

Ghost Kitchen & Dark Kitchen Checklists

Receiving Goods & Packaging · Opening & Menu Launch · Packing & Sealing Orders · Courier Handoff & Pickup-Time Promise (SLA) · Temperatures & Waste · Closing & Ratings

Receiving Goods, Packaging & Seal Supplies

A delivery-only kitchen has two supply chains: food and packaging. If you run out of either one, orders stop leaving the building.

ACCEPT ONLY STOCK YOU CAN SELL IN TIME

- ☐ **Check the temperature of chilled and frozen deliveries at the door. Chilled items must read 0–5°C (32–41°F). Reject anything above 8°C (46°F).**

Warm stock spoils early. That means waste you already paid for. In the closest study of a cold chain like this, out of 72 home meal-kit deliveries, over 76% of boxes had at least one item above 4.4°C (40°F). So 'it looked fine' is not a real check.
- ☐ **Count what arrived against the order, brand by brand, before the driver leaves**

If a shared ingredient arrives short, it takes items off the menu (86s them) for several virtual brands at once. Catch this now, or pay for it in cancellations tonight.
- ☐ **Reject stock that is close to its expiry date, below your minimum days-to-expiry**

A delivery-only kitchen has no walk-in customers to sell near-date stock to. There is no counter to mark it down on. So it goes in the bin at full cost.
- ☐ **Read the ingredient spec again on every new or swapped product, to check for allergen changes**

When a supplier changes a recipe without telling you, it can break every allergen answer you give, on every brand. One case was built on a single ingredient that turned out to be 100% peanut powder.

TREAT PACKAGING AND SEALS AS PRODUCTION STOCK, NOT OFFICE SUPPLIES

- ☐ **Count tamper-evident seals, labels and label-printer rolls against a set stock level, just like any food item**

Running out of seals during a rush means either unsealed orders or stopped orders. 28% of drivers admit to taking food from an order. In some places, an unsealed bag is against the law.
- ☐ **Test a sample from every new packaging batch for leaks and lid fit before it goes into use**

Suppliers change their moulds without telling you. A lid that no longer clicks shut can lead to a spilled bag, a refund, and many one-star reviews.
- ☐ **Check your stock of insulated bags and hot trays. Inspect liners for damage or dirt.**

Once a bag is sealed, packaging is the only thing keeping the food hot. In one packaging study, tray material alone changed cooling time by 50 minutes.

Opening - Stations, Online Storefronts & Menu Launch

Keep the brands separate, set up the packing bench, and launch every storefront with a menu your kitchen can actually cook.

KEEP THE BRANDS SEPARATE BEFORE THE FIRST ORDER COMES IN

- ☐ **Give every virtual brand its own station, boards, tongs and color-coded tools**

Shared surfaces are how one brand's allergen ends up in another brand's bag. Tests found gluten in 32% of restaurant food sold as gluten-free. The rate of positive tests rose as the day went on.
- ☐ **Set up a separate zone for allergen-free orders, with its own equipment and its own sink**

Allergen-free orders are the ones that can lead to prosecution. A separate zone is the only safeguard that holds up during a busy rush.
- ☐ **Check every handwash sink has soap, hot water and towels before service starts**

Inspectors checked 61 multi-brand delivery kitchens, and 58 had broken rules. Handwash sinks without soap or running water were one of the problems found. It is the cheapest failure on this list to fix.

BUILD THE PACKING BENCH

- ☐ **Stock the packing bench with bags, tamper seals, a label roll, cutlery, sauces, and hot and cold bag supplies**

If a packer leaves the bench to look for a seal, they stop reading the ticket. That is how items go missing.
- ☐ **Post today's allergen chart for every live brand at the packing bench, not just in the office**

Only 18% of customers who told the restaurant about an allergy got written confirmation on the food. This information needs to be where the bag is packed.

LAUNCH EACH STOREFRONT CORRECTLY

- ☐ **Open every brand on every delivery app and check each storefront shows OPEN with the right hours**

A brand that still shows closed during a rush earns nothing. A brand that shows open but has no kitchen behind it earns a cancellation.
- ☐ **Send today's out-of-stock list (the 86 list) to every platform before you take the first order**

Out-of-stock items are a main cause of cancellations made by the restaurant. These cancellations averaged 2.97% of all orders, and hit 5.25% in the last hour of trade.

- ☐ **Check that the header photo, featured items and quoted prep time are live and correct on each brand page**
Over 55% of first orders at a new restaurant come from customers browsing, not searching by name. In a delivery-only kitchen, the online listing is your entire shopfront.

HYGIENE & SAFETY

- ☐ **Wash your hands and put on new gloves before you touch food.**
Clean hands and gloves stop bacteria and viruses from reaching food.
- ☐ **Screen every worker for illness before the shift starts.**
Sick staff can pass illness to food and customers.
- ☐ **Send home any worker with vomiting, diarrhea, jaundice, fever, or an open wound.**
This stops illness or infection from reaching food or customers.
- ☐ **Mix a fresh batch of sanitizer to the correct strength (ppm).**
Weak sanitizer will not kill germs on food-contact surfaces.
- ☐ **Test the sanitizer strength with a test strip before you use it.**
A test strip proves the sanitizer is strong enough to work.
- ☐ **Walk the kitchen and look for pest signs before you open.**
Spotting pest signs early stops them from reaching food or stock.

Packing Orders, Labels & Tamper Seals

This is the checklist that pays for itself. Anything you miss before you seal the bag becomes a refund, an error charge and a bad review.

GET THE ORDER RIGHT BEFORE IT IS SEALED

- ☐ **Read the ticket against the bag out loud, item by item, before you seal it**
The closest audited figure comes from 600 mystery-shopped delivery orders at convenience stores: 82% accuracy. That means about one order in five was wrong. No such figure exists for delivery-only kitchens. Accurate orders scored 45 points higher on customer satisfaction.
- ☐ **Check every extra, swap and 'no X' request against the actual container**
Extras and swaps are where mistakes happen most. The item may be right, but the order is wrong, and the customer still counts it as a wrong order.
- ☐ **Count cutlery, sauces, sides, drinks and dips by hand against the ticket**
A missing dip can bring an error charge of up to 100% of the item price plus tax, and it costs you the repeat order. 20% of customers who got a wrong order say they would not order from that restaurant again.
- ☐ **Pack one order at a time. Never build two brands' bags side by side on the same bench.**
No study publishes error rates by bench layout or by single- versus multi-packer work (evidence gap 3), so this is a safeguard, not a proven cause. Still, with only one bag open at a time, a swapped item has nowhere to go. Your own error log will show the value of this.

LABEL SO THE RIGHT BAG REACHES THE RIGHT CUSTOMER

- ☐ **Label every bag with the order ID, brand name and item count before it leaves the bench**
Couriers often collect several brands from one address. An unlabeled bag is a wrong delivery that you cannot trace or dispute.
- ☐ **Attach written allergen information to the food itself, using a sticker or label, not just the receipt**
Only 47% of customers with allergies who ordered remotely got any written allergen information. A sticker on the box is what closes that gap.
- ☐ **Pack allergen and free-from orders last, from the clean zone, and flag the bag**
In one sensor study, gluten test results were higher later in the day: 27% at breakfast, 34% at dinner. The cause was not tested, and the menu mix was not ruled out. Either way, a free-from order needs a clean surface, not a busy one.

SEAL IT, SPLIT IT, LOG IT

- ☐ **Put a tamper-evident seal across every opening on every bag. Do this even for 'quick' orders.**
28% of drivers admit to taking food from an order, and 85% of customers want tamper-resistant labels. In some places, the seal is required by law.
- ☐ **Put hot and cold items in separate bags. Log every packing error, remake and its cause, by brand.**
Cold drinks ruin hot food, and an error that is not logged will keep happening. The log is also your only defence if an error charge is challenged. On DoorDash, you can only dispute this yourself for deliveries from the last 14 days.

Courier Handoff & Pickup-Time Promise (SLA)

Cook for the courier, not for the clock. Every minute a sealed bag sits on the shelf, you lose heat, rating and pay.

TIME THE FOOD TO THE COURIER

- ☐ **Start cooking based on the quoted prep time, not the moment the ticket prints**
Food finished early sits and cools. Food finished late makes the courier wait. The pickup-time promise (SLA) clock only starts once the quoted prep time has passed.
- ☐ **Review the quoted prep times for each brand and each time of day, and fix them where they are wrong**
Padding the prep time hides the wait problem instead of fixing it. A prep time shorter than your kitchen can deliver turns into a cancellation.
- ☐ **Place sealed orders on a dedicated handoff shelf, in order of pickup time, with hot items insulated**
A single-layer tray drops to 40°C (104°F) in about 45 minutes. Stacked six deep, this takes about 140 minutes. How you stage the order decides how it arrives.

CHECK THE HANDOFF

- ☐ **Match the courier's name and order ID against the bag label before you hand it over**
Handing the right courier the wrong bag can bring an error charge of up to 100% of the subtotal plus tax. The customer will see it as your mistake.
- ☐ **Mark orders picked up only at the actual moment of handoff**
Marking an order picked up early makes the numbers look better than they are, and it ruins your own wait-time data. DoorDash's benchmark is under 3 minutes 24 seconds of avoidable wait, with an ideal of under 2 minutes.
- ☐ **Log any order that sat sealed longer than your handoff limit. Note the brand and the reason.**
No one publishes wait-time figures for ghost kitchens. Your log is the only record that exists, and it explains your cold-food complaints.
- ☐ **Do not hand a hot order to a courier who has no insulated bag, or whose bag is visibly dirty**
Batched pickups arrive at the right temperature only 83% of the time, compared with 91% for direct trips. Insulation was not measured in that study, but it is the part you control. Customers blame the kitchen 66% of the time.

Keeping Food Hot, Cold & at the Right Temperature for Delivery

Keep food in the safe range, pack it to stay in range, and count what you throw away. Temperature is a complaint you can actually design out.

HOLD IN RANGE OR DO NOT SEND

- ☐ **Log chilled storage and every brand's prep rail at 0–5°C (32–41°F), four times a day**
Meat held at unsafe temperatures was a violation found across the inspected multi-brand delivery kitchens. More brands mean more prep rails, and more places where temperature can drift.
- ☐ **Keep hot food at 63°C (145°F) or above, or 57°C (135°F) where your local food code sets that line, and log it**
Food that leaves the pass below the safe hot temperature has already used up part of its four-hour safety window before the courier even arrives.
- ☐ **Act on every out-of-range reading immediately: move stock, log the time, tell the manager**
A temperature drift that is not logged can spoil a whole brand's worth of prep. Nothing will tell you which unit is failing.

PROTECT TEMPERATURE AFTER THE SEAL

- ☐ **Check the temperature of one hot item per time of day at the moment you seal it, and record the reading**
No study publishes the real temperature of hot food at the customer's door. The temperature at the moment of sealing is the only number you can measure, and it predicts complaints.
- ☐ **Vent fried and crispy items separately. Never seal them airtight with a saucy hot item.**
Steam turns a good-looking item into one that gets a one-star review. Quality complaints and accuracy complaints both hurt the same rating.
- ☐ **Treat a batched or multi-brand pickup as a temperature decision. Insulate more, and stage the order later.**
Batched deliveries reach the right temperature 83% of the time, compared with 91% for direct trips, and arrive 8 minutes 5 seconds later. You cannot stop batching, but you can pack for it.

COUNT WHAT YOU THREW AWAY

- ☐ **Log all waste by brand, item and reason. Include remakes caused by packing errors.**
In a multi-brand kitchen, waste that is not tied to a brand cannot be priced into that brand's menu.
- ☐ **Track weekly waste and remake percentage against sales, for each brand**
A remake means paying twice for food cost, labor and packaging. The only way to see this is to track it separately from ordinary waste.

Closing - Complaints, Ratings & Tomorrow's Menu

Handle today's refunds and ratings while you can still dispute them. Reset every menu, and leave a clean kitchen for tomorrow.

HANDLE COMPLAINTS WHILE IT STILL COUNTS

- ☐ **Pull today's refunds, error adjustments and 1–2 star reviews from every platform, for each brand**
On DoorDash, you can only dispute charges yourself for deliveries from the last 14 days. After that, you must go through support. Other platforms do not publish a similar time limit, so check your own merchant agreement. Either way, only your own same-day packing log can win a dispute. A lost dispute can cost up to 100% of the subtotal plus tax.
- ☐ **Sort every complaint into a category: missing item, wrong item, wrong extra, cold, late, seal or spill**
The mix of complaints tells you which safeguard failed. 66% of customers blame the restaurant either way, so you need the real cause, not just the blame.
- ☐ **Reply to every rating and complaint on every platform before you close the shift**
For an independent brand with no shopfront, the rating is the shopfront. In one Yelp study, gaining one star in rating raised independent restaurant revenue by 5–9%.

GET TOMORROW'S MENUS RIGHT

- ☐ **Reconcile the 86 list (out-of-stock list) back to live on every platform and set anything still out for tomorrow**
An item left 86'd overnight is lost revenue you won't notice. An item wrongly marked live becomes tomorrow's cancellation. Cancellations averaged 2.97% of orders.
- ☐ **Check each virtual brand against the platform's listing rules: how different the menu is, item count, and share of hot items**
Uber Eats removed 8,000 virtual listings in five months. DoorDash requires the menu to be at least 50% different from other menus at the same address. A brand that fails these rules gets delisted, with no warning.
- ☐ **Check each brand cleared the platform's minimum weekly order volume, and act on the ones that didn't**
Uber Eats requires at least 3 orders a week to keep a brand listed. A brand with no orders quietly loses its kitchen space when it is delisted.

CLOSE THE KITCHEN DOWN

- ☐ **Seal, date and label chilled and prepped stock by brand, then store it. Keep refrigeration ON.**
Shared cold storage between brands is where labels get lost and allergens get mixed up. If stock is not dated and labeled, throw it out.
- ☐ **Deep-clean shared assembly and packing surfaces between brands before close**
In one sensor study, gluten test results were higher at dinner than breakfast (34% against 27%), though the study does not explain why. A shared surface that is never cleaned carries yesterday's allergen into tomorrow's free-from order. That part is under your control.
- ☐ **Restock the packing bench, seals, labels and printer roll for tomorrow's open**
A packer who has to improvise at opening will skip checking the ticket. Mistakes start with the missing seal, not the missing item.

HYGIENE & SAFETY

- ☐ **Sanitize prep boards, utensils and bins at the end of the shift.**
Leftover food debris on tools breeds bacteria overnight.

Weekly Checks

Do these checks once a week, not every day.

WEEKLY FOOD-SAFETY CHECKS

- ☐ **Inspect the whole kitchen and storage areas for pests once a week.**
A full inspection finds pest problems a quick daily glance can miss.
- ☐ **Calibrate every food thermometer and probe once a week.**
A thermometer that reads wrong can let unsafe food reach a customer.
- ☐ **Deep-clean and sanitize the shared prep rail and chilled storage units once a week.**
Shared equipment between brands needs a deep clean to stop cross-contact and bacteria buildup.