 2,400 loyal employees serving over 1.1 million customers annually.

"It is heart-breaking that the required funding or investment could not be secured to get us through this unprecedented crisis."

Sam Woodward and Colin Dempster of EY's restructuring team were appointed joint administrators last Friday (22 May).

Woodward said: "The group has been significantly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic as all tours, trips and events have been cancelled and the hotels closed to the public, leading to a significant cash shortfall.

"The directors of the group have been in discussions with a number of parties, seeking a going concern buyer for the business. Unfortunately, despite interest in the group as a whole and in parts, no viable transaction structure was able to be agreed and, as a result, the group was placed into administration."

The jobs of 2,460 employees, 2,207 of which were furloughed at the time of appointment, must now be made redundant. Around 70 employees will initially be retained to assist the administrators in disposing of the assets and winding down the business.

Woodward added: "We will also be seeking to realise the remaining assets of the group's business for the benefit of creditors and we are therefore seeking offers from interested parties."

Main stakeholder Lone Star Funds took control of Shearings in 2016. The company rebranded as Specialist Leisure Group in 2018.

SIGNATURE LIVING FINED £34,000 OVER 'INFESTATION' OF MICE IN LIVERPOOL HOTEL

Signature Living has been told to pay more than £60,000 in fines and court costs after its 30 James Street hotel in Liverpool was found to be littered with mouse droppings "from top to bottom".

A judge said there had been "systematic failures" as it sentenced the company last week, following the entering of guilty pleas in relation to four food hygiene violations at Liverpool Crown Court in December.

The court had seen pictures of dead mice and droppings in locations including pots and pans. The photos were taken in a surprise inspection after a Signature Living employee, who had been dismissed, tipped off Liverpool City Council.

David Birrell, prosecuting, said 30 James Street styled itself "as a luxury Titanic-themed hotel", which was outwardly "smart and plush", however, "those appearances were deceiving" and "the position behind the scenes was very different".



BOPARAN RESTAURANT GROUP CONFIRMS CARLUCCIO'S ACQUISITION

Giraffe and Ed's Easy Diner operator Boparan Restaurant Group (BRG) has confirmed the acquisition of the Carluccio's brand.

It will take on 30 trading sites of the Italian chain, first founded by Antonio Carluccio in 1991, saving 800 jobs. The 71-site brand fell into administration in March.

Phil Reynolds, partner at administrators FRP, told *The Caterer* that the remaining sites had been permanently closed and that 1,019 staff had been made redundant.

WATERGATE BAY GROUP ANNOUNCES LATEST HOTEL ACQUISITION



Ampport House

The owner of the Watergate Bay hotel in Cornwall has acquired Ampport House in Hampshire as it looks to build a collection of five or six Another Place-branded hotels.

The group acquired the Grade II-listed, 19th-century property in March through a formal tender

process with the Ministry of Defence. It is expected to relaunch as a 50-bedroom hotel under the name Another Place, the Garden, after the property's listed garden, designed by Edwin Lutyens and Gertrude Jekyll.

COMPASS ACQUIRES FEEDR

Compass Group UK and Ireland has acquired technology start-up Feedr.

The caterer intends to accelerate its digital transformation with mobile ordering and pre-payment across workplaces.

The deal, which was completed in March, will play a key role in reshaping Compass' 'return to work' strategy, increasing flexibility for consumers and facilitating social distancing.

Robin Mills, managing director of Compass UK and Ireland said: "Feedr will provide the agility we need to meet the changing needs of workplace dining as we emerge from lockdown and adjust to a new normal."

WHITBREAD SEEKS TO RAISE £1b THROUGH RIGHTS ISSUE

Premier Inn owner Whitbread has announced its intention to raise £1b through a rights issue to ensure it emerges from the Covid-19 pandemic "with a strong balance sheet and in the best position possible".

Whitbread said the purpose

was to return its balance sheet to a position of strength, allow the company to invest with confidence and flexibility, and provide liquidity headroom in the event of a Covid-19 resurgence.

It said it would be able to withstand "many months" of its hotels being closed or at low occupancy and that it is ready to reopen quickly and safely.

DOUBLETREE BY HILTON ABERDEEN TO REMAIN CLOSED



DoubleTree by Hilton
Aberdeen City Centre

Ability Hotels has decided it is "no longer viable" for the DoubleTree by Hilton Aberdeen City Centre to trade and directors are placing the company into liquidation.

As a result, the 168-bedroom hotel will remain closed and staff members' roles will be made redundant.

Speaking to the BBC, Martyn Giles, head of asset management for the Ability Group, blamed the slump of the oil market in recent years coupled with the impact of Covid-19.

MARSTON'S AND CARLSBERG UK TO MERGE IN £780m DEAL

Brewer and pub company Marston's has announced plans to merge with Carlsberg UK in a £780m deal.

The two beer giants will join forces, creating Carlsberg Marston's Brewing Company, in a deal that values Marston's at £580m and Carlsberg UK at £200m.

Marston's will hold a 40% stake in the joint entity and receive a cash payment of up to £273m, with Carlsberg holding the 60% stake. The two companies have predicted the merger will produce cost savings of £24m in its first three years.

EXTRA OCTOBER BANK HOLIDAY UNDER CONSIDERATION

An extra bank holiday in October is under consideration by government, as a means of offsetting the losses suffered by the tourism industry due to the coronavirus lockdown.

VisitBritain's acting chief executive Patricia Yates put forward the proposal after reports that the pandemic was expected to cost the industry more than £30b.

It is hoped that a bank holiday later in the year would extend the summer season and help the industry, which has missed out on the benefits of two long weekends.

Is pedestrianisation the road to success?

Plans to pedestrianise city centres to free up space for consumers post-lockdown sound like a breath of fresh air for restaurant operators, but will car-free zones breathe new life into UK high streets?

Jennie Milsom hears from those affected

Earlier this month, the mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, announced plans to repurpose central London streets into “one of the largest car-free zones in any capital city in the world”, in a move designed to enable safe social distancing, improve air quality and keep London “globally competitive”.

Similarly, towns and cities across the UK are looking to pedestrianise streets to encourage people to return safely. Councils in Oxford, Doncaster Shropshire and Manchester are all looking to limit traffic in town and city centres to allow physical distancing and aid the economic recovery, while Mayor of Liverpool Joe Anderson has announced a £450,000 project to redesign Liverpool’s outdoor spaces, to create European-style covered seating areas.

With pedestrianisation plans under consideration up and down the country, coupled with the #UKGrandOutdoorCafe campaign, which is calling on the government to grant operators “blanket permission” to use pedestrianised streets for outdoor dining, the question is: are UK restaurants poised to fling open their doors “à la med” with a new al fresco approach to eating out?

It’s not just a case of widening pavements and putting out some tables, says Craig Bunting, co-founder of Midlands-based coffee and all-day dining group Bear. He would support pedestrianisation, but only if it

Town-planner view

David Frisby, director at Mode Transport Planning, believes that temporary plans for “stopping up the highway” – where highways are reallocated to pedestrians and cyclists – present an opportunity for those in the hospitality industry. He referred to a report by LivingStreets.org, which concluded that pedestrianisation can increase footfall by up to 30% and boost commercial trade by up to 40%.

“If a pedestrianised area is friendly, welcoming and inviting, people will want to spend more time and money there – chances are they will spend money to sit and eat and drink and enjoy more time there relaxing.

“Pedestrianisation presents an opportunity for the hospitality industry to lobby councils to ensure their business not only continues but thrives, by assisting with social distancing measures and providing a better environment in the summer. It will also provide enough time to plan for the winter – with heaters and shelters – because people aren’t going to want or be allowed to be packed into bars, but we’ll want to go out and have a drink and socialise.

“City centre retailers often believe that half of their customers come by car or bus and for that reason can be against pedestrianisation; however there is evidence that it is closer to 35% with the remaining 65% arriving either by foot or bicycle.”

“If a pedestrianised area is friendly, welcoming and inviting, people will want to spend more time and money there”

David Frisby, Mode Transport Planning

is carried out “with the bigger picture in mind”.

“This should be based on the behaviour of the communities that use the high streets and the businesses that operate within them,” he said.

Bunting said that other considerations included whether zoning would be timed and whether pedestrianisation

would work “in tandem” with supporting businesses in creating outdoor café-style seating spaces that were “active, vibrant and welcoming”.

“The streets need to look alive and there is work to be done on street levels, seating zones, bike racks, planting and green space. It needs to look great, otherwise, take the cars away and they will



look even more empty. People are not drawn to a pedestrianised street – they are attracted to the impact that, if executed correctly, the result should achieve.”

Des Gunewardena, chief executive of D&D London, said that the worst outcome would be to “suck the life out of city centres” by pedestrianising vast areas without thinking it through and making access difficult.

Although he did see potential, if done correctly. “You’ve got to think about how you can improve people’s quality of life,” he said. “What happens in the summer is that – especially with the Brits – everybody wants to be outside. So if you increase the area in which people can trade, you’ll do more revenue.”

Nisha Katona, founder of Bengali street food restaurants Mowgli, said: “It is into the chasm between safety and survival that the outside seating question is launched and freighted with such hope.”

Her 13 restaurants on busy high streets across the UK collectively have just 25 outside covers and she does not see pre-existing outside seating as a solution.



Ashford, Kent

SHUTTERSTOCK

“People are not drawn to a pedestrianised street – they are attracted to the impact that, if executed correctly, the result should achieve”

Craig Bunting, Bear

street” flanked by neighbouring operators. Although in favour of pedestrianisation, he said it was important that businesses remain accessible for everyone. “That’s one of the big issues – how people are going to get to it.”

For operators with an existing allocation of outside space, extending outwards would make a positive difference when reopening, he said, and confirmed he had already approached Westminster Council to ask for more space, which would allow for another row of tables and help comply with physical distancing.

Krish Singh, property director at Honest Burgers, said the benefits of being granted permission to trade al fresco would boil down to two issues: speed and fees, adding that a lengthy application process would detract from the benefit: “It’s something that would need to happen soon, otherwise it would defeat the object. In the UK outside space can only be used for certain months.”

Singh believed that if councils were to encourage outdoor dining, “temporary structures to allow shelter” from showers and chilly evenings must also be considered, saying such structures were commonplace in Europe, otherwise the benefits would be limited to “only a few very select days”. Overall he was in favour of encouraging people to congregate in outside areas populated with restaurants and pubs. “This would definitely help over the summer months and should be encouraged, but it won’t be the cure for the pain that’s to come with likely reduced trade, especially over the summer.”

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“It is into the chasm between safety and survival that the outside seating question is launched and freighted with such hope”

**Nisha Katona,
Mowgli Street Food**

She added: “To make any difference to us, we would need a deregulation of outside spaces with a zealous encouragement at government level for an al fresco dining free-for-all. My model for Mowgli’s re-emergence dare not be founded on such an ambitious change: better would be a considered change to the seemingly token two-metre rule.”

Chef-restaurateur Stevie Parle owns Pastaio in Soho’s Ganton Street, which is pedestrianised after 11am so lunchtime and evening diners enjoyed a “nice vibe on the



Mowgli in Liverpool’s Water Street

Get ready for the summer staycations

Quarantine, fewer flights and lack of finance may all work to hoteliers' advantage after lockdown, with a rush in bookings to properties in the UK from those seeking a break from the norm, says *Julian Troup*

The doors of hotels around the UK have been closed to the general public since the introduction of lockdown. But when they reopen, it will be the hoteliers who have been busy behind those closed doors who will be best placed to make the most of opportunities in the changed world brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Whether you are seeking to maintain your current business, expand or sell, the same approach is relevant. It can be summed up in the words of the Scouts' motto: 'Be prepared'.

For it is not a case of "if" the hotel industry will return to pre-Covid-19 activity, it is "when".

With this in mind, hoteliers should be treating the lockdown as a valuable period in which to examine and adjust their business plans in order to respond to the challenges and opportunities brought about by Covid-19, and to ensure that they are positioned to optimise their plans for the future.

So, what should you be doing? At the very least, you should be working on new marketing campaigns, restocking, and examining staffing levels to make sure everything is ready for when trade gets busier.

The social distancing protocols that will be introduced as part of the incremental lifting of lockdown will undoubtedly affect occupancy for some hotels, notably those that deal predominantly with customers who previously travelled for business but are now likely to connect via video calls. The 14-day quarantine period the government recently announced for travellers entering the UK from abroad, with some exceptions, will have a significant impact on hotels with a large number of guests visiting from abroad, either for business or leisure.

Yet the UK hotels sector looks set to benefit from an increase in domestic tourist trade, as a result of a combination of factors relating to Covid-19. The obvious one is the 14-day quarantine period, which will make taking holidays overseas difficult for many. Further influences include the increased cost of foreign travel; concerns about travelling abroad; the logistical difficulties that will be involved in foreign travel; fewer flights; and the financial constraints that will affect many individuals and families because of the impact of Covid-19 on the UK economy.

It is widely expected that UK leisure-based trade to coast and country – staycations – will see a spike following the lifting of lockdown, as people seek a change of scene after being confined to their local areas for weeks.



“With UK domestic demand likely to aid recovery post-lockdown, many hotel operators will be keen to expand”

Those areas that are going to attract the strongest level of trade will include national parks, coastal areas and cities and towns that have a mix of corporate and leisure.

Of course, it is also highly likely that these businesses will also attract the attention of buyers and their funders, as well as markets where leisure is traditionally strong.

However, having said this, demand will undoubtedly remain for hotels mainly reliant on corporate business. A lot will depend on the quality of the business and the circumstances behind the reason for sale. It is also worth noting the difference between 'hotels' and 'hospitality' (bars, pubs and restaurants), as there are far more social distancing ramifications with the latter, which will potentially mean later reopening and other constraints.

In terms of the hotels sector, we are expecting to see a return to transactional activity as life continues in a world that has

been adjusted to meet the challenges of the presence of Covid-19. Our experience tells us that buying a hotel generally has some emotion behind it. When lockdown began, uncertainty about reopening caused many to sit on their hands.

Moves to reopening and a return towards something resembling normality will precipitate a positive shift in confidence levels, and we will then see trading and transactional activity starting to return to its previous levels, although it is "crystal ball gazing" as to when Colliers will return to selling the circa 100 UK hotels per annum to which we were accustomed.

Indeed, with UK domestic demand likely to aid recovery post-lockdown, many hotel operators will be keen to expand, and will be looking for opportunities to purchase.

Our advice goes back to the 'Be prepared' mantra. Make sure that you have prepared properly and are in a position to proceed. The key to this will be having cash or in principle funding in place. Sellers will want to have the comfort of you being able to buy before they go ahead, in the knowledge that any due diligence process comes with cost.

Julian Troup is head of UK hotels agency at Colliers International



David Moore
 Founder and owner,
 Pied à Terre

Call to action

Now is the time to act to save our industry, and each and every one of us can make a difference, says **David Moore**

Iwake up most mornings to the ping of my phone, to read the latest missive from Jonathan Downey (JD) as he disseminates that morning's press, general rants from social media and his thoughts on our way forward on the Whatsapp group Hospitality Union.

There are battles to be fought and only some can be won. The service charge situation in furlough, or should I say the lack of it, is disappointing. Service charge is a big contributor to take home pay, and annoyingly we pay tax on it; but we also play a game of making it non-contractual, which has come back to bite us with our very clever tronc schemes and discretionary service charges. It is now an argument that makes us sound

coronavirus, the biggest weapon is Covid-19, and it is taking serious casualties. Every death is a family in mourning and a devastating loss. Our industry cannot be the next victim. We should have a voice, and if we use our individual voices, not sitting back thinking someone else will win this war for us, not thinking my voice is too small to count, then we can be heard.

Now is the time for every reader of *The Caterer* to take action and do something to win this war. Don't think I'm exaggerating – we are at war with the airlines, the steel industry, the high street, the oil industry – they are all looking for government money.

Last week I emailed my MP. I didn't have a clue who it was, and it turns out to be Sir Keir Starmer. I always think his name sounds

“If we use our individual voices, not sitting back thinking someone else will win this war for us, not thinking my voice is too small to count, then we can be heard”

ungrateful for furlough. It's a lost cause, drop it, stop whinging and move on – it is a distraction from the bigger picture.

Watching *The Darkest Hour*, the film about Winston Churchill, on VE Day, I really felt that the hospitality industry is also in its darkest hour and no one is listening. But, let's face it, we are in competition for the argument, the soundbites and the money with bigger industries with louder voices, funded lobbying and, frankly, better connected communities. It feels like we have no voice.

We don't have a Churchillian character; JD might be doing sterling work, but even he isn't Winston. Kate Nicholls at UKHospitality, the voice of the industry, seems lacking firepower (though that's not a criticism) when we are up against the likes of Richard Branson, Willie Walsh and Len McCluskey – all seasoned players. It reminds me of the scene when Churchill rants: “It is not a good time to negotiate when your head is in the tiger's mouth.”

We have been invaded by

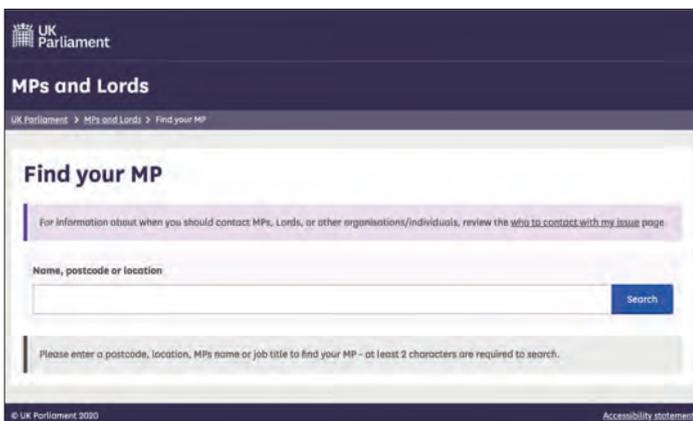
like a character in *Star Wars*. It's shame we don't have Obi-Wan Kenobi batting for our industry.

Go to www.parliament.uk and find your local MP. Tell them about your hardships, your hopes, your dreams; be certain to mention #NationalTimeOut, #RaiseTheBar, VAT reductions and the disaster a two-metre distance law would be. You don't need to explain these initiatives, they will be on their radar; they just need to know that the people who they represent care about it.

The irony is, if we don't get #NationalTimeOut, the wonderful and expensive furlough will only be a waiting room for the unemployed, and that will be a national disaster. I ask everyone, kitchen porter to CEO, to clink that link. It takes 1,000 layers to make one bite of a millefeuille; it takes the voice of an industry to be heard.

May the force be with you.

● To join the Hospitality Union group, contact julia@londonunion.com. We need to unite behind strong ideas before it is too late.



Meet the operators



Julia Edmonds
Managing director,
Lexington



Morag Freathy
Business and
industry managing
director, Compass
Group UK & Ireland



Chris Mitchell
Managing Director,
Genuine Dining Co



John Nugent
Chief executive,
Green & Fortune



Phil Roker
Managing director,
Vacherin



Ian Thomas
Chief executive,
Bartlett Mitchell



Ruston Toms
Founding director,
Blue Apple



The future of workplace catering

When the UK's offices begin to fill back up, their caterers will be ready with refreshed restaurants, refined product offers and geared up for a new way of operating. *Chris Gamm* spoke to seven business and industry leaders to find out how workplace catering has changed forever

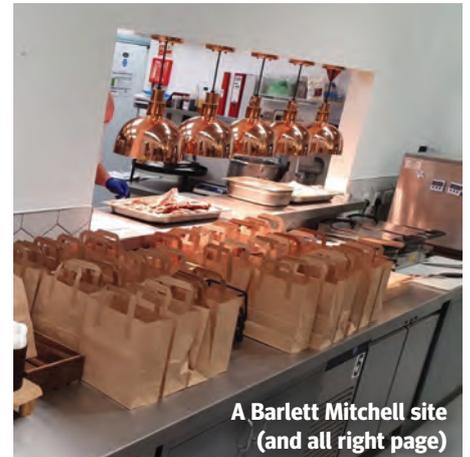
What impact do you expect coronavirus to have on business and industry [B&I] turnover in the next 12 months?

Phil Roker (PR): There is no doubt that the return to 'normal' is going to be slow and protracted. It's inevitable that even when offices do start to open up, they will not be at full capacity and will therefore not require the scale of catering offer that was available prior to lockdown. However, we do anticipate that our staff restaurants and cafés will continue to be well-used by those in the building to minimise social contact on the high street.

That said, turnover is going to be severely reduced in initial stages, and our expectation is that it will take up to 18 months to return to pre-virus levels of turnover.

John Nugent (JN): Revenues will be decimated in the medium term and recession is highly likely. Culturally, how we serve the workplace and the public will change. Relationships will be key to get through this period, both with customers and the partners we work with. It should lead to far more openness and frankness in the broader sector. Innovations, and not just technologies, will deliver a new foodservice model.

Ian Thomas (IT): As far as behaviours go, people will be less prescriptive on start and finish times for their working schedule and therefore an all-day service with longer operating hours, or seven-day working,



A Barlett Mitchell site (and all right page)

could be required. What is clear is that hospitality, fine-dining and events in workplace environments are likely to have the biggest downturn in the first instance, with meetings and events moving online. Some clients intend to ban visitors for 12 months, so this will be a major contributor.

Morag Freathy (MF): We are in the blocks and ready to support clients and customers when they come back. It's about being as ready as possible to confidently deliver a safe foodservice offer that will encourage our customers back to workplace dining. B&I has a unique opportunity to be able to influence the nation's eating



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WE'VE MISSED YOU!

STAY SAFE - PLEASE WAIT HERE

blueapple
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NEARLY THERE!
(GREAT FOOD AWAITS)

STAY SAFE - PLEASE WAIT HERE



“B&I has a unique opportunity to be able to influence the nation’s eating habits”

Morag Freathy

habits and I believe we will see a new appreciation of the true value of health and wellbeing. **Chris Mitchell (CM):** The challenge is getting our people back into the workplace doing what they do best. I think about how people are going to be travelling to offices – on the underground or train – and how much social distancing is practical. It’s not practical for many of our customers or staff to ride bikes or walk to work, so we will have to wait and see how clients deal with this. It’s going to affect numbers of people in offices or more likely lead to a lack of social distancing on public transport.

How are you addressing this, such as seeking new revenue streams?

JN: We must work with our landlords and partners to very quickly understand and be part of their recovery strategies. Services are being realigned and some discarded in the short term. Being nimble is key. Using the versatile spaces that we have in our buildings



◀ differently will assist with social distancing. Creating single-item food hubs in parts of buildings can deal with pre-ordering and eliminate queuing.

Having quality data is important. The financials are moving and changing so quickly now. We are in a period of constant forecasting.

IT: We believe that there is an appetite from clients to offer customers the ability to get their home kitchen staples from our new retail offer, along with healthy 'cook yourself' meal packs to take home. Having this service will minimise the need to go to supermarkets and therefore reduce any health risks.

What changes are you making to operations and technology?

Julia Edmonds (JE): We are completely adapting our menus to simplify the process and allow for all food to be packed to take away, and we are working closely with each client to redesign their offer and service space. We are also looking at new technology, such as virtual hosts, and proximity technology for managing customer flow and social distancing.

PR: In response to social distancing requirements, functionality has been added to our app (pictured right) that enables time slots to be allocated to staff restaurant users, alongside existing click and collect capability. Other changes will include a move to wrapped and pre-packed food; extended service times; extensive signage regarding access to and use of catering areas; clear signage for distancing at counters and reduction of seating.

MF: Our changes include extending opening hours to allow people to spread out their visits, offering to-go grab bags and click and collect, as well as contactless payment and a pre-ordering. We are highlighting healthier options that can support the immune system as we know this is a key consideration for our customers.

JN: The current situation will force us all to look at what has been the norm. Traditional counters, salad bars and the 'abundance approach' of food retailing will change initially. We will be forced to be more focused on certain products in the short term. Pre-ordering on certain days will allow for more innovation and choice due to having some certainty of building occupancy. As of now we have to assume that social distancing will destroy the traditional staff restaurant environment and all food will be pre-portioned and wrapped.

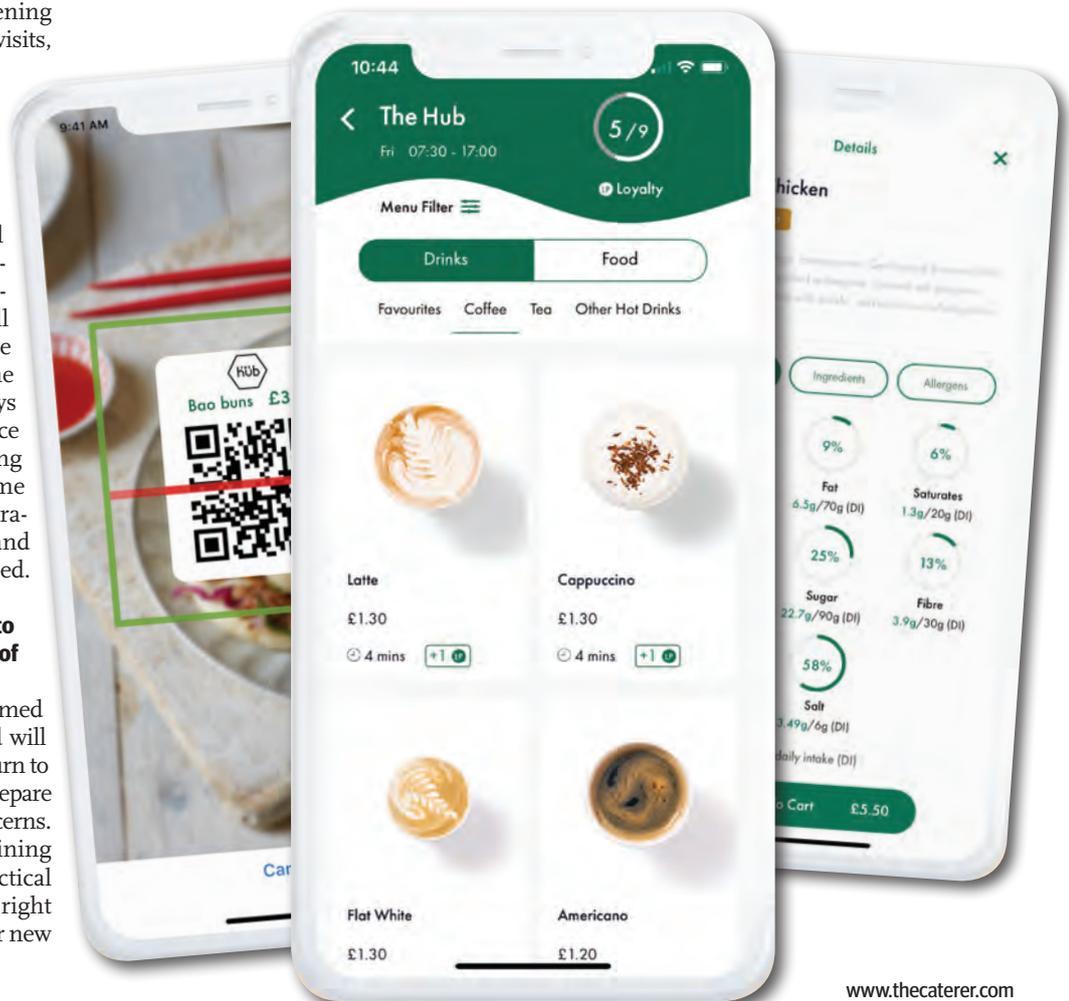
What measures are you putting in place to keep guests and staff safe and informed of the changes you're making?

JE: We have been keeping our team informed with developments as they happen and will be sending a pack to staff before they return to work, which will include information to prepare them for changes and to address any concerns.

We are also rolling out a new training programme providing a series of practical workshops to ensure everyone has the right information about social distancing, our new



A Compass site (and all right page)





“As of now we have to assume that social distancing will destroy the traditional staff restaurant environment and all food will be pre-portioned and wrapped”

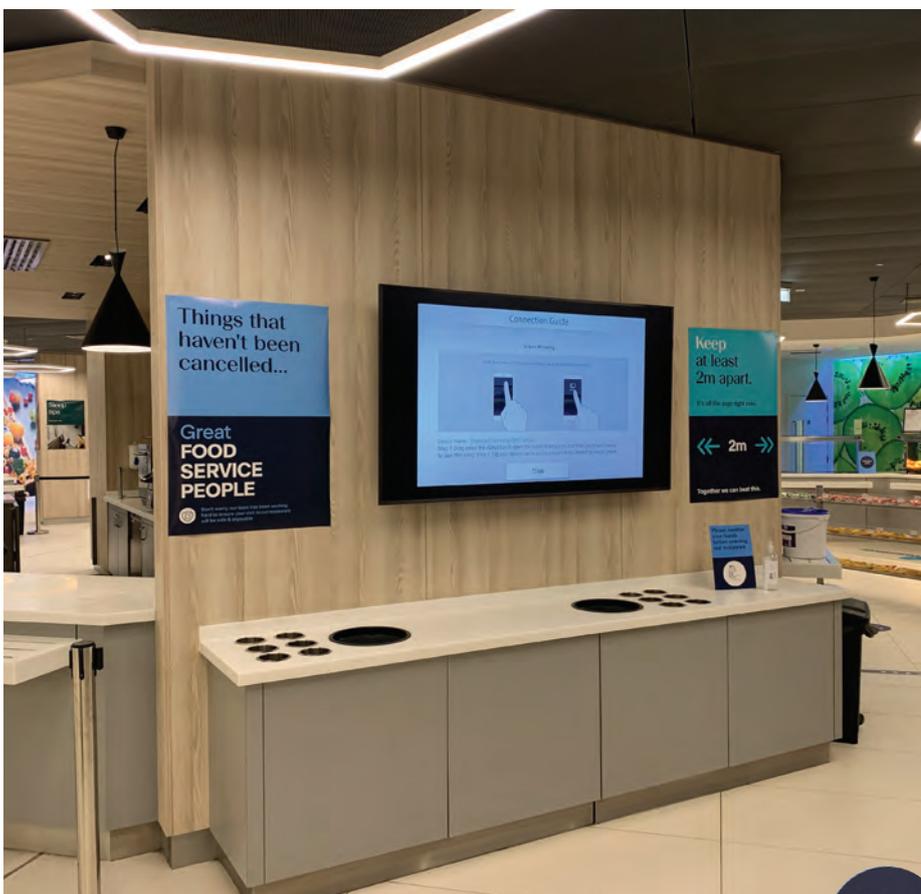
John Nugent

cleaning regimes, health and safety and how to communicate with customers about the new service. We have also been placing greater focus on employee wellbeing through what is a very challenging time for everyone.

Ruston Toms (RT): We are following current government guidance with regards to keeping customers and staff safe. We have introduced floor distancing markers, all food is packaged, our staff use PPE and have daily personal temperature checks and all transactions are contactless.

An immediate problem we foresee and are already experiencing is the cost and continuity of supply of PPE. The dining areas, if used, are sanitised between customers and signs indicate sanitised or non-sanitised tables and chairs. We are using in-house social media platforms to keep our staff informed.

MF: Our 14forty facilities management team



has developed a suite of training materials to enhance cleaning in catered and dining areas. While hygiene has always been important, it is now more important than ever that customers can see a high presence of cleanliness and sanitation. Our staff are equipped with both masks and transparent visors. Many of our front-of-house team are keen to 'share their smile' and want to wear visors while serving.

CM: We are working with UKHospitality to come up with an industry-wide strategy that all caterers can adopt to form best practice. This is a work in progress and as the government releases expectations on how we should work, it will continue to be updated.

What support do you need from clients?

IT: The key is to make sure that we are working on a building master plan with every one of the service providers to deliver the safest and most efficient building operations. This ranges from security, cleaning, facilities management, reception and even extends to our landlords.

Crucially, it is important that lead times of when they would like to reopen are communicated as early as possible so all the initiatives, procedures and equipment can be in place. This will have a knock-on impact to our suppliers too.

JE: It's about being able to respond quickly and adapting to clients' needs, so sharing information, having a clear strategy about building re-occupation and working together to find the best





◀ solution for them – for example, staggering meal-times and working patterns to limit the number of people coming into the restaurant space.

What do you envisage the market to be like for new business?

CM: I think it will be a mixed bag like it is now. Some clients may still decide to change if they're not happy with the service they receive, while others that were going to tender may not. I do think there will be opportunities to get new business after this.

MF: We are already seeing contract extensions as clients want to work through the next 12-24 months together without distractions and disruptions of market testing. We have also seen new business opportunities during lockdown and, with our experience, capabilities and stability of partners, I expect many clients to have shifted their attention to these valuable assets.

RT: Against expectations, we have won new business during lockdown. However, this is probably the exception rather than the norm, as we expect the market to be flat until next year.

In terms of business priorities, I think that many clients will not see tendering the catering service as very high on their list of priorities. A small caveat though is that as subsidies are likely to increase it might stimulate some clients to re-evaluate their contracts.

IT: Those clients that do tender will either be searching for aggressive cost savings or they will be seeking catering providers that have been agile and creative. They will need partners to be able to accommodate the new normal, maximising the opportunity of diversifying what they do to improve the employee welfare proposition.

How are you expecting consumer behaviour to change post-lockdown? Might guests rather use your services over queuing on the high street?

CM: Yes, I think that in-house catering is an integral part of people's daily work life. We offer a much safer environment for our customers to eat in where we can control safety elements with clients. I also think that people feel naturally more comfortable at work and catering services and teams are part and parcel of being at work.

JN: There is every chance that the perception for our sector will change very positively. It is easy for peoples' heads to be turned by new entrants on the high street or the local food truck that turns up nearby. In this new world, getting our message and food innovation right should allow for greater appreciation of what is sometimes regarded as 'in-house services'.

RT: It seems as though social distancing is here to stay for the foreseeable future. Therefore, we do feel we have an advantage over the high street. Workplace catering operations can be controlled and monitored in a far stricter way than the high street. We've been in dialogue with many of our clients over the last few weeks and we are busy devising a back to work programme. They will all be adopting new working practices that mitigate the chances of cross-contamination between employees. An overriding requirement will be that once employees are at their place of work, our clients would like to keep them there to reduce social interactions outside of the premises.

PR: One consideration that we are discussing



A Compass site

“Workplace catering operations can be controlled and monitored in a far stricter way than the high street”

Ruston Toms

with clients is temperature checking of all staff entering the building, so if this is in place, we believe that on-site catering facilities can represent a far more controlled and therefore safer environment than the random nature of the high street.

What's your vision for the future of workplace catering?

RT: There's a few ways of looking at this. It could be argued that clients may shy away from providing restaurants and

cafés, due to the likely increased subsidies required, plus over-regulation from government. Or they may see operating an on-site catering service as a way of keeping their buildings self-contained and therefore discouraging workers from moving in and out of the building with all the risks this entails.

Dwell times will be a thing of the past and customers will eat in isolation at their desks. This will dictate that operators provide portable food concepts that employees can eat flexibly. We don't necessarily see this as all doom and gloom. Our industry does and will adapt to the new foodservice landscape, whatever that is.

CM: I think it's largely the same as it is now, as people enjoy the service that contract caterers supply. I think it's going to change for a period of time while people readjust to the new ways of working. Will we see self-serve salad bars again? Of course we will. It's just a matter of time before people feel confident to use them again.

One of the biggest frustrations is the influx of single-use plastics that will have

to be reintroduced to service in order to keep food safe and make customers feel safe. This is something we will have to address as soon as practically and safely possible.

JE: Over the past few weeks I have been touched by how the hospitality industry has come together to support one another and our communities. There are so many great examples of this, from the Hospitality4Heroes Challenge to the numerous examples of how caterers have teamed up with charities and individuals donating their time. It confirms that we work in an amazing, creative, resilient industry that really does care about others. I'd like this to continue in the future.

PR: I sincerely hope that we can eventually get back to somewhere close to where we were prior to this crisis, where workplace catering is seen as vital to social cohesion, mental and physical wellbeing, as well as to recruitment, motivation and retention of key talent. However, there will be lasting effects of the crisis, which I expect to be a continuation of enhanced cleaning standards, and the end of cash, sadly.



Ruth Rogers

The River Café owner talks to *James Stagg* about how the 30-year-old Hammersmith business is weathering its third closure and why she's appreciating the public's newfound love of home cooking

How are you keeping yourself occupied at the moment?

My foremost concern, and something I think about every day, is how hard it is for all those people who are worried for their jobs and how they will feed themselves. That's worldwide. I'm an American and everywhere people are queuing for food. Not to mention the people who have lost family members to the disease too.

What's the situation at the restaurant right now? What are you focusing on in the business?

We closed the River Café on 17 March and started a delivery service called the River Delivers. It is based on Italian vegetables and it was started very quickly and it was very exciting. But after a few days we decided it was untenable to have the people who work for me to be in any sense of danger coming to work. We started just before the lockdown, so when lockdown happened our primary concern was looking after our people.

What has occupied you since then?

Since then we've had many conversations with other restaurateurs and our team on how restaurants will survive. None of us know how long this will go on for. It's all so counter-intuitive: usually in a crisis you stick together, but in this situation it's other people that are the danger.

Very soon after the lockdown we also launched Shop the River Café. In the first few weeks it was olive oil, wine, cheese, salamis, jars of tomatoes, beans and chickpeas, which we just sent out to our database. But it has since expanded slowly (I always grow slowly) with pesto and our own tomato sauce (which

we are very careful about preparing), Dover sole, butterflied leg of lamb and spatchcock chicken – the idea being that we take the hard work out for customers, so they don't have to take the bones out or marinate it themselves. We have the ambition to do more, but we need to control the product. The nice thing is that it keeps us in touch with our base and supports our suppliers.

It's been good to focus on one thing. Usually, when we do something at the River Café, whether it's a book, party or event, we're running the restaurant as well. But in this case we're just focused on the shop. But now we may be approaching a situation where we might be able to open in July. The next step is to think how to prepare for that.

This is the third time the River Café has had to stop serving. Does this feel different to those other occasions?

It closed when we had the fire [it was closed for a refit for seven months after a fire in 2008] and then when Rose Grey died [in 2010], and now. This is very different though, as there is such uncertainty. We just don't know when we'll open and whether we'll have to close again. It's a tricky time.

What shape will the restaurant take when you can reopen?

As soon as we're told we can open, we will. At the River Café we're very fortunate because we're ideally suited – we have more open space outside than inside and can get tables all the way down to the river. We're also looking at putting tables on the grass and doing whatever we can do to maximise the space. ▶

“We have the ambition to do more but we need to control the product”





Surviving the River Café fire

On a packed Saturday evening in April 2010, oily vapours in the River Café extraction system caught light and, two hours and an emergency evacuation later, the firemen were eating the remains of evening service in the smoke-black, water-logged interior of the riverside haunt.

When the red tape was eventually cleared, Rose Gray and Ruth Rogers had the dilemma of what to do with the restaurant.

Gray told *The Caterer* in December 2010: "We weren't going to stop doing what we had been doing because of a fire. It's the immediate challenge of the future. But of course we had no experience of a fire in our lives."

The restaurant ended up being closed for seven months while a refit took place. Staff were kept on full pay, and many went on educational trips with suppliers. Though that's clearly not an option in the current situation, the sentiment among the teams was similar. Rogers told us back then: "There was no jubilation when the staff learned they would be effectively on paid leave – these are people that get up and want to use their skills and work with their friends."

The restaurant finally reopened with a sleek redesign in mid-October 2010.

"I've been touched by the support we've had from customers but also other restaurateurs and chefs. I think we all feel that we're all in this together and we'll help each other"



Do you envisage service in a socially distant manner?

That's what we're looking at next. We'll be considering how we can do that with masks, gloves and any necessary safety precautions. Nobody is putting a gun to people's head and telling them they have to go out and eat – people have to make that decision for themselves. But if they do, we have to protect both our people and our customers.

The restaurant opened in 1987, so you must have a loyal customer base keen to return when the time comes.

I think we do and I've been touched by the support we've had from customers but also other restaurateurs and chefs. I think we all feel that we're all in this together and we'll help each other.

In terms of guests returning, I think that some people might have discovered that they love being in their house and eating at home, while others will be desperate to go out.

Will you be changing anything menu-wise when it comes to reopening?

We just don't know yet. We'll just make the food better than it's ever been. I think we all need to eat really well.

Are there any positives you take from the current crisis?

I take many, though I don't want to call them positives because of the incredible suffering going on at the moment. Personally I've enjoyed cooking in my own house, which I don't do much usually. My husband isn't well – he had an accident last year – so for me it's a privilege to have time to be with him.

The other positive will be if this is all good for climate change. When I look up in the sky it seems extremely clear and you can hear birds chirping as they now don't have to compete with the other sounds in the city.

Does it give you some hope that people are embracing bread- and pasta-making once again?

So many friends of mine are cooking – it's really exciting. People are cooking and sharing recipes. The number of times I've taken someone through a recipe over the phone has been fantastic. It's great to see how happy people are when they are cooking.

What are your hopes for the restaurant sector post-crisis, given that it will have to remodel itself?

I just want all my colleagues in all restaurants to be able to open again, cook again and do the job they do. We all do this because we love it and to lose that would be terrible. I just want everyone to be able to create the way they did pre-crisis.

As chefs we love to cook for people and serve them. All of our chefs love to cook and love to work – which is a culture we've always sought. My senior team, Joe Trivelli, Sian Wyn Owen, Vashti Armit and Charles Pullan, are all raring to go.



Slow-cooked tomato sauce with tagliarini



Poached turbot



Blood orange sorbet

Lease of life

The next rent due date is looming and the industry is no closer to settling the question of how businesses are going to pay without an income.

Emma Lake searches for answers

Narratives have long set landlords on one side of a battlefield and their hardworking tenants on the other – particularly in London, where rents have soared and operators been squeezed tighter and tighter.

As the Covid-19 pandemic hit and restaurants were forced to close, negotiations for immediate rent relief commenced. Some operators found their landlords were receptive to rent holidays while businesses are closed – but by no means all.

UKHospitality chief executive Kate Nicholls is calling for a long-term solution facilitated by government. She says: “The majority of landlords have been co-operative, but a minority have aggressively pursued hospitality businesses that are moth-balled, have no revenue and cannot hope to pay.”

Businesses have been closed for more than two months and it will be at least another month before any sites will be able to open their doors, and considerably longer before footfall, turnover and profits return to pre-Covid-19 levels. Agreements will need to be made between landlords and tenants to secure the long-term viability of businesses.

Rethinking rents

Stephen Owens, managing director – pubs and restaurants at Christie & Co, says: “I think the majority of operators have paused rent payments and are having ongoing dialogues with landlords that cover everything from rent holidays, rent suspensions, pausing rent, rebating, or possibly moving to turnover-based rents as we come out of this.

“The difficulty is that we have no real visibility on when businesses may be able to reopen – other than the vague idea of early July – or what that’s going to look like, so it’s very difficult to say long-term how people will want to rebase rents.”

Simon Chaplin, senior director – corporate pubs and restaurants at Christie & Co, adds: “It’s a question of how much should you pay. If you can only open half your business, do you pay 50% rent? Will the landlord accept that or will they be looking for full rent or will the government support that?”

“The pain is starting to come in now and landlords are starting to think ‘I can’t give this rent up for another quarter’.”

Owens says he doesn’t feel “terribly confident” that widespread agreement will be



**“It’s a question of how much
should you pay. If you can only
open half your business, do
you pay 50% rent?”**
Simon Chaplin, Christie & Co





◀ easily reached unless the government intervenes, with the moratorium on evictions, which is in place until the end of June, seen as pushing the problem to later in the year.

UKHospitality has called on the government to do something before the next quarter's rent is due in June, and has backed Jonathan Downey's campaign for a National Time Out on rent, which calls for a nine-month suspension of payments coinciding with the pausing of mortgage or debt payments for landlords.

However, the government has yet to act, so far focusing on routes to finance for businesses, many of which are facing the prospect of building a debt pile that must be tackled at a later date.

While there is a question mark over whether government aid will appear, tenants do have a strong case when entering into negotiations, with landlords likely to struggle to fill properties in the coming months.

Owens says: "We're looking at anywhere between 20% to 30% closures in the hospitality sector, so hopefully landlords will look at that and think we need to cling on to our tenants and make it attractive for them. Hopefully, common sense will prevail and they'll try and reach agreements, but it's a balancing act and it's not going to be straightforward."

Chaplin adds: "A lot of landlords are family trusts or pension funds that have been around for 20, 30, 100 years, and this one-year incident can be put at the back of the drawer.

An operator's view: Will Beckett, Hawksmoor

Broadly speaking, landlords fall into three groups: the aggressive ones, the extremely understanding ones, and the stand-off group. The first two are in a minority.

Everybody else has said that they think rents are due. We think they're not, and we've just parked the issue with nobody pushing too hard. I think there's still a hope that government might intervene and there might be a legislative answer.

I'm a co-signatory to the National Time Out, but there are other schemes. There's a property furlough scheme, which the retail consortiums are pushing for, where landlords, tenants and governments share the pain, but it's hugely expensive. I don't think we're particularly close to a solution coming from the government and the next rent day is 25 June.

Turnover rents look like the most sensible route. There are plenty of businesses that have turnover rents, but it was a landlord model in the past and the lease would say you had to pay the higher of the base rent



or a percentage of turnover (ie, if you do better than we thought you would, we want some of the upside). I would suggest this would need to become a tenant turnover rent (ie, we'll pay you the lower of the base rent or turnover). When we get back to a stage where we're trading as we used to, then by all means we can revert back to the model we have at the moment, but until then we can only pay what we can.



With this model you could also look at a type of furlough scheme, which could be a way for the government to intervene. It could work like the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, where landlords get 80% of their rent, tenants pay a turnover amount and the government guarantees the rest.

I think we're quite a way from individual negotiations. In my experience, landlords are much slower to acknowledge the

economic reality because the debt arrangements they make are predicated on a relatively static and upward-only model that hamstring what landlords can do.

I think any solution needs to look to mediate, not just between tenants and landlords, but between landlords and their banks as well. My gut instinct is either it will come down to government legislation or there's going to be a massive number of insolvencies.



the operations – and why should they? Where it did work was in airports and transport hubs, where the landlord is integral to the operation, interested in tenant mix and wanting to understand the dynamics of the offer.”

Chaplin adds: “Likewise, every operator thinks they’re better than anyone else, so they haven’t wanted to pay a turnover rent because they think they’ll be paying away some of their personal goodwill. They probably will [agree to a turnover rent] at the moment, but whether a good operator in five years’ time would be happy tied into a turnover rent when they’re performing well, I don’t know.

“The other difficulty is that every operator is different. JD Wetherspoon is high-volume, low-margin, so its turnover percentage would be massively different to a Michelin-starred restaurant. It’s understanding the dynamics of individual businesses. It works in transport hubs where all the businesses are high foot-fall and relatively high turnover, but it doesn’t work in businesses that are more specialised.”

A change of focus

Some brands are already looking at site closures, while others have filed for administration. Chaplin says that it is worth remembering that high rents had been “driving operators out of business” even before Covid-19 hit, and reductions were already needed – possibly to the tune of up to 30% in the capital.

He predicts that the current crisis could accelerate that process in the short term: “There will be certain areas of the country where there will be a glut of sites and there won’t be any takers. How long this goes on for depends on how long social distancing is needed, but why would you go into a city centre site when office workers are at home? There just won’t be the demand.

“I was talking to one operator with about 40 sites in London who can’t see themselves opening more than half of those sites. When people return and tourism comes back, maybe in three years’ time, they can, but operators can’t see that happening in the next 12 months.

“The value will be the suburban sites and possibly some of the shopping centres because they could restrict numbers and people could feel more comfortable in a food court, for example, where they can drive there and sit two metres apart. Country pubs with car parks, gardens and spacious interiors and hotels will, I think, be the first to come out and possibly do very well because people will want to take staycations.”

While Owens thinks the Covid-19 crisis could be a “seismic event”, Chaplin is not so sure it will mean long-term changes. He adds: “Looking at previous recessions, memories are short and, in a few years’ time, you’ll have a young operator saying ‘right, I’ve got this great concept, I’m going to go into all the major sites in London and I’ll pay £200 a sq ft no problem at all’. They’ll come in, mess up the rents for every other operator and we’ll be back to square one again and everything will have been forgotten.”



“Trying to renegotiate rents today is impossible without knowing what everything will look like in 12 months’ time”

Stephen Owens, Christie & Co

A lot of landlords could take a bit of pain now for the future. From the restaurants’ point of view, they can’t take the pain now, they’re already in pain, and this could just kill them off.”

Turnover translated

Both Owens and Chaplin agree that flexibility is needed, with agreements being reviewed regularly as restrictions on trade and consumer confidence change.

“Trying to renegotiate rents today is impossible without knowing what everything will look like in 12 months’ time,” Owens explains. “That’s why the idea of turnover rents seems to be gaining traction. I think both landlords and tenants see that as a fairly open way of going forward. The landlord has visibility on how the business is performing and, if it has been structured in the right way, the tenant can pay what it can afford. But it’s not simple.

“Every business has a different break-even

point. I think that’s why some landlords are finding it difficult to get their heads around – they’re not in the detail of the business, so they don’t know what that turnover rent should necessarily look like. Tenants and landlords need to work together to find solutions.

“The frustration from landlords is that they need certainty because they need to go to their own funders and say, ‘we’ve agreed this’. The difficulty for tenants is that they don’t have certainty, so trying to structure something with landlords that gives them certainty is difficult. They need to give themselves breathing space.”

While turnover rents are now being seen as an answer for many, they have not previously proved overwhelmingly popular.

Owens explains: “From a landlord’s perspective, a turnover rent was effectively betting on the quality of the tenant, so if you’ve got a great tenant, you benefit, if you have a poor tenant, you don’t. They often don’t understand



All Menuwatches go forward to the judging of the Menu of the Year Catey

MENUWATCH



Clockwise from left: elderflower and coconut rice pudding; jersey royals, wild garlic pesto; roast chicken thigh, miso and sake sauce 'supreme'; foccacia and brown butter; roasted red peppers, cherry tomato, crispy brown butter-fried chickpeas

Homing Pidgin

Head chef Michael Robins has pivoted his offer to collection only, serving the community during lockdown. *Katherine Price* hears how keeping true to the globally inspired, ever-changing spirit of the Hackney restaurant has brought the locals flocking

“We ran burgers and tacos through our minds, but we thought that was something people will do at home, because everyone has time to cook now,” laughs Michael Robins, head chef at Pidgin in London’s Hackney. Three days after the restaurant closed in mid-March due to the outbreak of Covid-19, Homing Pidgin was launched, a collection-only, £25 three-course set menu available from Thursdays to Sundays.

“They [owners James Ramsden and Samuel Herlihy] were very adamant the whole time that if we didn’t feel comfortable at any point, that it’s not safe for us mentally or physically, then it doesn’t have to happen. But we wanted to do it; we wanted to keep cooking and staying busy and bring a little bit of happiness to some people,” says Robins.

The menu remains globally inspired, staying true to the restaurant’s ethos to ‘never repeat a dish’. However, this now comes with the extra consideration of ensuring dishes retain their quality after being transported to people’s homes and reheated (exact reheating instructions are supplied).

“We wanted to keep cooking and staying busy and bring a little bit of happiness to some people”

Michael Robins

If the team were in any doubt as to whether people are enjoying the service, the speed at which it sells out is proof. One hundred meals are released through the restaurant’s weekly newsletter, and then later another 200 on the website. Both sell out within five minutes. After attempts to introduce a password system failed to reduce demand, the team now change the menu every fortnight rather than weekly to give more people the chance to try it.

“We wish we could do more, but we’re just a small 25-seat restaurant. We’re doing as many as we can,” he says.

The team is mindful of the environmental impact of packaging, with desserts transported in compostable vegware and mains in more robust plastic packaging that they hope guests will reuse.

Dishes are mostly vegetable-focused with produce from Wellocks, fish from Fin and Flounder, and meat from HG Walter, as well as ingredients foraged at Hackney Marshes (such as the elderflower used in the elderflower and coconut rice pudding) or from the restaurant’s preserve collection.





Michael Robins



Fresh pappardelle pasta, retired dairy cow albondigas, smoked tomato sauce, boquerones, wild garlic brioche crumb, wild garlic purée



Housemade focaccia and brown butter



Wild mushroom salad, confit Jersey royal potatoes, Champagne miso vinaigrette, whipped mascarpone, pickled shallots and pistachios, carrot furikake, dill



Rapeseed oil sponge, bourbon dark chocolate crèmeux, yuzu jelly, anise myrtle gel, almond biscotti

One particularly popular dish was the banana cream pie. The potted 'pie' features a crumble made from a mixture of Fee Brothers Aztec chocolate bitters, cornflour, plain flour, icing sugar, vanilla bean, cocoa and butter, which is baked on a low temperature and stirred regularly to dehydrate it.

The custard includes frozen ripe bananas puréed with milk, cream, cornflour, sugar, egg yolks and then cooked down to thicken. Once it's thick and firmly set, a Chantilly vanilla cream is whipped in to loosen it. Fresh, chopped banana is mixed into the custard, and the whole dessert is topped with a chilli and salt peanut crumble. Robins says it takes the team nearly two hours just to box it up: "It is time consuming, but people seem to think it was worth it."

One of Robins' personal favourites is the smacked cucumber salad, a simple Chinese-inspired dish of chopped and smacked cucumbers, black garlic purée, pickled courgettes, spring onions and coriander. This is paired with a spiced vinegar dressing, where aromatics such as cloves, star anise and cardamom are toasted, steeped in water to make a 'tea',

From the menu

- Roasted red peppers, cherry tomato, crispy brown butter-fried chickpeas, burnt tomato and sherry vinaigrette, ricotta, mint
- Roast chicken thigh, miso and sake sauce 'supreme', asparagus, Jersey royals, wild garlic pesto
- Elderflower and coconut rice pudding, sorrel and rum punch compressed pineapple, jalapeño dulce de leche

£25 for three courses

which is then reduced and combined with soy sauce, chillies and black vinegar.

Canadian-born Robins says he takes a lot of inspiration from his time as chef de partie at the St Charles Country Club in Winnipeg under Takashi Murakami, as well as a stage at Dove-tail in New York. Leaving his role as executive chef at Sous Sol in Winnipeg to move to the UK in 2018, he was drawn in by Pidgin's constantly

changing menu and openness to experimenting with ingredients and techniques.

He works with junior sous chef Ben Ing each week to design the menu and says development is still a priority. The team of four who haven't been furloughed (Robins, Ing, general manager Georgia Gallacher and assistant manager Laura Companys) are working full-time five days a week, "making sure that there's still an establishment to come back to and all the staff have a place to work when this is all done".

When it comes to the future of Homing Pidgin, "We're just kind of rolling with the punches," Robins concludes.

"No one really knows how long this is going to last. For now, it seems like people are quite happy with what we're providing, but that does not mean that we don't want to progress ourselves and develop. That's what draws people to work at Pidgin – the fact that things change and they're always developing and progressing. We plan on continuing."

Pidgin, 52 Wilton Way, Hackney, London E8 1BG
www.pidginlondon.com



Comfort: Recipes to Calm your Fortress

By Gabriella Dyson and Lucy Studley

Available to download at justgiving.com/fundraising/comfort-cookbook

"In times of uncertainty, we can rely on our kitchens as a source of comfort."

Comfort has been pulled together by *The Maverick Guide* editor Gabriella Dyson and Cornwall Content's Lucy Studley in just six weeks in response to the coronavirus crisis.

Celebrating the ingredients, producers and chefs of the south-west, the digital cookbook features recipes from the likes of Paul Ainsworth, Elly Wentworth, Jude Kereama and Michael Caines, beautifully styled and photographed by Ali Green (who cooked many of the recipes herself at home).

Everyone involved in the project has given their time and expertise free of charge and all donations towards downloading the book go to industry charity Hospitality Action.

The book is visually stunning, and I would willingly pay good money for it in hardback. It offers a wide variety of comfort food dishes, whether you find solace in soups and stews, big bowls of pasta, hearty breakfasts like porridge and pancakes, or sweet treats. Or in my case, all of the above.

The digital download also includes a directory of suppliers and guides to foraging and growing fruit and vegetables. It respectfully acknowledges the full circle of suppliers and chefs who rely on each other, and each recipe features an introduction to the people behind the recipes and produce.

The simple recipes are designed for the home cook rather than the professional chef, but that does not detract from its ability to provide a distraction as a collection of comforting recipes to be cooked with and for families within the average household budget, and to allow chefs to support their industry colleagues.

Donations for the book are supporting a charity that is itself bringing comfort to people in our industry who find themselves in need during this difficult time. This is a comfort in itself: that there is something we can do to help when so much at this time is outside of our control.

By Katherine Price

Serves 4

4 lemon sole, 500g-700g each

Olive oil for cooking

Cornish sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

Green sauce

1 shallot, peeled and finely chopped

1 garlic clove, peeled and finely chopped (remove the germ first)

2tbs flat leaf parsley, chopped

2tbs rocket leaves, chopped

2tbs mixed green herbs (whatever you fancy, such as mint, basil, parsley, dill, etc) chopped

2 anchovy fillets in oil, drained and chopped

1tsp capers in brine, drained, rinsed and chopped

½tsp English mustard

Finely grated zest and juice of ½ lemon

300g softened unsalted butter

Garnish

300ml sunflower oil

2tbs large capers, drained, rinsed and chopped

For the green sauce butter, put all the chopped ingredients into a bowl together with the half teaspoon of English mustard, lemon zest and juice. Add the butter and mix until everything is evenly combined. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

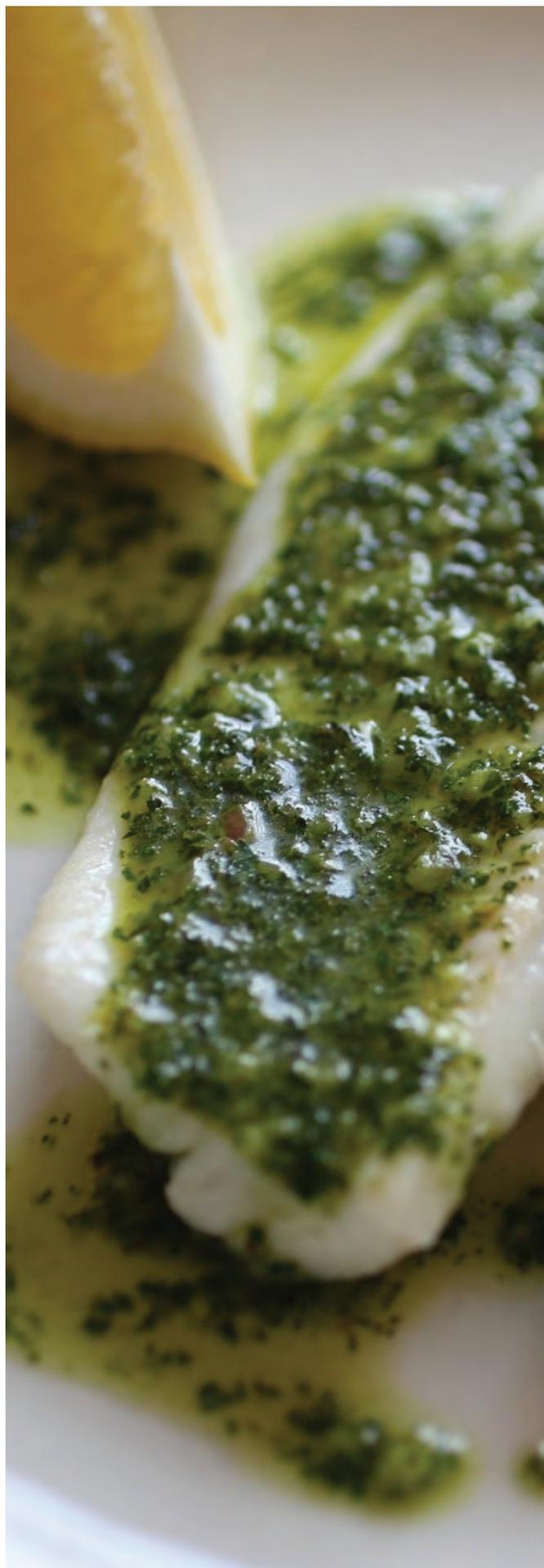
Spoon the butter onto a sheet of baking parchment and mould to a sausage shape. Wrap the parchment securely around the butter, folding in the ends to keep it tight. Chill until ready to use.

For the garnish, heat the sunflower oil gently to 180°C in a small, deep, heavy pan. Add the capers and fry for one minute until crispy. Remove with a slotted spoon and drain onto kitchen paper. Keep warm.

Pre-heat your grill to its highest setting. Oil a tray large enough to comfortably hold the fish. Oil the fish then season all over and place on the tray dark side up. Unwrap the butter, cut in to discs and place these on the fish.

Grill the lemon sole for 10-12 minutes. To serve, lift the fish carefully onto warmed plates then spoon over the butter and cooking juices left on the tray. Finish with the deep-fried capers and serve at once. I like mine with boiled new potatoes and some lovely fresh veg.

● This recipe appears in Nathan Outlaw's 'Everyday Seafood' (Quadrille)



Lemon sole, green sauce butter



PHOTOGRAPHY BY NATHAN OUTLAW

Revelations

Kerth Gumbs, head chef, Ormer, Mayfair



What was your best subject at school?

In fourth grade, I picked food nutrition as a subject and I haven't looked back

What was your first job?

My best friend and I opened our own pizzeria at the age of 16 back home

What do you normally have for breakfast?

Usually a healthy shake and smoothies, but Sundays are a bit heartier

What do you do to relax?

I go for a massage or to the movies

Which is your favourite restaurant?

Muse by Tom Aikens was one of my best meals of 2020

What's your favourite hotel?

I may be a bit biased here, but it would have to be Flemings hotel, where Ormer is located

What is your favourite food?

The amazing street food you can find in Thailand. It is great, humble and affordable

What do you always carry with you?

A small bottle of hand lotion

Which person in catering have you most admired?

Julian O'Neill has been a great mentor to me



Which person gave you the greatest inspiration?

Tom Aikens for his energy, creativity and style of food

Cast away on a desert island, what luxury would you take?

Definitely my kids. They provide me with sense of purpose and are pretty entertaining too

If you had not gone into catering, where do you think you would be now?

As I was into track and field at school, I would be an athlete

Tell us a secret...

I am an open book! But I will have exciting news about Ormer Mayfair to share with you soon...

What irritates you most about the industry?

Nothing really, but lately I have been rather worried like everybody else about how resilient we can be with the current situation

When did you last eat a hamburger?

One weekend during lockdown when, like most chefs, I was in the hype of experimenting with making my own bread

Who would play "you" in a film about your life?

Actor Taye Diggs, he's definitely a smooth operator...



What's your favourite book?

I like to read children's books to my kids, in particular *The BFG* by Roald Dahl

New products



- The Rieber JVA Secure Meal System is suitable for hot or ambient meals, while chilled food can be delivered using pre-frozen eutectic plates. Optional features include door element with removable heater, different door configurations, drinks dispensers, and rough ground castors and silent running castors.
- Price Trolley, £6,750; tray sets, £47
- www.bgtrieber.co.uk

- SaferMask Group is supplying its facemasks throughout the UK. The three-layer, washable masks are reusable up to 30 times.
- Price Pack of two, £10.80; volume discounts apply
- www.safermask.group



- IMC and Lincat have joined forces to supply a mobile handwash solution. The hands-free, foot-pumped station, model number F63/503, has a 20-litre water tank, which is removable for refilling, and a separate waste-water collection tank.
- Price £649
- www.lincat.co.uk



- Young's Foodservice has introduced Jumbo Breaded Cod Fish Fingers and Jumbo Battered Alaska Pollock Fish Fingers, for use in wraps or for dipping.
- Price From £10.95 per case of 60 units
- www.youngsfoodservice.co.uk



Beavertown Brewery has launched the latest addition to its core range, the punchy citrus and tropical flavour Nanobot, a new low-alcohol 'super session' IPA (2.8% ABV) brewed with Sabro and Simcoe hops. Price £1.90 per can www.beavertownbrewery.co.uk/nss



Tiki Tonga Cold Brew uses the Tiki Tonga signature No12 blend of 100% Arabica black coffee, which has a rich mouthfeel and a nutty chocolate finish. The coffee is sourced from ethical and sustainable farms. Price 250ml can, £2.50; six-pack, £13.20 www.tikitonga.co.uk

2 Fingers chunky tartare sauces are made with free-range egg mayonnaise and no artificial sweeteners, colours or flavours. They come in four varieties: original, creole, wasabi and vegan. Price Original Chunky Tartare Sauce, £42 for a case of 12x250g bottles www.eat2fingers.com



Cove vodka is made using King Edward potatoes grown on Leanne Carr's family's farm in Devon. The vodka is made using small batch traditional copper pot distillation for a smooth flavour. Or try Cove's fruitier cousin, Cove damson liqueur. Price Cover vodka, £25.67 for a 70cl bottle; Cove Damson Liqueur, £21.18 for a 50cl bottle www.devoncove.co.uk

Fishing for ideas

With the end of the lockdown looming, operators will be trying to make their reopening menus something to remember. From low-cost classics to something more luxurious, there's something for everyone when it comes to seafood and fish on your menu. *Lisa Jenkins* reports

When the hospitality industry emerges from lockdown, restaurant owners and suppliers will be rushing to serve up some of the nation's favourite dishes. And when it comes to seafood, this will be an opportunity to make the most of the hundreds of different types of seafood species caught in UK waters and support the UK seafood industry.

Hans Frode Kielland Asmyhr, UK director for the Norwegian Seafood Council, says that the pandemic will have changed the landscape of the restaurant industry for years to come. "This is an extremely difficult time for caterers and restaurateurs, and it is important for everybody in the industry, from suppliers to restaurant owners and everyone in between, to support each other while we wait for the opportunity to bounce back."

Cheap but cheerful

Andy Gray, Seafish's market insight team and trade marketing manager, says restaurants should consider including a wider selection of seafood on their menus. "We are likely to see a range of customer choices once the full range of foodservice outlets open again. Some people will be eager to satisfy their cravings for fish and chips and others will want to treat themselves to the full dining out experience.

"Some will rush to fill up on their favourites that they have missed during lockdown, but this will be balanced against customers who will be wary of dining out and may want to take their time before rushing back to mass socialising venues."

Rockfish restaurants founder and restaurateur Mitch Tonks thinks the former is more likely: "Opening, and how it will look, is an unknown, but I think we are all looking forward to that sense of community and seeing the faces of your regulars.

"I think the thing people are really missing is a plate of fried fish. It's something we all crave – crisp, salty batter, moist, juicy fish and a pile of chips with tartare sauce. We all have our own cravings or dishes that remind us of something special.

"But there is so much more to miss about eating seafood in a restaurant – a bowl of steaming mussels, a pile of oysters or a simple grilled fish – all these things are on my mind a lot!"

The coronavirus crisis will have made a





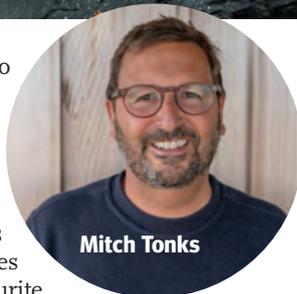
SHUTTERSTOCK

serious hit to profits, and so many operators will be looking to cut costs on raw ingredients when reopening. Luckily, cheaper raw ingredients can still be used to create a hit dish, for example, steamed mussels can be used to create moules marinières, a perennial favourite among diners that makes use of British ingredients and feels like the premium option to a guest while offering a good profit return.

Johnny Godden, owner of Flying Fish Seafoods in St Columb, Cornwall, highlights mackerel as a potential hit: "The cheaper and more cheerful options, such as the versatile, healthy and tasty mackerel, which is also in great abundance, will, I believe, also play a big part on menus this summer."

Meanwhile, Ennevor Yap, director at Wing Yip, emphasises that cheaper fish can offer chefs the opportunity to try something unusual: "During the spring and summer months, our bestsellers are sea bass and sea bream, as they are extremely versatile fish. Sea bass, for example, is often a favourite among customers due to its taste and soft texture. It stands out well on its own but can also take on an array of strong flavours."

"With consumers not having been



Mitch Tonks

"I think the thing people will really miss is a plate of fried fish. It's something we all crave – crisp, salty batter, moist, juicy fish and a pile of chips with tartare sauce"

Mitch Tonks, Rockfish

able to escape to their favourite holiday destinations, operators may see a demand for authentic dishes from around the world. For operators looking to give traditional seafood dishes an authentic Oriental twist, Wing Yip stocks a range of sauces that go well with fish and seafood, whether it's sweet, sticky marinades or spicy sauces. Mai Siam sauces, for example, can be added as a cooking sauce for seafood-based stir-fries and rice dishes."

Make it premium

Godden agrees customers will be eager to get into restaurants, but expects that guests will

be looking for something luxurious that they would not have been able to enjoy at home: "We have excellent quality Cornish lobster, Cornish turbot and red mullet all in season right now and these



Clearwater langoustines

could be the prime choices. These relatively indulgent species, along with John Dory, will hopefully be on the menus."

John Ashmore, marketing director for Clearwater Seafoods, is similarly expecting guests to be tempted by a more premium offering, such as his recipe for barbecued lobster halves. With many restaurants



Johnny Godden

“With consumers not having been able to escape to their favourite holiday destinations, operators may see a demand for authentic dishes from around the world”

Ennevor Yap, Wing Yip

◀ considering using outside space to allow for social distancing measures, a barbecue offering could be the way to attract diners, weather permitting. Clearwater’s split half lobsters are caught in the north-west Atlantic, contain the meat from half of a tail and that of one claw and one knuckle, and are ready to cook with no preparation required.

Clearwater’s Canadian Sea Scallops, which are Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certified, are another product that can bring luxury to a menu while saving operators time and money. The scallops are shucked and frozen within an hour of catch, without any additives or chemicals. The fresh-frozen process offers freshness and a high-quality product with a longer shelf life.

Ashmore also suggests that classic dishes can be ‘dressed up’ with whole langoustines, providing a delicious alternative to prawns. “They are easy to prepare, requiring only a short blast of high heat in a frying pan, wok or on the grill,” he explains.

Seasonality, sustainability and supplies

Rick Toogood, chef-patron and co-founder of Prawn on the Lawn in Padstow, Cornwall (winner of the 2019 Seafood Restaurant of the Year



Prawn on the Lawn’s turbot head, and smoked tomato butter



Prawn on the Lawn’s cured grey mullet, grilled tomatoes and seaweed



Prawn on the Lawn’s wrasse tartare and pickled mushrooms



“It’s what we can do with the produce as chefs to make it luxurious without being pretentious”

Simon Hulstone, the Elephant

award), and East Highbury in London, agrees that profits will be a priority, but emphasises that this doesn’t need to be at odds with sustainability: “There will be challenges for restaurants, with cash flow being a real issue for some. In these circumstances lesser-known species should be used – it’s a chance to balance out the current dependence on a handful of species, like cod, plaice and mackerel, for example.”

Simon Hulstone, chef-patron of the Michelin-starred Elephant in Torquay, Devon, thinks there’s more to a premium offering than expensive or unusual species or cuts of fish: “First, use fish you are familiar with and that you are comfortable cooking. It’s what we can do with the produce as chefs to make it luxurious without being pretentious.

“Second, we always opt for seasonal and sustainable ingredients,” he explains, making special reference to halibut and Fjord trout from Norway as two of his favourite summer fish.

Throughout lockdown there have been issues with the supply chain, with home consumers often unable to buy specific products. However neither Godden nor Asmyhr anticipate similar issues with the fishing supply chain. “Weather factors permitting, there will be no problems and there should be a plentiful supply to meet demand. Our favoured day-boat fishermen will be keen to get back to business as usual,” says Godden.

Covid-19 support tools tailored to seafood businesses

Seafish has released an online tool to help seafood businesses identify which government financial support schemes they may be eligible for.

By selecting their business type and location, seafood businesses can access information about which packages may be available to them and details of how to apply.

The tool, which can be accessed from the Seafish website, covers seafood sector-specific packages and those open to businesses more generally from the UK government and the devolved administrations in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales.

Aoife Martin, director of operations at Seafish, explains: “With various support packages for seafood businesses and announcements from each of the home nations in recent weeks, businesses may have found it difficult to keep track of exactly what help they are eligible for.

“We have collated the relevant information into our financial support measures tool to provide businesses throughout the seafood supply chain with a quick and easy way to identify the government support that can help them through this challenging time.

“We also provided economic data and analysis to the governments to allow them to develop support packages tailored for the seafood industry. We’re also supporting the industry with similar queries and continue to respond to these requests.”

The coronavirus section of its website also contains a list of other sources of advice and support for individuals and businesses in seafood, as well as updates on the work that Seafish is doing to support the sector through the current situation.

For the tool, visit tabsoft.co/36k10qG

NORWEGIAN SEAFOOD COUNCIL



The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted us in ways we never thought possible, bringing with it a multitude of consumer restrictions and undeniable behavioural shifts, many of which will stick, lockdown or not. The Norwegian seafood industry – the second largest seafood exporter in the world – has remained operational throughout the lockdown, being classified a critical function of society. But as the globe starts to emerge from the heavy clouds of the viral outbreak, we are faced with a very different marketplace from only a few months ago.

What the future holds

Coronavirus has devastated the hospitality industry and meddled with the diner's relationship towards eating out and food in general. We now find ourselves in a critical period to carefully navigate with agility and innovation. We talked to our chef ambassador, Michel Roux Jr, chef-patron at London's Le Gavroche.

"This has been a truly testing time for the whole industry and we are praying there won't be a long-term effect. When we can safely reopen our doors, we'll be looking to offer a pared-down menu at Le Gavroche to save costs. This is not going to be a lesser menu by any means; we need to make the restaurant experience as exceptional as possible for our guests, and that's where fish and seafood – seen as very special ingredients – come in," says Roux.

NAVIGATING A NEW NORMAL IN UNCHARTERED WATERS

With a lift in lockdown measures drawing closer, the seafood industry vows to support the hospitality sector as together we prepare for a new reality

Trends for reopening

With eating out temporarily off the cards, lowered disposable incomes and a significant increase in down time, home cooking and meals around the table are enjoying a resurgence. Consumers are also opting for healthier and more environmentally conscious options as lockdown becomes a part of everyday life. Satisfying these trends will be key to reopening menus.

Ingredients with functional benefits are increasingly coming into play as links between health and immunity become clear – take superfoods such as seafood, seeds, spices and nutrient-rich vegetables. But it's not all about health kicks – consumers are also turning to hearty, indulgent dishes for comfort and wellbeing.

Roux explains: "In challenging times, I believe people look to comfort food, and for our style of cooking, this means great classic dishes and techniques. We want a big metaphorical hug from our food, and the type of hearty, home cooking that

makes you feel good. We are looking forward to serving the kind of food you would associate with French country cooking, for example bouillabaisse, but using prime ingredients, presented in a very beautiful way."

Zero waste

It is not only the public's values on nutrition and dining culture that have been challenged by the pandemic; there has also been a radical shift in consumer attitudes towards food wastage, with decreased access to shops, more meal planning and better budgeting awareness with tightened purse strings. The issue is, of course, already on the agenda across the hospitality sector, but it will become increasingly salient upon reopening.

Roux continues: "The pandemic has had an effect at every level. We have all had a knock to our disposable income, and that must be taken into account with future menus. We will be looking to include better value fish like haddock and hake. We will also be buying whole fish rather

than prepped to cut costs and, more importantly, have so much more raw material to use in the kitchen; from the head to the tail fin, everything is edible and can be used to combat wastage and boost margins.

"Whether high end or more affordable, our ingredients will continue to be of the highest quality. Harnessing our strong relationships with suppliers will be key to navigating reopening and pivoting to the numerous changes that this will entail.

"As important as offering the right menus is, we must be able to reassure our guests that, despite social distancing measures and keeping safety paramount, coming into Le Gavroche is as special an experience as it's always been – that's going to be crucial."

To those deep in the midst of diversifying offerings, to those keeping doors closed waiting for lockdown to lift and to those simply longing to get back in the kitchen – we stand by you in complete solidarity and look forward to sharing a meal together when we reach the other side.



◀ Asmyhr insists: “We and the entire Norwegian seafood community are absolutely committed to helping the industry get back on its feet, however we can.”

Issues with supermarket supply chains have led customers to seek produce elsewhere. Rich Toogood and his wife Katie recently converted their London restaurant to a fishmongers as a consequence of the Covid-19 lockdown, and the couple hopes that consumers’ new-found interest in provenance will carry on to food-service menus.

Rick says: “There is a real desire for people to access quality produce, and not just seafood. This increase in awareness of where to source ingredients will hopefully carry on to operators when they have a chance to reopen.

“When we do all reopen our restaurants, it should be seasonality that we are seeking and hopefully there is a new-found appreciation and support for the people catching it.

“I believe it’s the responsibility of the operator to seek out the supply, whether it’s through an online platform or ordering direct from fisherman and producers. There is some cracking fish coming into season right now, like gurnard, crab, lobster and brill. Don’t be

afraid to ask questions of your supplier – they should know what they’re talking about.”

Seafish believes that provenance does play an important role when it comes to consumer choice, increasingly so for fish and shellfish, with the origin of a product often the final influencing factor. Gray recommends “communicating to customers in clear and simple terms as to where and how your fish and shellfish is sourced,” and emphasises the importance of supplier accreditations such as MSC.

Being more descriptive regarding product provenance on menus can also greatly influence the appeal of fish and shellfish dishes. An example would be to change ‘scallops in a white wine and shallot sauce’ to ‘seared Cornish scallops in a crisp Chablis and French shallot sauce’.

While planning your reopening menu to excite guests and enhance your profits is no doubt important, it’s more vital to remember what it is your customers are coming for. As Tonks says: “Restaurants mean so much to people because they are places to relax and enjoy with friends and family. They mark special dates and occasions and they are part of the happy memories we have, and that all comes with good hospitality.”

Contacts

Clearwater www.clearwater.ca/en/

Flying Fish Seafoods
www.flyingfishseafoods.co.uk

The Elephant www.elephantrestaurant.co.uk

Marine Conservation Society
www.mcsuk.org

Marine Stewardship Council www.msc.org

Norwegian Seafood Council en.seafood.no

Prawn on the Lawn
www.prawnonthelawn.com

Rockfish www.therockfish.co.uk

Seafish www.seafish.org

Wing Yip www.wingyip.com

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A WINNING FORMULA



Clearwater's wild-caught, frozen-at-sea Canadian Sea Scallops are recognised globally for their superior quality and taste. Sustainably harvested from the pristine waters of the Canadian North Atlantic and Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certified, they are **shucked and frozen-at-sea onboard Clearwater's factory vessels within one hour of catch**, without any additives or chemicals. Freezing-at-sea is the preferred scallop processing method, with independent research showing that **frozen-at-sea scallops outperform land-frozen scallops** on drip loss, cooked yield, flavour, texture, appearance and shelf life.

Clearwater's fresh-frozen process not only **offers the ultimate in freshness and quality**, but provides a product with a longer shelf life and ultimately better value for customers. **Clearwater Canadian Sea Scallops retain their yield, shape, colour and taste during cooking** and consistently sear a beautiful golden brown. We are proud to have been voted winner in the Product Excellence Awards Frozen Fish and Seafood category.



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Prask Sutton

The former DJ is now the founder and chief executive of mobile order and pay app Wi5. He speaks to *James Stagg* about how mobile ordering is vital in any business but will never replace the human touch

Mobile ordering and payment has been around for some time but hasn't really gained traction. Do you think this is a breakthrough moment?

Things really started picking up in November last year. It had taken a while for people to get their heads around it. Aggregators like Deliveroo and Just Eat laid the groundwork for ordering food on mobile and we're the literal next step.

Mobile ordering can improve businesses' bottom lines, but it was considered a 'nice to have'. Now, with Covid-19 and the stipulations around distancing and contactless payment, it's a 'must have'.

You don't want to benefit from something as tragic as this event, but it's a case of being in the right place at the right time.

How does it work in a hospitality setting?

Different operators use different methods to onboard customers into the flow of ordering and pay. People use QR codes or URLs on menus – some have even used near-field communication for guests to tap their phone against. We also work with companies like Wireless Social, which allows us to get people into the order and pay flow on the wireless landing page.

Is there a great increase in operators getting in contact now?

In the past few months it has gone crazy. Everyone in the business is flat out. One of the reasons things started picking up, even before Covid, was that the solutions available were either off the shelf – which didn't meet the brand desires of multi-site operators – or from digital agencies, which come with a hefty price tag.

We think we offer the quality of an agency with the price tag of an off-the-shelf product. We're very much behind the scenes as



“It's really important to us for people to know this isn't another tech company coming in to automate everything”

a white label. For a business like Pizza Hut to trust us, it has to be super-polished and stable, and security has to be key.

What kind of data does this type of software provide? Do operators have access for insight and marketing?

The main tenet behind our business is to work with operators to keep their customers. They get their data and we're there to help them grow. Of course, we want to make sure it's a great experience for the customer, but it has to be the best for the operator.

Though data is important and valuable, just handing it over in a big chunk isn't particularly useful. There are insights from the data that are useful, so if we can action the data automatically, then we can use trends in behaviour to inform menu design or how something is presented to a guest.

How does Wi5 integrate with existing ordering and payment systems?

We can work with anything to do with customer relationship management or loyalty systems. We're not trying to replicate anything.

We're experts at what we do and recognise there are experts in other areas, so we'd rather be part of a suite of tools that work together in harmony.

What kind of changes would an operator have to consider making before implementing a mobile order and pay system?

It depends on the complexity of their systems, but it's built to be frictionless with as few barriers as possible. If you're a single-site operator, we can get you going with little intervention, but multi-site operators will need a more hands-on approach. The most important thing is making sure calls to action are up in the venues and staff understand what's involved and what the process is.

What difference does it make to tipping?

We're focused on building features that ensure front of house staff are looked after in terms of service charge and tips, and how we can incrementally increase them. It's really important to us for people to know this isn't another tech company coming in to automate everything. We want to make sure that people can focus on the key areas of their job where they can bring value, and that they're properly remunerated for that. Getting buy-in from staff is key to making this work.

Do you think this type of system will now become a prerequisite of operating for the majority of operators?

I think it was going there anyway; the current situation has just accelerated it. There are so many efficiencies to be made and improvements in service. People get used to things very quickly. The move to cashless, for example, was on the way in anyway.

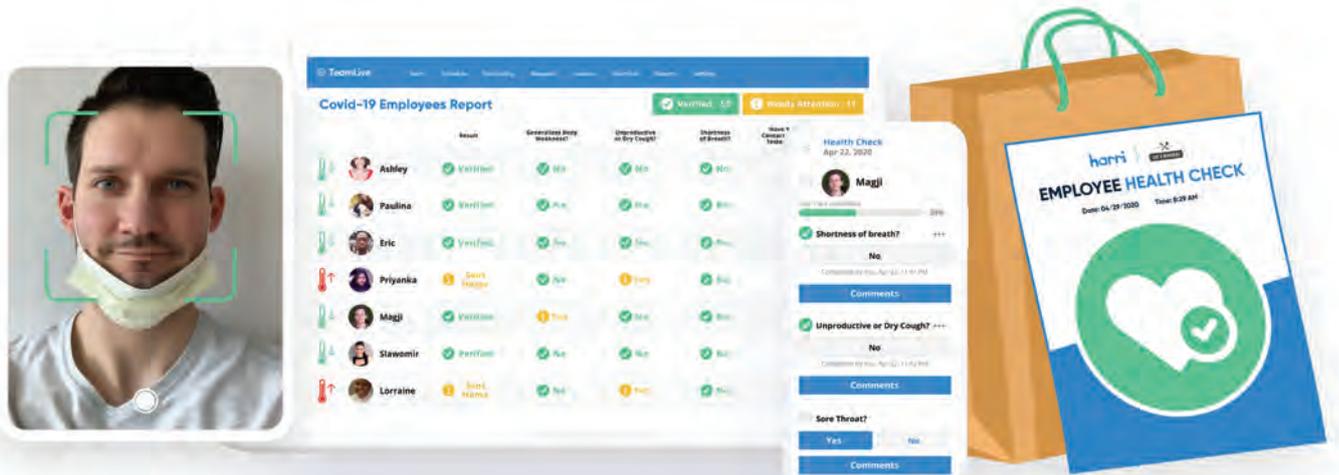
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