

Fast Casual Restaurants - US - 2021

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This report looks at the following areas:

- The impact of COVID-19 on consumer behavior and the fast casual market
- How fast casuals can stay competitive amid the value and convenience of QSRs
- The biggest future opportunities for daypart and menu expansion
- The importance of off-premise investments including contactless pickup, mobile apps, online ordering and ghost kitchens.

The COVID-19 pandemic severely impacted US foodservice sales and restaurant traffic; however, limited service restaurants, including fast casuals, were better equipped to respond to changing consumer needs with safe, convenient, and lower-cost meals compared to their full service restaurant counterparts.

While fast casuals fared better than full service operators throughout the pandemic, they still face heavy competition from the convenience and value of QSRs, which have recovered faster. Despite this, 58% of fast casual diners agree fast casuals are a better value than fast food restaurants. Fast casuals can drive value through the use of quality ingredients and have ample opportunity to increase traffic by expanding focus beyond core dayparts to include happy hour, snacking or even remote work occasions. Additionally, revamping the menu to include international and fusion fare can appeal specifically to younger generations who already are core segment diners.



“Fast casual restaurants need to remain nimble and convenient for diners to continue on the road to post-pandemic recovery. This means catering to traditional mealtimes as well as expanding to other occasions, such as for work or happy hour. Expanded occasions and menu items can especially appeal to younger generations and parents, both core segment users.”

- Emma Allmann, Jr. Analyst

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