



Outdoor Dining

Complete Guide

Introduction

The allure of outdoor dining is undeniable, offering fresh air, natural light, and a vibrant atmosphere that enhances the dining experience.

Expanding services to include outdoor seating, especially during peak seasons, can substantially boost a restaurant's revenue.

What key factors should be considered for outdoor dining?

1. Assess Your Space
2. Check Local Laws and Regulations
3. Design and Layout
4. Staffing
5. Technologies
6. Menu Adaptation
7. Marketing

In this complete guide, we will detail each aspect to help you create an inviting and efficient outdoor dining area.

Assess Your Space

The first step to expanding your restaurant with outdoor dining is to assess your space.

Here are the key issues to consider:

Available Outdoor Space



- **Existing Patio:** Do you have an existing patio area that can be utilized for additional seating? Measure the dimensions to determine how much furniture can fit comfortably, leaving enough space for walkways and service.

- **Sidewalk Cafe Option:** Consider the sidewalk in front of your restaurant. Is there enough space to set up tables and chairs without obstructing pedestrian traffic?

- **Internal Space Conversion:** Is there a possibility of converting a section of your indoor space for outdoor dining? This could be a covered area or a semi-enclosed space that can be opened up during good weather.

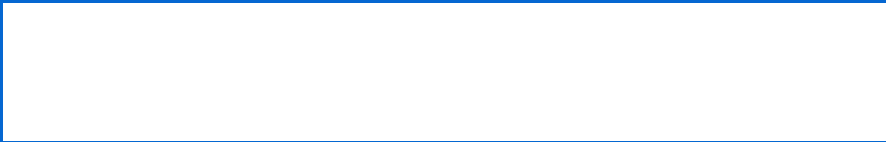
Space Dictates Needs:

- The type of space you choose will determine the permits you need.
- Depending on where you create the outdoor seating, you might need to redesign your indoor floor plan to ensure smooth traffic flow between the two areas.

By carefully assessing your available space, you can make informed decisions about the overall design of your outdoor dining area.



Navigating Local Requirements for Outdoor Dining



The type of outdoor space you choose will significantly impact the permits you need.

Sidewalk cafes typically require specific permits with stricter regulations, while utilizing your own existing patio area might have simpler processes.

Zoning Compliance

Before diving into permits, ensure your chosen location is zoned for outdoor dining. Non-compliant locations might not be eligible for any permits.



Permitting

The specific permits you need will depend on your location. Common permits include:

- **Sidewalk Cafe Permit:** This is typically required for any establishment expanding seating onto the sidewalk.
- **Special Use Permit:** This might be needed for unique outdoor dining setups that deviate from standard sidewalk cafe regulations.
- **Temporary Outdoor Dining Permit:** Some cities offer temporary permits for seasonal outdoor dining.

Due to variations across cities and counties, it's crucial to contact your local government for the most up-to-date information on eligibility, specific requirements, and fees:

Common Permit Application Documents (May Vary)

Scaled Drawings: These typically include two parts:

- **Internal Layout:** A detailed plan of your restaurant's indoor space, including tables, chairs, entrances, exits and other relevant features.
- **Proposed Outdoor Area:** A detailed plan of the proposed sidewalk cafe layout, including furniture placement, walkways, umbrellas, and any other relevant elements.

Hours of Operation: Provide a statement outlining the operating hours for both your restaurant and the outdoor dining area.

Liability Insurance: Proof of comprehensive liability insurance covering personal injury and property damage is often required.

Additionally, you will need to obtain:

- **Health Department Approval:** Meet health department regulations regarding food safety, sanitation, and hygiene.
- **Alcohol Service:** If serving alcohol, ensure compliance with local Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC) regulations, which may require additional permits.

Other Requirements to Consider

In addition to the local permits required, there are other compliance considerations to ensure a smooth operation for your expanded outdoor dining area in Florida:

- **Fire Safety:** Ensure adherence to fire codes, including proper fire extinguisher availability and clearance around exits. Contact your local fire department for specific regulations.
- **ADA Compliance:** Guarantee your outdoor dining area is compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) by providing accessible routes and seating. Refer to ADA guidelines for detailed requirements.
- **Sidewalk Space:** Maintain a clear path for pedestrians walking on the sidewalk next to your patio.
- **Noise Control:** Adhere to local noise ordinances to avoid disturbing neighbors and businesses.
- **Cleanliness:** Implement measures to maintain cleanliness and manage waste effectively in your outdoor dining area.

- **Insurance:** Update your existing liability insurance policy to cover the expanded dining area. Additionally, ensure worker's compensation covers any changes in the dining area.


- **Pet Guidelines:** Follow any local or state rules regarding pets on your outdoor patio.

- **Smoking Laws:** Understand and comply with smoking regulations for outdoor dining areas in Florida.

- **Outdoor Utilities:** If needed, obtain permits for outdoor plumbing or electrical connections to accommodate your outdoor space.

By considering these requirements and local permits you can ensure your outdoor dining area in Florida operates smoothly and complies with all necessary regulations.

Designing & Laying Out Your Outdoor Dining



Creating an inviting and functional outdoor dining space is crucial for a successful restaurant expansion.

To maximize the potential of your patio and sidewalk spaces consider:

Floor Plan Efficiency

- **Separate Entrances/Exits (if possible):** Create separate entry and exit points for your outdoor dining area to prevent congestion, especially in high-traffic areas.
- **Accessibility:** Design your layout with ADA compliance in mind, providing accessible pathways and seating arrangements for guests with disabilities.
- **Seat and Table Arrangement:** Optimize space by determining the right number of seats and tables. Choose table sizes appropriate for your menu and dining style, avoiding overcrowding to maintain service efficiency and a comfortable atmosphere.
- **Traffic Flow Considerations:** Keep tables away from high-traffic areas like server stations and restrooms to ensure a pleasant dining experience.



Outdoor Dining Specifics



- **Strategic Arrangement:** Plan the arrangement of tables, chairs, and any barriers as carefully as you would for indoor areas.
- **Storage Solutions:** Plan for secure storage of outdoor furniture, cushions, and other equipment when not in use to protect against weather damage and theft.
- **Quick Adjustments:** Develop protocols for quickly adjusting the setup in case of sudden weather changes such as rain or strong winds. This includes having portable canopies or retractable awnings ready to deploy.

Order Flow and Service Efficiency



- **Clear Pathways:** Ensure clear pathways for servers to navigate efficiently between the indoor kitchen and outdoor dining areas.
- **Service Stations:** Establish outdoor service stations equipped with necessary items (utensils, napkins, condiments) to reduce trips to the indoor kitchen.
- **Express Lane (Optional):** During peak hours, consider implementing a dedicated “express lane” system within the kitchen specifically for patio orders. This prioritizes preparation and delivery of outdoor food, preventing long waits for patrons enjoying the al fresco experience.
- **Technology Integration:** Use handheld POS systems to take orders and process payments directly at the table, speeding up service and improving order accuracy.

Zoning

- **Functional Zones:** Divide the patio into functional zones (e.g., dining, bar, lounge). Each zone should serve a specific purpose and have distinct seating arrangements.

- **Privacy Zones:** Create intimate spaces using planters, partitions, or trellises. Privacy enhances the dining experience.



Furniture Selection



Choose durable, weather-resistant furniture suitable for outdoor use:

- Invest in comfortable and weather-resistant outdoor furniture. Opt for chairs with good back support and consider cushioned seating for extended dining experiences.
- Plan shade solutions like awnings, umbrellas, or strategically placed trees and plants.
- Heating Options (Optional): If you plan on offering outdoor dining year-round, consider installing patio heaters to extend comfort in cooler months.
- Wind Management: In areas prone to wind, consider using windbreakers or strategically placed plants to provide a more comfortable dining experience.

Creating Ambiance & Style

Inviting Atmosphere: Create a warm and inviting atmosphere with outdoor lighting. Use string lights, lanterns, or wall sconces to enhance the ambiance, especially during evening hours.

Natural Light: Optimize natural light by positioning tables to receive sunlight without causing discomfort.

Brand Reflection: Add decorative touches that reflect your restaurant's brand and personality. Use planters, artwork, or table settings that create a cohesive and stylish dining experience.

Greenery and Landscaping: Incorporate plants, flowers, and greenery to enhance the ambiance. Choose low-maintenance options suitable for outdoor conditions, adding a touch of nature and freshness to the dining experience.

Consider container gardens or hanging plants for a touch of flexibility.


Customer Comfort and Experience

- **Regular Checks:** Schedule regular checks on customers to ensure their comfort, such as adjusting shades, heaters,
- **Feedback Loop:** Implement a system for gathering customer feedback specifically about the outdoor dining experience to continually improve the setup and service.

By following these detailed steps and considerations, you can design an outdoor dining space that not only enhances your restaurant's appeal but also provides a comfortable and memorable experience for your guests.



Staffing Considerations



Ensuring a seamless outdoor dining experience requires thoughtful staffing considerations.

Here are some key aspects to address for managing your staff effectively with a patio dining expansion:

Anticipate Seasonal Demand

Outdoor dining is typically more popular during certain seasons and special occasions, leading to fluctuating customer traffic.

To manage this variability, forecast demand based on historical data, local events, and weather patterns.

Use this information to adjust staffing levels appropriately.



Hire & Train Dedicated Patio Staff

Patio service requires a different approach than indoor dining due to factors like increased walking distances, variable weather conditions, and different customer expectations.

Consider hiring staff specifically for patio service during peak seasons and provide thorough training.



Clear Roles & Patio-Specific Training



- **Define roles clearly:** Clearly define roles for your patio staff. Who handles drink refills? Who manages the outdoor bar area? Clarity prevents confusion and ensures smooth service.

- **Patio-specific training:** Train servers specifically for patio service in areas such as managing larger sections, dealing with environmental factors (sun, wind, rain), and maintaining high levels of service despite potential distractions.

Cross-Training and Server Efficiency

- **Cross-training:** Cross-train staff to work both indoors and outdoors. This ensures flexibility during unexpected changes in customer traffic.
- **Enhance server efficiency:** Emphasize the importance of maintaining high service standards. Equip servers with portable technology, such as handheld POS systems, to take orders and process payments directly at the table, reducing trips back and forth to the main dining area.



Patience, Adaptability, & Table Turnaround



- **Patience and adaptability:** Train staff to be patient, adaptable, and attentive to customers' needs.

Outdoor dining may have a more relaxed pace, but attentiveness remains crucial.

- **Table turnaround:** Balance efficiently managing table turnover with avoiding the impression of rushing guests.

Safety Measures and Health Care

Implementing proper safety measures, hygiene, and health practices is essential in an outdoor dining setting:

- **Safety and Hygiene Considerations:**

Ensure the patio floor is slip-resistant, especially during wet conditions.

- **Handwashing:** Set up easily accessible handwashing stations for staff.






Monitor Performance and Gather Feedback

Regularly monitor the performance of your patio dining services and gather feedback from both customers and staff. Use this information to make informed adjustments to your staffing strategies and service procedures.

- **Listen to staff:** Gather feedback from servers about patio challenges, customer preferences, and any safety concerns.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Use feedback to improve processes and enhance the overall patio dining experience.

Remember, a well-staffed patio with efficient and attentive staff ensures happy customers, positive reviews, and increased revenue for your restaurant.

Technologies for Enhancing Your Outdoor Dining Experience



Technology can significantly improve the efficiency and overall experience of your outdoor dining operation.

Here are some key options to consider:

Modern Point of Sale (POS) Systems

Handheld Terminals: Replace traditional bulky POS systems with mobile, handheld terminals. Servers can take orders directly at the table, reducing back-and-forth trips and improving service speed.

Integrated Payment Processing: Accept all major credit cards and contactless payments (Apple Pay, Google Pay) directly at the table, eliminating the need for customers to return indoors to pay.

Menu Management: Easily update and manage your outdoor menu on the fly through the POS system, reflecting any seasonal changes or special offers.

Order Routing and Tracking: Streamline communication between servers and the kitchen with real-time order routing and tracking on the POS system.

This reduces errors and ensures faster delivery of food to outdoor tables.

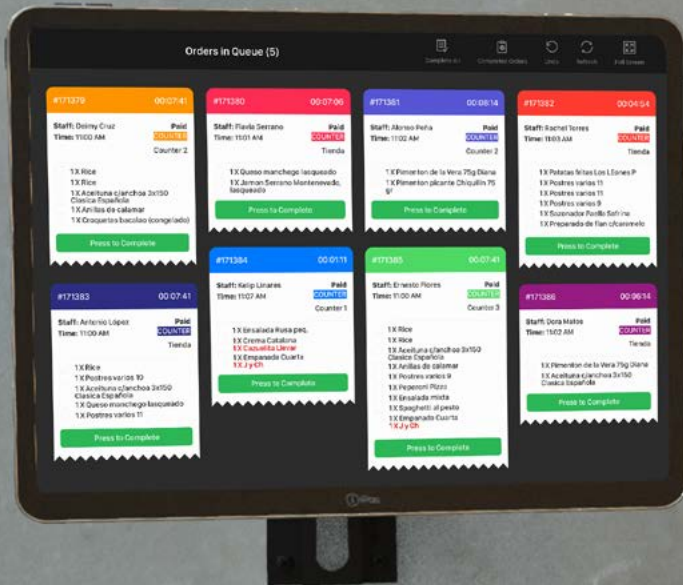
Inventory Management: Maintain accurate inventory levels with the POS system, ensuring you have enough supplies (cutlery, napkins, etc.) to meet outdoor dining needs.

Kitchen Display System (KDS)

Real-Time Order Visibility: Implement a KDS in the kitchen for real-time visibility of all incoming orders, including those from the outdoor dining area. This improves kitchen workflow and ensures prioritized preparation of outdoor orders.

Order Tracking and Status Updates: The KDS allows kitchen staff to track order progress and update statuses (preparing, cooking, cooked) which can be relayed back to servers for improved customer communication.

In addition, you can work on patio orders with a different color since the KDS is color-coded.



Team & Payroll Optimization Technologies

Employee Scheduling Software: Simplify scheduling and optimize staff allocation for both indoor and outdoor dining areas. This software helps you create flexible schedules that adjust to fluctuating customer traffic, especially during peak outdoor dining seasons.

Time and Attendance Systems: Utilize electronic time clock systems with mobile app access for servers to clock in and out from the outdoor dining area. This streamlines payroll processing and ensures accurate timekeeping.



Additional Considerations

- **Outdoor Wi-Fi:** Ensure a strong and reliable Wi-Fi signal covers the entire outdoor dining area. This allows for seamless operation of POS systems, handheld terminals and communication platforms.

- **Weatherproof Charging Stations:** Provide secure and weatherproof charging stations for servers' handheld POS terminals and other mobile devices used for outdoor dining operations.

By integrating these technologies, you can create a smooth and efficient outdoor dining experience for your customers while optimizing staff management and payroll for your expanding operation.

This will ultimately lead to a happier staff, improved customer satisfaction, and potentially increased revenue.

Adapting Your Menu for Patio and Outdoor Dining Success

Creating a successful outdoor dining experience extends beyond just furniture and layout. Your menu also plays a crucial role in attracting and satisfying customers who want to enjoy the fresh air.

Here's how to adapt your menu for patio and outdoor dining:

Focus on Lighter Fare & Seasonal Ingredients:

- **Temperature-Friendly Options:** People often crave lighter dishes in warmer weather. Adapt your menu to include more salads, wraps, sandwiches, and grilled options.
- **Seasonal Appeal:** Highlight fresh, seasonal ingredients that are at their peak during the outdoor dining season. This can include local fruits and vegetables, seafood catches, and lighter proteins like grilled chicken or fish.
- **Smaller Portions (Optional):** Consider offering smaller portion options for some dishes, catering to those who may not want a full meal while enjoying the outdoor ambiance.



Presentation Matters

Portable and Bite-Sized: Offer some dishes that are easy to eat without utensils, perfect for enjoying al fresco. Consider skewered options, handheld appetizers, or dishes served in small bowls or cones.

Visually Appealing: Presentation is even more important outdoors. Use colorful ingredients and vibrant garnishes to make dishes visually appealing on the patio.



Drinks for Every Occasion



Refreshing Beverages: Offer a variety of refreshing beverages to quench thirst on a hot day. Include iced teas, lemonades, fruit-infused waters, and a selection of light beers and wines.

Signature Cocktails (Optional): Create some signature cocktails specifically for the outdoor dining experience.

These can be refreshing and light, featuring seasonal fruits and herbs.

Nighttime Menu: A Shift in Focus (Optional):

While lighter fare reigns supreme for daytime outdoor dining, evening menus can offer a slightly different approach, [especially during the summer months](#).

Here's how:

- **Evening Ambiance:** Evening patio dining offers a more relaxed and romantic atmosphere. Your menu can reflect this by including a wider range of entrees, potentially featuring heavier proteins like steaks or stews.

- **Slower-Cooked Dishes:** Dishes that take longer to cook, like braises or slow-roasted options, can be well-suited for night menus as they often require less last-minute preparation by the kitchen staff.

- **Emphasis on Seafood (Optional):** Summertime often coincides with peak season for fresh seafood. Highlight these offerings on your evening patio menu with creative dishes that showcase the bounty of the sea.

- **Dessert Delights:** People are often more likely to indulge in dessert during a leisurely evening meal. Expand your dessert offerings on the patio night menu to include seasonal favorites and lighter options like sorbet or fruit parfaits.

Marketing Strategies to Captivate Your Customers with Outdoor Dining

A vibrant outdoor dining space can be a significant asset for your restaurant.

But to truly maximize its potential, you need a strategic marketing plan to capture customer attention and drive traffic to your patio.

Here are some effective strategies to consider:

Highlight the Ambiance:



Visual Appeal: Showcase the beauty and comfort of your outdoor dining area with high-quality photos and videos on your website, social media platforms, and online review sites.

Descriptive Language: Use descriptive language in your marketing materials to paint a picture of the inviting atmosphere. Mention comfortable seating, lush greenery, twinkling lights (if applicable), and breathtaking views (if available).

Focus on Seasonal Delights:

Seasonal Menu Updates: Promote your adapted outdoor menu, highlighting the use of fresh seasonal ingredients and lighter fare options. Feature mouth-watering descriptions and photos of your new patio dishes.

Themed Promotions: Create special promotions around seasonal events or holidays. For example, offer a “Summer BBQ Nights” menu with grilled specialties, or a “Sunset Happy Hour” with discounted drinks and appetizers on the patio.



Social Media Engagement:



Live Updates: Use live videos or stories on social media platforms to give your followers a glimpse of the outdoor dining experience in real-time.

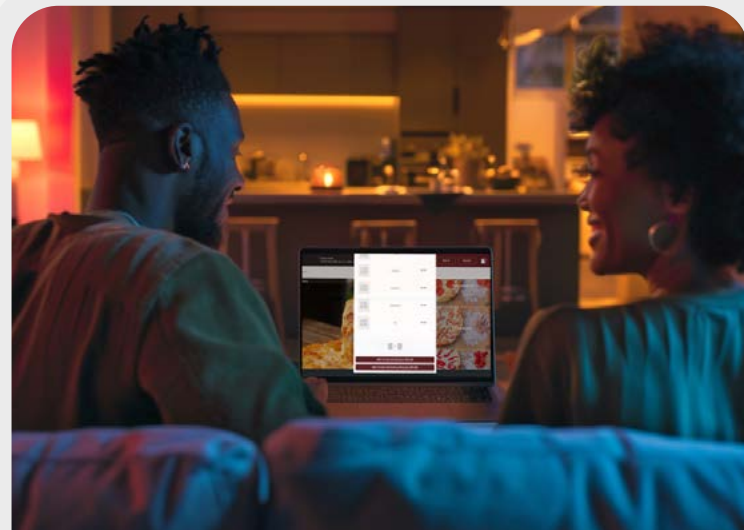
Highlight happy customers enjoying the ambiance and delicious food.

Customer Contests: Encourage user-generated content by running contests where customers share photos of themselves enjoying your outdoor dining area. Offer prizes or discounts for the most engaging entries.

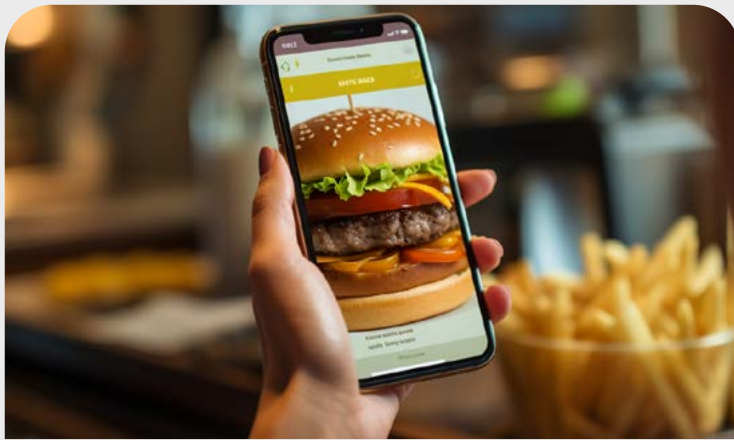
Embrace **Technology**



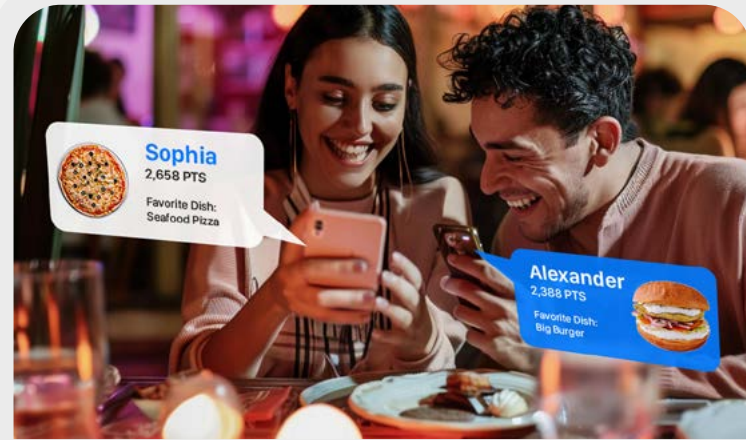
Google Ads: Utilize it to target potential customers searching for “outdoor dining near me” or similar keywords. Showcase high quality visuals of your patio and highlight your seasonal specialties in the ad copy.



Online Reservations: Make it easy for customers to book a table on your patio through your website or online reservation platforms.



Digital Ordering: If your restaurant operates with a robust online ordering system, consider extending it to your outdoor seating area. This allows customers to order and pay for their meals directly from their phones, reducing wait times. >



Loyalty Programs: Integrate your outdoor dining experience with your existing loyalty program. Offer bonus points or rewards for customers who dine on the patio. This incentivizes repeat visits and encourages customers to try your outdoor space.

Strategic Partnerships



Local Collaborations: Partner with local farmers' markets or breweries to offer special menu features or events on your patio. This attracts new customers and showcases your commitment to fresh, local ingredients.

Influencer Marketing: Partner with local food bloggers or social media influencers to promote your outdoor dining experience to their audience.

Additional Tips

- **Embrace Community Events:** Host events or live music nights on your patio to attract customers and create a festive atmosphere.

- **Provide Excellent Service:** Ensure impeccable service for your outdoor diners, just as you would for your indoor guests.

By implementing these creative marketing strategies, you can effectively promote your

outdoor dining experience, attract new customers, and create a buzz around your restaurant.

Remember, highlighting the unique ambiance, seasonal offerings, and convenience of your outdoor space will be key to drawing in customers and keeping your patio tables full throughout the season.



Your All-in-One Solution for Effortless Outdoor Dining Expansion

Take your restaurant outdoors with confidence!
iPos is the comprehensive POS system designed
to streamline your entire operation, making it the
perfect partner for expanding your restaurant's
service to a vibrant outdoor dining space.

Here's how iPos empowers your outdoor dining success:

- **All-Inclusive Software Suite:** Manage everything from a single platform. iPos provides a full set of software features with built-in integrations to ensure smooth operation.
- **Enhanced Mobility:** Equip your staff with handheld POS devices for efficient order taking and table-side service on your patio.
- **Seamless Payment Processing:** Offer a variety of payment options for your outdoor customers, including contactless payments for added convenience.
- **Real-Time Kitchen Communication:** Ensure fast and accurate order fulfillment with our integrated Kitchen Display System (KDS).
- **Simplified Team Management:** Optimize staff scheduling and payroll management with built-in team and payroll tools.

- **Data-Driven Insights:** Gain valuable insights into your sales performance with iPos's data analysis features.

- **Optimized Online Ordering:** Offer a user-friendly website with online ordering functionality directly connected to your POS system.

- **Self-Delivery Powered by Uber:** Eliminate third-party delivery fees by utilizing a self-delivery system powered by the Uber network.

You get the convenience of Uber without the hefty commission fees.

- **Free Google Ads Management:** Maximize your online presence with iPos Eats' functionality to manage your Google Ads at no extra cost.

Rounding Out Your Restaurant's Success:

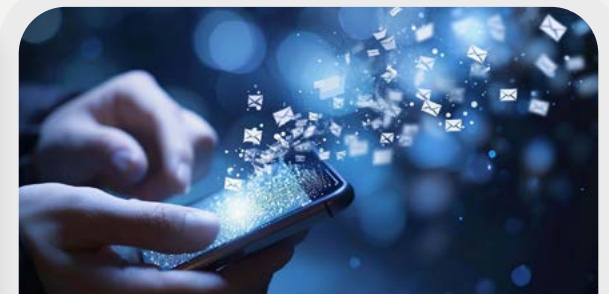
iPos goes beyond core POS features, providing additional tools to enhance your customer experience and loyalty:



Loyalty Programs: Reward your repeat customers with a customizable loyalty program.



Gift Cards: Offer the perfect gift option with iPos's gift card functionality.



SMS Marketing: Engage with your customers directly and promote your outdoor dining experience through targeted SMS campaigns.



The All-in-One Advantage:



Enjoy the peace of mind of having a complete suite of restaurant management tools under one roof. With iPos, you get everything you need for a successful restaurant operation, all at a single, affordable monthly fee.

Ready to take your restaurant outdoors?
Contact our agents today and unlock the full potential of iPos!

[Get a demo](#) >



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