



# How to boost sales with crowd-pleasing combos

**T**he concept of a combo meal—soup and a sandwich, soup and a salad, etc.—is not new by any means. But over the course of the pandemic, restaurants reported that consumers were more interested than before in value offerings. Meal combos like these meet a lot of consumer needs—they offer a good value, of course, but they also help to satisfy cravings for multiple menu items, they offer family-friendly meal solutions and they make for easy off-premise dining options.

For operators, the opportunity to benefit from consumers' shifting priorities is big. With more consumers looking for value offerings that still taste great, operators have the chance to expand their menus and create new choices that customers can choose from.

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Saladworks, a fast casual chain with 115 locations across the country, offers an array of menu items, including wraps, grain bowls, sandwiches and more, all of which are available as pairings with soup. Mark Mears, Chief Marketing Officer for Saladworks, said, "We have found that soups provide an excellent opportunity to provide a well-rounded and nutritionally balanced meal the whole family can enjoy."

Of course, knowing some best practices for creating craveable combo meals is key—offering the right options that meet consumers' needs while featuring trending ingredients that don't max out kitchen

being used should be high quality ones. After all, a combo meal isn't a good value to anyone if customers don't want it—and according to Technomic's recent *Value and Pricing Consumer Trend Report*, more than three-quarters of consumers—77%—say that quality is a menu attribute that creates value.

Beyond quality ingredients and recipes that reflect current trends, operators should also offer a good range of choice in pairings. Of course, offering a few different choices isn't a new concept—soup and a salad, soup and a sandwich or soup and pasta have been popular menu choices for operators that offer combos for years. But by ensuring there are a few options to choose from for the main course, plus options for sides and even dessert, operators can feel confident that every customer will be able to find something they like.

David Pepin, Chief Brand Officer for Yampa Sandwich Company, a quick-service deli in Steamboat Springs, Colo., confirmed this, saying, "Yampa Sandwich Company has had great success with both soup and sandwich and soup and salad combos. We find these offerings are not just seasonally successful, but popular year-round. Our customers find great value in these offerings, especially when we can provide variety and flexibility within our menu."

Mark Mears, Chief Marketing Officer for Saladworks, agreed. "The COVID-19 pandemic created a unique dichotomy in terms of eating habits. On the one hand, guests are looking for warm, craveable comfort foods; whereas on the other hand, they are looking to eat healthier to keep their bodies strong

and build up their immunities. Like our salads, soups have an inherent 'health halo' that allow our guests to feel better about themselves. At the same time, they are fueling their bodies with soups that provide a satisfying combination of warmth and comfort," he said.

In other words, by offering indulgent choices as well as lighter soups and combo items, operators can ensure that the menu will be craveable for all sorts of customers.

### Choose low-labor, convenient, heat-and-serve options

Once the menu is planned and combo choices have been set, operators will need to source the best products to make it happen. With the current labor challenges facing the foodservice industry, it's critical to find products that are low-labor and can be served with minimal prep. With many restaurants working with a smaller staff for the same amount of traffic, it's easy for workers to get overwhelmed if there's a long list of prep when they get in for their shift. With low-prep, convenient, heat-and-serve menu items that can be offered as part of a combo meal, staff can simply heat up



### Offer upcharge items to customize the meal and boost the bottom line

Some soups, such as classic chicken noodle or a roast turkey sandwich, are great selections for baseline combo meals. However, for the diners that want something a little more special, operators can offer a selection of premium choices that they

can charge a little more for. For example, adding bacon or avocado to a sandwich is a great way to earn a couple extra dollars on a sandwich, and upscale soup options such as Chicken Artichoke Florentine Soup or Angus Beef Chili with Beans can also be offered at a small upcharge.

Pepin noted, "It is important to us that our menu shows creativity and is current to both regional and local trends. There are always going to be the staples in soup recipes, but when you have the opportunity to excite your customers with a new and flavorful soup offering, you have now created a trustworthy relationship with both your supplier and customer."

By offering a rotation of the classics

the day's portions and be on their way.

Thankfully, there are options out there that offer convenience and quality, so there's no need for operators to feel like they're compromising. Blount Fine Foods, for example, offers an array of heat-and-serve soups that diners will love, in a variety of flavors they crave, including comfort food favorites such as Broccoli Cheese Soup and Tomato Basil Soup, globally inspired options such as Thai Chicken Soup and a selection of vegetarian options.



staff or break the food budget is a tall order. Here are some tips for ensuring combo meal success.

### Use quality ingredients and on-trend recipes

Offering menu items that customers want to order is a no-brainer. But what does that mean in practice? It means that recipes should feature on-trend ingredients, and the ingredients



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and new and exciting options at a slight upcharge, operators can keep diners interested and engaged with the menu.

Another way operators can keep customers interested (and earn a little extra at the same time) is by offering soup toppings as an upcharge. Croutons, crispy crumbles of bacon, premium shredded or cubed cheese and other tasty toppers can make a meal truly customized, plus it can give customers a whole new kind of soup. For example, adding mozzarella and croutons to a tomato soup or cheddar cheese and roasted poblano relish to a Mexican-style soup can take the meal to the next level.

### Choose a capable, reliable supplier

Once all of the menu choices are in place, it's all moot without a reliable supplier. Operators will want to be sure their suppliers and vendors can reliably supply the products and ingredients they need—and ensure the product is consistent, time after time. Throughout the pandemic, many vendors experienced supply chain issues, but Blount Fine Foods offers reliable delivery service that operators can depend on, and because product consistency is a priority for the company, operators can feel confident knowing that soup will taste great and be consistently delicious from location to location.

Pepin said, "We had been exploring many different soup suppliers over the years, but never one that prides themselves so much on their choice of ingredients and variety of recipes as Blount... Partnering with Blount has immensely streamlined and simplified our kitchen processes. In addition, it has ensured a consistent offering across all six of our current locations. The ease of process will only further help as we





continue to expand with more Yampa Sandwich Company locations.”

Blount is a fifth-generation family-owned business, and with that level of experience comes with the brand’s freedom and ability to make decisions and pivot however they need to—which ultimately benefits not only the company but the operators they serve, as well.

“It comes down to quality, flavor and variety,” Mears said. “Our soups simply have to be special to live up to our mission of creating ‘WOW!’ moments for our guests. Having ample variety of soup flavors provides a way for us to support our *BE Original* brand positioning—where guests are invited to find what they love at Saladworks to help fuel their passions and live their best life.

He continued, “The brand reputation of our soup supplier is very important as well as their ability to reliably support our organization via sales, service and distribution. This combination is very much in evidence based upon our

relationship with Blount Fine Foods.”

### Sales successes

With all of these practices in mind, it’s important for operators to know it’s not all talk—choosing a great menu and a reliable supplier to ensure combo meal success does pay off.

Saladworks, for instance, ran a promotion during January and February 2021—during “soup season”—wherein guests could earn rewards for adding soup to any entree purchase. The promotion, called Soup It Up!, allowed



diners to earn rewards points, with additional points given on certain days, such as National Soup Day (February 4) or during the Big Game (February 7). What’s more, Saladworks Rewards members could get a \$2 discount on any Pick 2 combination all day on Tuesdays. The promotion, which ran for eight weeks, resulted in an average incremental increase on guest checks of 51 cents, and the sales mix for the entire Soups menu category at Saladworks went up a full point. The program also rewarded workers and managers at Saladworks locations who met and exceeded goals for upserving soup to guests.

As for Yampa Sandwich Company, Pepin noted, “We had great success with our takeout programs this past year, and soup was certainly an added value. All of the Blount soup varieties are created with comfort in mind, and boy did we all need a little bit of that last year. Accompanied with our delicious hand-crafted sandwiches and salads, the addition of soup created an experience that was easy, well rounded and very satisfying!”

To learn more about how combo meals and soups from Blount can lead to bottom line wins, visit [www.blountfinefoods.com](http://www.blountfinefoods.com)