



WHY COMBI OVENS ARE A GHOST KITCHEN MUST-HAVE

The pandemic has brought unprecedented changes upon the restaurant industry. From pivots to outdoor dining and delivery services to menu changes, another big change has been the growth in numbers of ghost kitchens—delivery-only restaurants eschewing the traditional business model of sit-down, dine-in service. The growth in popularity isn't totally unforeseen—industry experts predicted they would increase in numbers over the next few years, but the pace of new brands popping up has certainly been faster than anticipated, perhaps thanks to the pandemic's surge in off-premise dining demand.

Part of that could be attributed to the rise in popularity of third-party delivery. According to analytics firm Second Measure, third-party food delivery sales grew an impressive 138% in December 2020 alone. With dining rooms closed,



Ghost kitchens generally have much different space than traditional restaurants

many restaurant brands turned to off-premise orders to keep their businesses afloat. And even as dining rooms reopen, many consumers report that they anticipate that they'll continue ordering takeout and delivery. With that in mind, some operators are choosing to abandon the dine-in model entirely or add delivery-only options for their brands' most popular items. For example, one casual dining chain has seen success with its chicken wings-only ghost kitchen, while a popular pizza chain offers its pies for delivery only, selling under a different brand, but cooked in the same kitchen.

Ghost kitchens not only give existing brands a way to add incremental sales to their bottom line, but they also give prospective

operators the chance to start up their restaurant with a smaller investment and lower overhead. But in order to be successful, ghost kitchen operators need to consider the best strategies for their actual kitchens—including how to cook for multiple brands in the same kitchen.

RETHINKING KITCHEN SPACE

Ghost kitchens generally have much different space than traditional restaurants. While standard kitchens might have different stations—sauces, flat-top grills, deep-fryers, etc.—for different dishes, ghost kitchens typically have a much smaller square footage to work with. With the reduced space comes a bigger need for efficiency—every piece of equipment should be carefully considered. In that same

vein, ghost kitchens often work to serve the needs of more than one brand; it's possible that the same kitchen will need to be able to churn out batches of Buffalo wings as well as fried options such as fish and chips, or other menu items, such as roast chicken, pizza or baked macaroni and cheese.

With the increased demand for kitchen versatility, operators should be looking for equipment that can prepare a variety of foods without taking up too much space. What's more, with delivery speed expectations, operators need to be able to prepare the foods customers order relatively quickly; according to *Technomic's 2020 Takeout and Delivery Consumer Trend Report*, consumers are willing to wait an average of 34 minutes for their food to be delivered. Knowing that,

operators should use equipment that is capable of cooking consistently great food—fast. Thankfully, one piece of equipment—the combi oven—can do all of this.

SUCCESSFUL EQUIPMENT SOLUTIONS

Combi ovens are the chosen piece of kitchen tech for many successful restaurant brands, and it's easy to see why—they offer an array of cooking functions; they are easy to use and don't require extensive, specialized training; and they can cook a large volume of food at one time or in batches based on demand, just to name a few benefits.

Versatility is key with combi ovens. RATIONAL combi ovens, including the iCombi Pro and iCombi Classic, take up less than 11 square feet of space, making them an ideal solution for smaller

spaces and busy kitchens. In small spaces, for example, a 3-foot grill can be replaced with a half-size, six-shelf combi oven unit—and can double the output at the same time. With the functionality to cook meat, fish, poultry, vegetables and baked goods, they're perfect for whatever's on the menu, and with intuitive cooking controls that minimize error and ensure consistent quality, they're ideal for high-volume operations with a skeleton crew staff. Combi ovens can also assist with fried foods; while they may not be able to fully replace fryers, they allow operators to pre-cook many fried items and hot-hold for flash-frying when needed. This cuts down on ticket times and can greatly diminish wait times—perfect for when there's a flurry of wing orders.

Additionally, Combi ovens from RATIONAL regulate their cooking temperatures and times according to what's being prepared, so no

matter who's operating it, the food will come out great every time. By automating the cooking process while offering the room to cook a lot of food at once, restaurants can fulfill a large number of orders in a short amount of time.

What's more, combi ovens make it possible to prepare food ahead of time—even overnight—and hold it at the ideal temperature, preventing food from going cold or drying out. Imagine being able to prepare in advance for anticipated rush periods so there's no scrambling at the last minute to get every order out!

In a time when speed, efficiency and consistency are key, ghost kitchen operators can't go wrong with combi ovens. RATIONAL combi ovens enable kitchen staff to select the results they need, load food items and go, and multiple types of food can be prepared at once. The intuitive touch screen interface is easy to use and ensures that no matter who's on the schedule, everything will be cooked to perfection—crisp crusts, tender meats, perfectly prepared veggies and more.

Combi ovens give restaurants the flexibility and versatility necessary for these unprecedented times. With the capability to displace items like steam cabinets, convection ovens, grills, broilers, rice cookers and more, they are perfect for the small footprint in many ghost kitchens.

As ghost kitchens continue to proliferate, RATIONAL is ready to help operators outfit their kitchens with the do-it-all equipment they need most. To learn more about how combi ovens can make ghost kitchen operations streamlined, efficient and fast, visit

rational-online.com

