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## How 5 Emerging Restaurant Chains Adapted to the ‘New Normal’

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EMERGING CONCEPTS

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CHILL-N NITROGEN ICE CREAM

### Chill-N-Nitrogen Ice Cream

When you drill down restaurant success during the pandemic to the individual categories, it's clear that some have been affected far more than others. Pizza and wings (perfect for group dinners) have been soaring, while breakfast (an on-the-way-to-work event) was left scrambling.

Ice cream might seem like the kind of category that suffers from social distancing and quarantine, as it's a more social, special-occasion product that's generally best eaten right away. But at least at Chill-N Nitrogen Ice Cream, the South Florida brand that has grown to eight locations since launching in 2012, business has been steady after a brief dip in the spring.

"People are hunkering down and maybe not going out to eat or not spending a lot of money, going on vacation, or buying that car," says David Leonardo, CEO of Chill-N. "But they're going to go out and treat themselves to a guilty pleasure."

Chill-N's typical experience is one in which customers pick an ice cream flavor and toppings and watch as their treat is mixed and frozen using liquid nitrogen right in front of their eyes. But like most restaurant concepts, it had to pivot to off-premises channels, especially delivery, early in the pandemic. Delivery accounted for about 10 percent of business prior to COVID-19, but Leonardo says it reached as high as 90 percent early in the pandemic before settling to account for around 25–30 percent of sales today.

Chill-N managed to crack the code on how its ice cream could travel without melting. "If we know that your product is to go or if we know it's a delivery order, what we're going to do is we're going to add a little bit more liquid nitrogen," Leonardo says. "That additional liquid nitrogen pretty much guarantees that for the next 10–15 minutes, it's going to stay in a solid state so that by the time you get it delivered to your house, it's almost as if you're basically handing it to someone over the counter."

One other big change Chill-N made this year was to introduce a larger package size after it recognized that more families were purchasing bulk orders. Its largest size was previously a pint, but it introduced a quart in response to the pandemic shift. It also rolled out a Survival Kit in the early days of the coronavirus that included two quarts of ice cream and a roll of toilet paper delivered to customers' doorsteps.

Leonardo says Chill-N is ready to step on the accelerator and is looking at franchising across the Southeast U.S.

"No matter how big a crisis is, there's always opportunity," he says. "You should always put aside some time to figure out and strategize how you can capitalize on this and how we can beat the competition, whether it's a new product development or marketing or value proposition."