



# Clover 2021 Restaurant Holiday Guide

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# Welcome

Welcome to the 2021 holiday season! You should feel proud for having persevered through one of the toughest periods for restaurants—and small business in general—in living memory. 2020 brought with it a pandemic that continues to impact restaurants and their customers the world over, but it also galvanized the spirit of resilience and innovation.

**Technomic's TIndex**, a monthly index tracking the food service industry, reports that in July 2021 (the latest available results at time of publication), the industry generated revenues 1.1% higher compared to the same month in 2019, and 31% higher compared to 2020.

**Think with Google** reports that Q4 2020 saw a “seismic shift in consumer shopping behavior,” with a massive increase in online ordering. The shift to digital commerce is widely expected to continue through to 2022 and likely for the long term. This of course includes the food & beverage industry, which quickly pivoted to online ordering and delivery as a key source of revenue.

According to **Statista**, the online food delivery segment (including orders for pickup) is expected to reach revenues of US\$31.9 billion in 2021 and to grow by 12.2 percent in 2022.

We have plenty of reasons to feel optimistic as we head into 2022. The **consumer confidence index** remains higher than most of 2020. As of August 2021, **unemployment** had also improved compared to the start of the pandemic. Some of the consumers who had to tighten their belts after a layoff now have discretionary dollars to spend—and a pent-up desire to treat themselves. Having weathered a challenging year and a half, many restaurants have streamlined their operations and figured out how to serve customers in a safe and socially distant way.

With fresh, out-of-the-box thinking and strategy, you can use the holidays to make your guests feel safer and recapture the warmth and good feelings of the season. It's with this in mind that we have created this guide to help you prepare for this holiday season.

Let's dive right in.

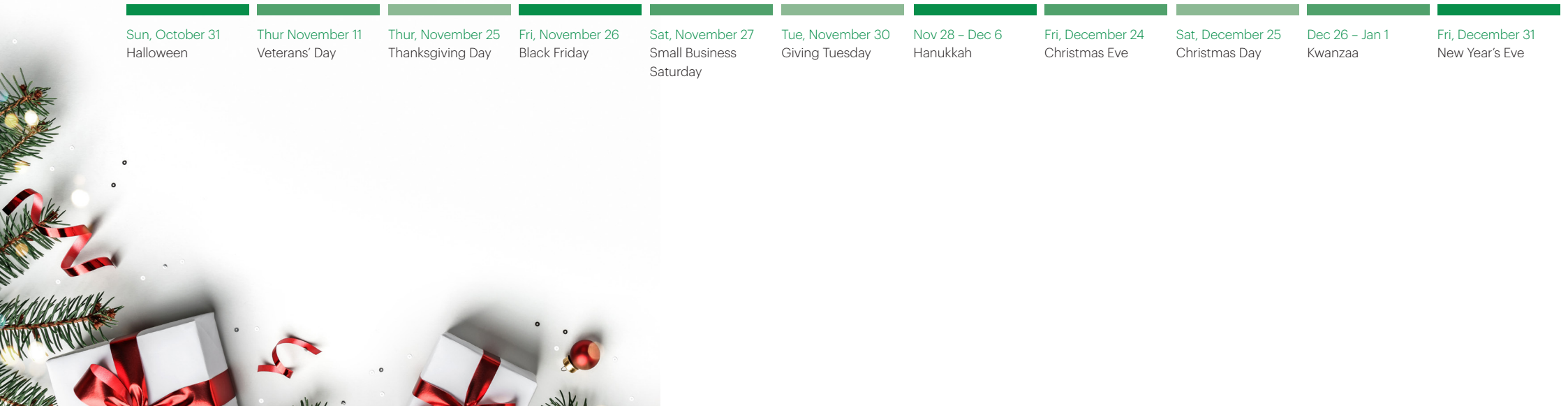
# 2021 Holiday Timeline

By now, it's a given that holiday promotions start early. This "holiday creep" began several years ago, as retailers began pushing Black Friday deals even before Thanksgiving. **Adweek predicts** another early start to holiday shopping this year, with continued emphasis on online ordering and ecommerce in general.

Many people who scaled back their holiday plans last year will be eager to splurge this year; this could also contribute to "holiday creep." Even though pandemic restrictions have been lifted in many places, consumers still crave the convenience of ordering ahead,

so savvy restaurant brands will continue offering those options. Similar to last year, many **retailers plan to close this Thanksgiving**, giving their employees the full day off. Depending on how these employees and their families decide to spend the holiday, it could create more opportunities for restaurants. After all, families who couldn't gather for Thanksgiving in 2020 may choose to go all out this year.

With promotions starting earlier, it's smart—and recommended—to start planning your holiday strategy and building anticipation now.



# The Guest Experience

Whether online or in-person, guests always appreciate personalized or unique experiences, more so than in almost any other industry. People go out to eat for numerous reasons: to celebrate, to relax, to enjoy a nice lunch or dinner in the company of their friends and loved ones. They want not just a nice meal, they want memories and experiences. And they have plenty of options to choose from, especially come holiday time.

So how to stand out in a sea of delicious possibilities?

## Atmosphere & ambiance

It might be so obvious as to sound trite, but your physical space really does make a powerful impact on the guest experience. The lighting, colors, and design of your walls, the arrangement of tables, even the type of tablecloth, silverware, and table decor, set

a mood. Expert interior designers recommend sitting in every single chair in your restaurant to experience what that guest sees, whether there are any unpleasant air drafts, odors from the kitchen, or other elements that might negatively impact the dining experience.

This season, walk through your space—with an interior designer if your budget can swing it—and see what accents and details can be added to turn your restaurant into an unforgettable holiday dinner for your guests. Make sure to document the process, too, to post on social media and in your email communications, to whet your guests' appetite and make those holiday reservations come flooding in.

On a side note, don't forget to communicate to your customers what your holiday hours and "closed" days will be.





## A dining option for everyone

Americans are definitely missing dining out. A **survey conducted by Morning Consult** in July 2021 found that 71 percent of U.S. consumers were willing to dine outdoors compared to 60 percent who felt comfortable indoors.

While promising, these numbers do include a segment of the population that may not feel comfortable dining at a restaurant just yet. There are easy options for these customers, like takeout and delivery which remain popular. As per **a survey** by Restaurant Dive in April 2021, 57 percent of consumers said they order takeout or delivery once or twice a week (prior to the pandemic, that number was nearly 90 percent). In addition, for those who enjoy cooking or preparing the food, “take and bake” options can provide a great alternative to the dine-in experience. These customizable meal packages empower your

customers to create a festive holiday experience at home: when they pull a delicious dish out of the oven for their family, with minimal prep time, they become the star chef headlining an unforgettable meal, thanks to your restaurant!

The holiday season can be a difficult time to predict sales and can throw some peaks and valleys into your revenue stream. The “take and bake” tactic can help provide an additional revenue stream that can smooth out those highs and lows and mitigate the volatility of the holiday season. Additionally, “take and bake” items can also be used to create a family-style portion of your menu for those who decide to dine in, giving you a new and exciting menu concept utilizing a profitable style of service.

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●● **Pro tip:** Create holiday-themed names for your menu items and “take and bake” packages.



## Loyalty and rewards

A **rewards program** is a great way to inspire customer loyalty, keep them coming back, and learn more about your guests. In the case of **Clover Rewards**, your patrons can earn and redeem perks each time they order from you: onsite, via the Clover app, or your Clover Online Ordering page.

Drawing on guest data, even the least tech-savvy restaurant owner can create a winning holiday strategy. If you're concerned a few dozen roasted turkeys might not all sell out, based on your holiday sales from last year, you can mix it up with different side dishes or research new holiday dishes that align with your community's cultural roots.

**Gift cards** are another way for customers to spread holiday cheer to others. Customers spend an **average of \$59 more than the value of the gift card** when they redeem them, so they can generate additional revenue, too. E-gift cards are a fast, convenient gift for family and friends near and far.

## Safety

Good safety and hygiene practices have always been part of restaurant best practices, but all the more so ever since COVID-19 blew through our doors. If you've opened your dining room or are planning to, make sure you're following local guidelines on safety and hygiene, and be ready to adapt if those guidelines change.

Features like **Scan to Order** (see next section) can minimize interactions between staff and guests to keep everyone safer. If you can also offer curbside pickup or delivery, these options might appeal to people who aren't comfortable with dining in.

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●● **Pro tip:** Post creative, upbeat signage showcasing all that you've done throughout your restaurant to keep guests and staff safer.



# Online Ordering

Even if your dining room is open, and depending on local ordinances and case levels, some of your guests may want to order holiday meals online rather than dining on the premises. In fact, Statista predicts that **online food delivery will reach nearly \$32 billion** in revenue this year. Having a functional and well-designed **online presence** is more important than ever.

If you haven't set up online ordering yet, here's how to get started:

● **Enable online ordering.** Services like **Clover Online Ordering** can help increase your sales by offering contactless and cost-effective online ordering, from dine-in to takeout to delivery. Online ordering services from Clover and our third-party partners make it easier for your guests to find your restaurant and order online on site or from home.

○ **Takeout:** Orders placed from the Clover app or from the Clover Web Ordering web menu we create for you.

○ **Delivery:** Guests can request delivery for orders placed via Clover Online Ordering with deliveries dispatched to DoorDash (available late October 2021). You can also integrate Grubhub directly into your Clover POS. This pulls your menu into the Grubhub platform and syncs incoming Grubhub orders with your Clover processing, inventory management, and reporting functions. And you get delivery by Grubhub, too.

● **Dine-in:** Set up Scan to Order so guests can scan a QR code to place online orders safely within your restaurant.

● **Leverage our partners.** Fisherman Websites can get you up and running with an SEO-optimized website built directly from all your information, including menu, hours of operation, and reviews. Fisherman will even host and maintain the website so you can focus on fulfilling the orders flowing in from your new website. To get started, contact your Business Consultant and ask them about Fisherman.





● **Add contactless dining features.** **Scan to Order** allows customers to browse your menu and order directly on their phones. In addition to keeping guests and staff safer as mentioned above, Scan to Order can help reduce labor costs and create operational efficiencies. It also enables you to:

- Highlight holiday specials at the top of the menu
- Update or change your menu in real time—it's digital and instant, no re-printing necessary
- Turn tables faster on busy holidays by allowing guests to complete payment up front.

If you already have online ordering but want to take your game to the next level:

● **Put online ordering front and center.** Many customers who access your website will want to order takeout or curbside pickup, so make sure those links are easy to find and require minimal steps. Check out our handy **Clover Online Ordering ebook**—and be sure to utilize our brand new menu images feature if you're a Clover merchant!

● **Make it mobile-friendly.** **Statista** reports that 39 percent of holiday shopping revenue last year came from smartphones. Does your website load quickly and display correctly on iOS and Android devices? Try this **test from Google**. If your site is not mobile-friendly yet, **these tips can help**.

● **Spice up your offerings.** Themed subscriptions, gift food boxes, branded merchandise, and take-and-bake goodies such as cookie dough or frozen pizzas are just a few options. Also consider partnerships with other businesses whose products might complement yours. For instance, if you run a bakery, is there an opportunity to create holiday-themed care baskets with a local beauty brand?

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●● **Pro tip: Make sure you're using images with your online menu. Research shows that adding photos of your dishes to your menu can increase sales by as much as 30%.**



# Connecting with Your Community

Nothing can replace true, authentic connection to community. You don't need a lot of advertising if a customer genuinely loves your food and your service—they will keep coming back. But it is smart business practice to stay on the radar of even your most loyal fans, if only because there are simply too many options these days, as we discussed above. And for those who have not yet discovered you, communication and promotion are even more critical.

Given all of the holiday marketing messages that consumers receive, personalization and localization can help your restaurant stand out this holiday season. So how to delight your customers, drive more traffic on slower days, and reach out to customers you haven't seen in a while? The two primary channels of communications that are free and (fairly) simple to use are social media and email.

## Social media

Even as much of the world reopens, social media use remains high. The **Pew Research Center** found that roughly 7 out of 10 Americans use social media. Of those, the majority visit social media sites daily. In fact, nearly half of adult Facebook users in the U.S. say they visit the site multiple times a day! Given the heavy adoption of digital communication tools, email and social media remain important ways your restaurant can stay top of mind this holiday season. These channels are also an important reflection of your brand.

● **Make it human.** **Social media** is an easy way to forge human connections with customers, especially when you show some personality and make it fun. Fun photos or videos of your employees wearing holiday-inspired masks or Santa hats remind your followers that there are real people behind the business.



● **Listen before you post.** Don't treat Twitter or Instagram like a billboard for your business. Follow and interact with your customers, suppliers, and other local businesses. **Listen** to what your followers post and respond to their posts. What holiday traditions are they excited about? Are they celebrating differently this year? Genuine interaction and conversation will make your posts feel more human. Know your brand. Don't latch on to every social media trend you see. Make sure what you post supports your brand's message. Do you and your staff feel strongly about inclusivity during the holidays? Don't be afraid to own that. Are you passionate about embracing the roots of your food and how your culture celebrates with food? Show that. Be authentic!

● **Consider boosting key posts with paid social media.** As usual, all of the big brands will be posting a lot this holiday season, so if you really want to ensure that prospective customers see your posts, consider budgeting for **paid social media campaigns**. Use targeting to ensure that your paid posts reach people in your geographic area who fit your ideal customer.

● **Schedule posts.** The runup to the holidays can get hectic. Schedule posts in advance so they publish at the right times for your customers. However, don't just set it and forget it. Check in regularly to reply to comments and engage with your community.

● **Link your Clover account.** When you sign up for Clover Customer Engagement, you can run promotions through your social media accounts.



## Email

Email marketing gives you more control than social media, because you aren't subject to the whims of a social media algorithm that makes your posts less visible to followers.

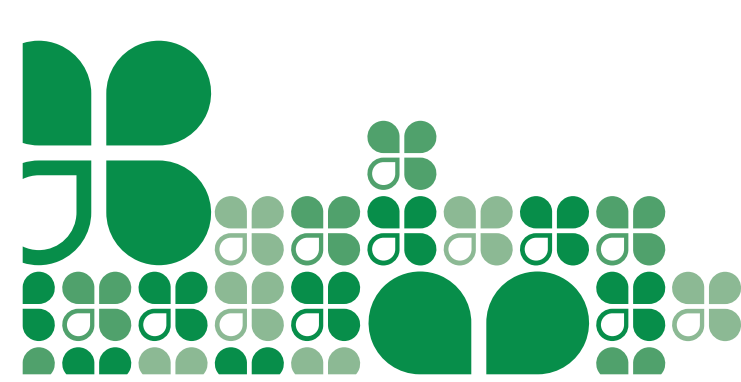
● **Ask customers to opt in.** You need permission before adding someone to your email list so you're not spamming them. However, you can create incentives for email signups such as using the Promos app in your Clover POS to send promotions to your customers for their next order.

● **Segment your customer lists.** Mailchimp and other email marketing providers let you create multiple email lists so you can target the right message to the right group. For instance, you could segment your list to target your most loyal customers and send exclusive offers to them.

● **Personalize your emails.** The majority (70 percent) of operators surveyed by **Nation's Restaurant News and Epsilon-Conversant** said personalization is either very or extremely important in their marketing messages. Use your customer's first name in the email subject line or the opening. For customers who haven't provided a name, choose a fun catch-all like "Pasta Lover," "Burrito Buff," or whatever makes sense for your brand. You can also send an **automated birthday greeting** (perhaps with a promo for a free dessert or appetizer) if you're collecting birthday information.

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●● **Pro tip:** *The Customers feature in your Clover POS also gives you visibility into customer history. It creates customer profiles from credit card sales and keeps contact info and preferences current—automatically.*



## Photography

Food is a highly visual medium, so make sure you have eye-catching photos to make guests' mouths water whenever you communicate with them via email or social media. Drive anticipation for your holiday offerings with beautiful images of your holiday specials and gifts.

Photograph your food alongside props like Christmas tree ornaments, Hanukkah gelt, paper snowflakes, red and green ribbons, or other festive items.

## POS system

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●● **Pro tip:** *If professional photography doesn't fit your budget, you can create festive holiday images with the right lighting and free editing software. Check out [these food photography tips from a professional food photographer](#), or [this list from GrubHub](#).*



# Inventory and Supply Chains

Ingredient and supplies management is always important during the holidays, but it's especially crucial this year because of **continuing supply chain disruptions** due to pent-up demand, resource and manufacturing shortages, natural disasters, and other factors. Encourage your customers to pre-order their holiday meals or make reservations well in advance so you can predict demand and order accordingly.

Your distributor should also be on top of letting you know what's in short supply and what is abundant. Consider developing new menu items that utilize the abundantly available ingredients to avoid 86'ing often.

In addition to carefully planning your menu, look at the systems that support your inventory. As we saw with grocery stores last year, supply chain issues and heightened demand can throw a wrench into menu planning. Are you able to source ingredients locally so that shipping delays won't impact your holiday menu? Do you have alternate suppliers you can use if an order is delayed? Is your kitchen staff good at improvising if you run out of a key ingredient? These are the questions to start asking now.





# The Human Factor

Let's not forget the people who make operations run smoothly: you and your staff. The holiday season can be stressful for restaurant workers, and this year—yes, we're already looking at the second COVID holiday season—is no exception. As you look ahead to November and December, make sure you have adequate staff so no one feels overworked and everyone gets time to relax with their families throughout the hectic holiday schedules.

Following months of closures, many restaurants are still short-staffed. In fact, almost three quarters (72 percent) of restaurant operators said recruiting and retaining employees was their top operational challenge in a May 2021 survey from the **National Restaurant Association**. This was true of small independent restaurants as well as large chains.

**Technomics** reports that even after the 2021 hiring rebound, to 10.8 million workers, the restaurant industry still retains a pre-pandemic shortage of 1.5 million workers. To add to that pain, the cost of labor has shot up 12% in April 2021 compared to April 2020.

Some workers still fear for their health. Some have **left the restaurant industry** altogether as a result of the prolonged shutdown and instability. Older workers may have retired, while others have left the workforce to focus on parenting or caregiving.

The limited availability of staff, coupled with the stress of a second COVID holiday season, can put both your team and your customers on edge. We've seen an uptick in restaurant patrons being abusive to staff due to long waits, ingredient shortages, and even the new vaccination card requirements in some cities. With so much out of our hands, mental health is increasingly important in maintaining a happy, healthy, and high-performing team. Consider implementing simple things like:

- **Opening your door—and ears—to your staff, so they know they can come talk to you**
- **A group subscription to a meditation app**
- **Team exercises or activities**
- **Family meals**



By showing your team you care about their physical and mental health, you can forge a stronger bond among your restaurant family—and make them key to your success.

Sadly, there is no silver bullet for solving the labor shortage, especially since profit margins may not allow you to pay everyone well above market rates. Some restaurants have increased staff hours so they can get by with fewer employees. Other restaurants are reducing their operating hours or raising prices so they can afford higher hourly wages to recruit in-demand talent. Some are also keeping efficiencies adopted during the pandemic, such as contactless dining solutions like **Scan to Order** and **Scan to Pay**, that

free up servers' time by allowing guests to order and pay directly from their smartphones.

Above all, be sure to build some contingencies into your staffing plan for those times when employees aren't feeling well. This year, with all of the variants running around, it's extra critical that employees who might be sick stay home. Cross-training employees can give you more flexibility in staffing when someone is out sick.

With some creative thinking and advance planning, your restaurant can help patrons celebrate the season in new ways while enjoying the foods they and their families love.



# Your Holiday Checklist

Here's a checklist for restaurant owners preparing for the 2021 holiday season. Print it out and keep it handy!

## Guest experience

- Dress up your restaurant in your favorite holiday style—this means not just your physical location, but also your website, social media platforms, emails—even your receipts!
- Add holiday flair to your menu and any merchandise you sell
- Think of creative promotion ideas that appeal to your customers
- Don't forget gift cards, whether physical or digital ones
- Be sure to promote your loyalty program!
- Remind customers of the many ways you're keeping them safe and healthy

## Online commerce

- Be sure your website is mobile-friendly and can accept online orders
- Consider adding special holiday products to your website
- Test your delivery and shipping methods (GrubHub is now integrated into Clover, and Clover Online Ordering with Delivery will be available starting in late October)
- If you've changed your hours due to staffing shortages or other factors, update your website

## Marketing

- Keep building your email list and social media following
- Engage with your social community, respond to their posts and interact with them
- Create enticing imagery for email and social media
- Consider partnering with other businesses in your local community

## Inventory and supply chains

- Encourage guests to pre-order holiday meals and make reservations early so you can order accordingly
- Have a plan B in case a supplier can't deliver what you need

## Staffing

- Schedule adequate staff for the coming months
- Have a plan in place for times when employees call in sick, including cross-training employees so they can cover for each other
- Check out staffing-related apps in the Clover App Market, like Homebase for hiring and scheduling, and Gusto for payroll (did you know Gusto syncs with Homebase?)



## Additional Resources

- **Contactless payments**
- **Clover Online Ordering**
- **Scan to Order**
- **Scan to Pay**
- **Clover Gift Cards**

## Disclaimers

The content provided in this guide is for informational purposes only. Nothing contained herein should be construed as legal, financial, tax, or medical advice. Readers should contact their attorneys, financial advisors, tax professionals, and/or health care providers to obtain advice with respect to any particular matter. Also please refer to [www.cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov) and [www.who.int](https://www.who.int) for further information with respect to the coronavirus and COVID-19, and steps you can take to mitigate the related risks.

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