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Forward by the Founder

COVID-19 has hit hard worldwide, but much of our business advice comes from outside of the GCC and often unsuitable for application to our way of life.

With our beloved hospitality industry on its greatest test, the only path forward is one of change. We can either embrace the new world in light of COVID, or we can pass to the books of history. These physical world changes will only be part of the challenge, however, we also have so many new opportunities that come along with the emotional journey that we have been on. Prepare your teams to pivot their thinking and adjust to new business models and a shift away from the old ways of thinking.

This document was born, originally from inspiration from Black Sheep restaurants in Hong Kong, with their spectacular advice for their market, we see to provide some help tailored to the GCC, to align our thoughts for this great journey.

One important thing to remember, if this is already feeling heavy, VAT was introduced, and for some this challenge felt like it would re-shape the market. Yet, with proper planning, we adapted. This time, however, the public will be the ones to pass judgment on your adaptation to the circumstances.

Stay true to your brand and offer value, not just to the public but to your team who are also facing this challenge head-on and sharing in the risk. Follow exactly government protocols and health advice and know we are together.

Be sure, no one person or organization has the recipe for perfection, because this has never happened before and there are no magic bullet answers. Good planning and strategy will carry you through.

While we in the Gulf, have led a past of privilege due to the bountiful nature of our geography, it is not for the government to fix all our problems. The governments and medical community have done so much, now we entrepreneurs must show leadership and strong moral value in the hardest of times to support our people and do our part.

Sawsan Balouch

Founder - Mahonia & My Cafe

Hygienic Procedures with transparency

As we mentioned above, this is also a journey in the mind. You do not want to be a fearmonger and show life like the world is ending, but also you must show with clear honest transparency what you are doing, communicate with your team & your guests.

1. Handwashing at regular intervals - set an actual interval time that works based on your service flow and outlet.
2. Masks are already mandatory in Bahrain. Make sure your team enforces this in a respectful manner.
3. No physical contact allowed.
4. Liquid sanitizer on all work areas and guest space, basically everywhere.
5. No repeat use items on tables (salt/Pepper/Condiments etc)
6. Temperature checks as the team and guests enter and as they leave.
7. Tracing contact details saved on the cloud (see booking form [below](#))
8. Have [Hygienic Procedures FAQ's](#) ready and your team very well versed on it, confidence in what you are doing is essential. No unsure answers, everyone needs to know your policies and procedures. Add your FAQ to the end of your menu.

Plan for illness, don't be caught off guard

Have an [emergency situation procedure](#) and make sure all your team have access to it and have read it.

Who are the points of contact per shift and out of shift, especially if not all of your team speak Arabic.

Have a proper set of protective equipment, masks, gloves, thermometers, face shields.

Having something bad happen is always easier to manage if there is a clear plan and the whole team knows it.

Use a clearly written booking health declaration form, our sample is [here](#).

Have a prepared script for team members if a guest doesn't want to fill in the form and explain in kind words this is for all of our families theirs and yours. Team members shouldn't have to think of ways to crisis manage on the spot. See the Mahonia and MyCafe sample [here](#).

"Prevention is better than cure" - Don't shy away from the problem. Address it if needed. Remove the stigma from the situation, we have crisis planning in any event that someone tests positive, whilst we concurrently take all the preventative measures to reduce the risks. Need this reiterated all over the document.

Crisis Plan flow chart

In any event of a covid positive case & contact, what do we do?

(Omer to write this up)

Dining layout & service

At Mahonia, our concept is 7 tables dining and a 7 table seating lounge, this has meant we have large space between tables already in our business model. However, as things progress we each need to constantly review our layout to ensure that we offer a safe environment and that abides by any new government guidelines.

Your ambiance may be impacted by having just empty tables, perhaps re-imagine the space and service flow should be considered.

When someone is eating & they aren't wearing a mask, where is this mask being stored? Remove the awkwardness of the dining experience and think from your guests point of view.

A nice touch would be to also have masks for guests in case they damage theirs or just want one from you.

Perhaps offer a small bag or tray, or even better a UV light tray. You will know what works best.

Step by step you need to walk through the new dining experience and see your moments of awkwardness and pain points; iron these out by addressing them.

Hand sanitizers should be placed on each table

Involve your team

This impacted us all, the fear will not go away, but good leaders will give teams space to talk about the issues in a constructive way.

Have discussions on shift plans, people management, and splitting team sizes into essential groups.

We are sure your team will be as eager as ours to keep the same high service standards, but keep guests safe.

[*According to the CDC, the most recommended way to prevent the spread of COVID-19 is to wash your hands](#)

The booking process, walk-ins, takeaway & delivery

Have a clear process that your front of house team communicates to guests and enforce without exception. It's common in the GCC for relationships to matter. Use the power of good communication, to lead people to want to follow the rules.

Prepare scripts for the front of house and role-play some scenarios so they are used to handling this new type of citation as much as they can be.

Create a new booking form (link to the form) to serve as transparency and also for tracing if needed to help the government do its good work.

Ask each guest, not just the booker, for their email, so you can send them any information about COVID updates should it be required.

Deal with email inquiries during and out of office hours. Set up in advance responses to booking requests and FAQs for office hours and for out of office hours. Make sure your auto-response on email is clear and shares all relevant information including your FAQs.

Delivery/Takeaway

Both your drivers and the customers need to feel safe. So make a clear policy that your team follows and if you outsource delivery find out their policy and share this with your team.

Things to consider, offering contactless payment. Although this is an option for some payment gateways it's not that widespread with customers in the GCC. Think about how you take payment in advance, there are a host of local companies that provide smart payment options including but not limited to payment gateways and mobile card payment machines.

Work with the best digital team you can.

We use OLLA the agency, that are niche experts on luxury hospitality and what that means in the digital world.

As a luxury restaurant, its often the case that our experience cannot travel well, what things can you do to pivot, more on that below.

Also, one huge tip, pick a company that are built in the GCC. Our market nuances are large and the market is often unforgiving if you cross a cultural line.

You don't need to be the masters of all things digital, but you should work with a team that is. Their insights will help you streamline and go to market in the best stance you can.

Social Media & Crisis Management - from OLLA the Agency

Have a clear plan that is sensitive to the tone of what is happening, think about your messaging and the main ethos should be: offer value.

Plan your back-to-market goals, be specific and realistic. What are you known for? How can you talk about that in a way that is inclusive rather than elitist?

Have ready replies for all questions you will face, people do not want to feel like you are making up a response relating to safety on the spot. They want to know you have a plan.

If someone gets sick and has been at your establishment what are you going to do? Being silent or pretending the problem does not exist, does not aid in your benefit.

Respond unemotionally and clearly, and if someone is just trying to troll you, you don't need to fight, Corona has impacted us all and you don't know their journey so don't be

mad and fight, just allow people the space to heal together.

Take complaints offline, have someone speak to them as soon as possible. The personal touch will go a long way. Anything that is validly pointed out is best remedied as fast as possible.

Have a press release ready in the event that someone gets sick, in case you need it. Often social media stories and highlights are enough and that's where someone would look for the answers first.

Have your first email ready to send back to your customer list to tell them what's happening, and what the plan is. Be clear and concise.

Menu Engineering

This time away while painful, has also provided time to revisit everything you always wanted to but didn't have the time to. Today, you need to explore your data; what were the best sellers and what didn't move & plan according to that.

Look at your menu and the ingredients and what you can remove/change/improve to reduce how many ingredients you order. Specially as even when we get back to market, it will not be how it was before immediately, so you don't want to be sitting on stock that is rotting.

While not part of our brand, Buffet's the staple of the GCC hotel and others, this has to change; social distancing makes this feel very at odds with all the advice about social distancing. Eliminating them or adapting them with customer service and good digital options to choose could strike a path forward.

Digital Menus for safety & ease.

Financial Audit

You should review your brands financial standing and how you are going to take it back to market. There are many softwares that can help you get your thinking aligned such as www.sheets.google.com for free and set up your own templates or use one by Zero.com [here](#).

Cash flow analysis needs to be weekly and monthly basis. Most importantly, speak to your bank today & set up a bridging finance agreement. It's better to have it and not need it, than to need it and not have it.

Hospitality sector are not doctors

Don't give advice on what to do, share government advice and direct people to the doctors. It's that simple. Be part of the solution not the problem by spreading truthful positivity, not fear.

Closing thoughts.

There will always be a challenge in business & this one is unprecedented. Look at any perceived weakness as an opportunity to turn this into a strength. This is a journey of mindset as well as strategy, allow yourself time to reflect and be true to your brand.

Unused Material:

1. OLLA worked closely with our team to imagine and launch Ambrosia to pivot our brand while on lockdown. This allowed us to create a monetizable product line that did not detract from our brand or service, while immediately adding a new revenue stream.

2. Pivot

Think about what you can do to generate revenue, look at your perceived weakness as an opportunity. Can you do delivery? Can you create a new product line? Innovation that perhaps would not have been accepted before may now have the potential to grow your brand.

Can you offer delivery? If so, why not have some standard operating procedures. For example:

- Place the delivery in front of the door and ring the bell, no need for things to be handed across. But let the guest know in advance so they don't think the driver is being rude.

Think about your product lines, especially if you are in luxury hospitality, will your food travel well? Dining in a luxury outlet is not just about the food, it's about the whole experience and can you offer that in a delivery service?

At Mahonia, to combat this we launched Ambrosia by Mahonia, our luxury cake & dessert range. Something that can be enjoyed at home as a full experience that is not detrimental to our brand long term. In fact, it did so well that we are expanding Ambrosia.

Reference material

Booking Health declaration form

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1DZiFDNDUaK1WWTkUznaO76yckfAgiQzGuMIbDVQj0jU/edit>

Team script with FAQ's

- <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1XOvfgGMf8UGsL1amMKIC8ZAL3emhYOHlsSiWzew87p8/edit>

FAQ's

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1XOvfgGMf8UGsL1amMKIC8ZAL3emhYOHlsSiWzew87p8/edit?usp=sharing>

Emergency situation procedure & contacts

https://docs.google.com/drawings/d/1Kwh0LPymUKoGczWnk6AS2o8_tHGNQMTUIJhtCfwiPeY/edit?usp=sharing