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# The Unlikely Rise Of The Restaurant Meal Kit



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Dining

*I write about food & drink, and the people who grow, create and eat it*



The Filipino Kamayan Feast meal kit from Bongbong's Manila Kanteen. ROBYN DAVIS

With the UK officially in recession, optimism can be thin on the ground, particularly in the hard-hit hospitality sector. Creativity and resilience, however, are in abundant supply.

Before the pandemic, the sector employed more than 3 million people, according to trade body UKHospitality. Now, three quarters of [hospitality businesses are at risk of insolvency](#) within 12 months and, of those, 20% are at 'significant risk.' More than 22,000 restaurant workers have lost their jobs so far this year, double the number of job losses for the whole of 2019.

Despite the gloom, the sector has pulled together and launched a raft of initiatives, schemes, and survival tactics to try to keep their

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businesses going—and also to keep workers supported, and consumers as well fed and looked-after as circumstances allow. [Michelin-starred restaurants started doing home delivery](#) and takeaway, chefs donated recipes to [a cookbook in support of hospitality workers](#). And what’s been described by its creator as “a totally new category” has arisen: the home-delivered restaurant meal kit.

During lockdown, London restaurants such as [Dishoom](#), [Smokestack](#), [Pizza Pilgrims](#) and many others launched meal kits, delivering restaurant-made, pre-prepared food in a box for reheating, finishing and eating at home. One new company takes the restaurant meal kit concept a logical step further.

## Doing Things Differently



Pete Butler (left) and James Terry (right), the duo behind Dishpatch. ANTON RODRIGUEZ

The company is called Dishpatch. “The name is a bit Sean Connery,” admits co-founder Pete Butler, a logistics specialist with a decade of experience in the restaurant industry, who set up the business with a web designer and developer James Terry.

What Dishpatch does differently is to work with a roster of guest

chefs and restaurants, which rotates on a monthly basis. The Dishpatch team provide the chefs with a platform on the Dishpatch website. Dishpatch publicizes the menus, collates the orders, then sorts out the logistics of getting the cooked food from the restaurant kitchens into insulated boxes, complete with additional ingredients and instructions, delivered to customers' homes across the UK.

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## Staying In Is The New Eating Out

"Dishpatch started on day one of lockdown," Butler explains. It began as an online listings directory, putting food businesses that under ordinary circumstances supplied restaurants, into direct contact with consumers.



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Part of the 'date night' spread from Andrew Edmunds restaurant. ROBYN DAVIS

The pair noticed that a number of restaurant meal kits listed in their

directory were getting a lot of attention—and the penny dropped that their expertise could be a boon to restaurateurs. “It’s difficult to do a delivery service if you’re a small independent restaurant—which is where my food logistics experience came in,” explains Butler. “We figured that we could help restaurants to offer an at-home service—and that is what Dishpatch has become.”

Customers visiting the Dishpatch website in early August could choose from five menus: a vegetarian Parsi pulao feast, a Filipino spread, a Ghanaian-style goat menu, a taco fiesta, and a ‘date night’ spread from Andrew Edmunds restaurant in London’s Soho. For September, there will be some new chefs coming on board and others returning to the lineup.

Meal kits cost £40-£55 and serve two, and kits ordered during the week are delivered on a Friday. They arrive in a cardboard box chilled, with instructions for reheating, finishing and presenting.

## Meal Kits: Bigger Than The Takeaway Market?

“We see this category as being the third way to enjoy restaurant food,” Butler says. “There’s eating in a restaurant, then there’s restaurant takeaway—and we see restaurant meal kits as a completely new category, one that has the potential to be as big as, if not bigger, than takeaway in future.”

More ‘traditional,’ meal kits, such as those sold by Hello Fresh, Gousto, and Mindful Chef, have benefitted from the coronavirus crisis, with [soaring sales](#). But not everyone is convinced that the long-term future of meal kits is bright. News website [FoodNavigator](#) reported that “the meal kit model is unsustainable,” and predicted that demand will eventually tail off as and when life returns to normal.

Butler, though, believes that the restaurant meal kit is a different beast altogether. “This is a totally new category. We’re more like a restaurant ready meal than a recipe box. It’s about having a great dining experience, but in your home.”

And, he says, meal kits make sense for restaurateurs, offering an additional revenue stream. “From the restaurant side, it’s an interesting dynamic. If you do a certain number of covers it becomes a substantial part of your business. For some of them, 30-40% of their revenue is now from Dishpatch.” Butler says that Dishpatch is “generating tens of thousands of pounds in monthly revenue, and we expect to be in profit early next year.”

“Covid was the catalyst,” for this new business model, says Butler. The headlines may be gloomy and the job forecasts doom-filled, but there’s just a bit of positive news, delivered in a box, straight to the front door.

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