

Alicart Restaurant Group

Alicart Restaurant Group Multiplies Order Volume Despite Pandemic Closures by Relying on Fusion Connect Call Center

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— Phil Dixon, Director of IT, Alicart

CHALLENGE

Restaurants were among the earliest and hardest hit by closures stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic. Alicart’s main business is dine-in, specializing in large groups and the travel and tourism industries, both of which were all but shut down for months by the Coronavirus.

“The COVID-19 response has been extremely challenging,” says Phil Dixon, Director of IT, Alicart Restaurant Group. “Times Square was empty. Nobody was in downtown offices; no one attending events in Vegas. Our business largely dried up.”

Needing to shift its sales model to keep revenues coming in, Alicart leadership sought a solution. While restaurants nationwide quickly pivoted to offering meals via order-ahead takeout, curbside pickup, and delivery, Alicart took an unusual approach that paid big dividends, even as most of its restaurants closed.



CASE STUDY

INDUSTRY: Restaurant Hospitality

ALICART RESTAURANT GROUP®

Alicart Restaurant Group

For over twenty years, the Alicart family of restaurants has been offering an exciting and unique spectrum of dining concepts.

The legendary Carmine’s Family Style Italian restaurant—with locations in New York City’s Theater District, Upper West Side, the Tropicana Hotel and Casino in Atlantic City; Washington DC, Penn Quarter, the Forum Shops in Las Vegas and the Atlantis Resort & Casino in the Bahamas—serves exceptional Southern Italian cuisine in abundant portions designed for sharing.

Alicart’s other specialty restaurant is Virgil’s Real BBQ, New York City and Atlantis Resort & Casino in the Bahamas.

SOLUTION

Although it closed most locations, the company kept kitchens open in restaurants located nearest large residential populations shut in by stay-at-home mandates. “The business was in residential areas, so we followed the business,” says Dixon. The company then promoted online and phone-in orders for curbside pickup or delivery.

The second decision was to subscribe to Fusion Connect Call Center. “I knew the cloud communications system from Fusion Connect would enable us to serve customers, with employees working remotely taking calls,” says Dixon, who manages the restaurant group’s technologies nationwide.

With most orders coming in during lunch and dinner rushes lasting about two hours each, a single person answering the phone inside the restaurant could not have handled the call volume. Worse, this would have provided guests with a bad experience: a busy signal or an extremely long wait.

“Over the years, we’ve discovered that our customer base likes to do business with us by phone,” says Dixon. “So that was one more reason we thought that using the Fusion Connect Call Center to accept phone-in orders would be a great solution.”

The company staffs between 3 and 4 Alicart team members working from home. They can handle all the mealtime rush call volume. Callers are greeted by an auto-attendant that plays a custom pre-recorded comfort message. The first available agent answers the call and takes the guest’s order and payment, while entering the order into a web-based point of sale interface. This interface sends the order to the kitchen to be cooked and prepared.

The call center was fully deployed and continues to be maintained by Fusion Connect. This enabled Alicart to focus on pivoting its business and operations at a critical time, while Fusion Connect managed the technology platform on a day-to-day basis.

Easy To Use Call Center App With A Quick Setup

The Fusion Connect Call Center runs in a Unified Communications (UC) app that agents can easily download and access on their computer or mobile phone. “The app is simple to learn for anyone,” says Dixon. “I added someone yesterday, and from installing the software to taking them on a brief ‘tour’ of the features and controls, within 15 minutes, they were taking orders.”

Increased Hospitality With The Creative Use of Call Center

Alicart’s success is a testament to the company’s decision to make creative use of cloud-based communications amid the COVID crisis. “Self-service web orders are great, and we point our customers to our website to place their order if they prefer,” says Dixon. “But hospitality is a people business. When you are taking a guest order on the phone, you have an opportunity to

be personable, even hospitable, to make menu recommendations and maybe even upsell. That's why we're sold on phone orders and Fusion Connect Call Center."

Call Center Funnels Incoming Calls While Promoting Self-Service Online Ordering

One person staffing a single phone line could have handled only one customer order at a time. "With Fusion Connect Call Center, we don't miss any calls, so we capture more business," remarks Dixon. In addition, staffing the call center call queue with multiple agents more closely mimics the order volume and pace of a busy restaurant, with many orders hitting the kitchen at once. Plus, it gives customers a better experience. "The queue avoids the phone ringing endlessly, or a busy signal," says Dixon. "Plus, it's staffed by people who have a vested interest in our success. They know many of our guests personally, and know and love our restaurants and the menu."

Alicart is able to use the comfort message to motivate customers to place their orders online via the company's website, which is a high-volume—but less labor-intensive—ordering channel. Comfort messages can also contain advertising and promotional messages such as limited time offers or specials.

Menu of Expertly Managed Enterprise-class Services

Dixon didn't have a lot of experience with cloud-based telecommunications or call center solutions. By working with Fusion Connect, which offers telecom solutions and the experts to manage them, he doesn't have to be an expert.

"Setting up a call center requires some deep know-how," says Dixon. "Kudos to Fusion Connect and your great team of savvy salespeople, engineers, service delivery, and support staff. They were super knowledgeable and responsive in getting our call center set up and configured quickly."

With the call center off his plate, Dixon can focus his time on setting up and managing more technical aspects of the company's technology and security infrastructure such as the Wide Area Network. "I rely on Fusion Connect for their expertise in telecom and call center but I know if I ever need help, Fusion Connect can support us with connectivity, failover, and other services they offer" Dixon remarks. Dixon has access to a dedicated account manager at Fusion Connect, who can provide technology solutions that restaurants need to grow and innovate.

A New Way To Manage Orders and Increase Sales

"Taking orders using Fusion Connect Call Center during COVID-19 has been sort of a pilot for how a call center might work for our business. And it's been super successful and effective," says Dixon. "We've seen that Fusion Connect Call Center can help us do more business and use our resources more efficiently." The Alicart leadership team is now considering expanding use of a call center across its locations nationwide for peak takeout and delivery times. They are also considering using call center to scale reservations and catering.



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