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Bluedot Unveils Six Key Restaurant Industry Predictions for 2021

Hyper focus on technology investments, personalized customer experience, off-premises, and big data among leading trends for the year ahead as COVID continues

SAN FRANCISCO, Dec. 2, 2020 -- [Bluedot](#), which provides location technology for mobile apps to power high-value interactions between brands and their customers, today revealed six pivotal restaurant industry trends and predictions expected to emerge in 2021.

"The surge in off-premises dining this year forced many restaurant operators to cobble together ad hoc solutions to accommodate customers seeking delivery, takeout, curbside pickup and drive-thru. Amid the pandemic, mobile ordering and contactless payment became must-haves as consumers reset their priorities around their health and safety concerns," said Emil Davityan, Bluedot co-founder and CEO. "In the year ahead, the restaurant industry will emerge from a boot-strapped approach to one that will enable efficient execution and well-crafted customer experiences as they look to win market share."

The key trends and predictions for 2021 include:

The lines will blur between QSR, fast-casual and even some casual dining concepts amid an ongoing shift toward off-premises consumption. Dining outside the four walls eliminates the ability for restaurants to differentiate themselves through the in-store experience they provide. Instead, operators' influence over the customer experience has been reduced to the quality of the food and the service they provide at the two main customer touchpoints — ordering/payment and pickup. Mobile ordering and pickup will become essential to providing a rewarding customer experience. A focus on the experience outside the restaurant will lead to a significant increase in investments in digital and mobile technologies that could be used to ease ordering, reward frequency, encourage store pickups, provide gamification, enhanced loyalty rewards programs and more.

While other brands play catch-up, a handful of leading players will roll out advanced next-gen off-premises systems that will set the standard for the next 5-10 years. Operators that had already established efficient off-premises systems, including drive-thru, curbside and delivery, will remain in the best position to be successful in the year ahead. Consumers have significantly increased their usage of the drive-thru amid the pandemic contributing to a 43% jump in just three months according to Bluedot's second [State of What Feeds Us](#) report. Top brands will evolve their drive-thrus to include digital menu boards, geolocation, and more, and will also reinvest in improving the functionality of mobile apps as part of their efforts to better manage the customer experience.

More operators will seek to regain ownership of their customers and end their strained and profit-draining relationships with third-party delivery services. Learning from the solutions they hastily deployed over the past several months, restaurant brands will become more closely identified with their own ability to provide seamless mobile and digital experiences for ordering, pick up and delivery, eliminating their reliance on third-party delivery services.

Mobile data will become big data as the customer experience hinges on personalization. The pandemic has led to a sharp uptick in consumer mobile app usage with 88% using them more often than before [the report found](#), creating valuable insights for brands. Purchase history, omni-commerce and delivery, frequency and dwell time derived from mobile app usage will become pivotal to personalized service. It will also determine future relationships with natively digital generations. 2021 will be a year of rapid testing and deployment of solutions and technologies with a particular focus on

mobile and data. In turn, large operators will roll out adapted solutions in markets where personalization is most needed.

Operators will seek more end-to-end, holistic solutions that integrate their disparate technologies. This will facilitate the management of the customer experience, no matter what channel customers choose to use. In response, technology providers will verticalize or consolidate in order to provide the kinds of end-to-end solutions operators are seeking. Operators recognize the imperative of time to market and long term technology roadmaps have condensed into a much shorter window as consumer behaviors continue to shift. Operators will also need to weigh the impact that the increasing investments in technology has on their franchisees. Corporate management must make these changes palatable to their operator partners, preferably through seamless, turnkey installations.

Curbside will become carside as popularity rises and consumers turn to restaurant brands that can deliver a first-class experience. Consumers have significantly increased their use of curbside pickup with two-thirds utilizing the service more often than before COVID according to [the report](#). Consumers will come to expect a fast, pleasant and hassle-free experience the moment their car pulls into a curbside space with automated check-in and orders brought directly to their car upon arrival. Mobile technologies, including geolocation and predictive arrival technology, will alert stores when a customer is approaching and the moment they pull into a curbside space so staff can be ready upon arrival.

For more information on Bluedot and its solutions, visit bluedot.io.