



September Issue

Mega
Mealzo
Magazine

History of the Smash Burger

No matter where in the UK you get your burger fix, unless you've been out of the loop, you know what a Smash Burger is. However, for those not in the know, here's the origins, what makes it unique, and how it became the sensation it is today!

Where did it come from?

There is much debate about when and where the Smash Burger came to be. Many assume the popular chain of restaurants of the same name came up with the idea, as they were established in 2007. However, if we look over the Atlantic, the answer is clear. In the 1950s in Kentucky, USA, a small hamburger shop owner, Bill Culvertson, created the iconic item by taking a can of beans and flattening his patty, and upon consumption realised it tasted much better! Fast forward to today, and Smash Burgers became such a hit that you will find a takeaways and restaurants offering them in every major city in the UK!

What makes a smash burger?

What is essential to the process is the flattening; your typical burger is much thicker and it is usually unseasoned until the cooking process is complete, as well as having a much more balanced fat to meat ratio in its patty. For smash burgers, the beef patty is pressed firmly with a cast iron press for at least 10-15 seconds to get a proper sear. Not just that, but smash burgers are made with a greater meat-to-fat ratio, ideally 80% ground beef to 20% fat. The higher amount of fat means that the burger remains moist and juicy, even when it's flattened onto the griddle!



What is the original recipe?

Originally placed on a buttered bun and smothered in cheese and pickles, the recipe originally developed by Bill Culvertson was typically American. Ever since, however, the variants of the classic recipe have gone in dozens of directions on grills across the globe. Want to add peri peri sauce for a kick, or a slice of haggis for a Scottish twist? How about a touch of salsa and guacamole? The possibilities are endless.



Why should I care?

The smash burger has dwarfed being a trend now that it has lasted over 70 years, reaching peak popularity in the late 2010s and early 2020s thanks to the advent of social media. Across all platforms, especially TikTok, content involving the preparation, consumption, or general advertisement of smash burgers can accumulate thousands, and even in some cases millions, of views. It is clear this is something that will last!

THE DARK KITCHEN:

A 2020s Success Story

The Dark Kitchen, otherwise known as a Ghost Kitchen or Virtual Kitchen, began as a trend of the mid-2010s. Now a decade on, the pandemic accelerated this trend into a mainstay of the restaurant and takeaway industry across the UK, Europe, and the USA. So what are they, how do they work, and what are their benefits?

What are they?

While the name might throw some off, Dark Kitchens are at their most basic level a separate entity that is used to sell takeaway food purely online. This completely removes the in-person customer service, and focuses the entire business to just cooking and delivering food to demand. It can also have the same name as a takeaway brand, but operate with complete autonomy from the customer facing element.

How do they work?

Dark Kitchens can work in a multitude of ways. While the core concept of a kitchen that does not have a customer facing element is important, the rest varies. Another, more expansive version is the 'Virtual Food Hall'. While run by one restaurant, this offers food from multiple brands, giving a larger range of choice. There is also the 'Kitchen as a service' model. In this case, the kitchen is set up by another party, and existing restaurants can employ them. This is a way of taking the hassle and expense of renting a space from the restaurant, for a competitive fee. No matter the model, there are many benefits to be reaped from a dark kitchen.



How beneficial are they?

In short, very. As many restaurant owners understand, starting a new expansion to that business, such as another shop in the franchise, is costly. This is because the start-up and overhead costs can soar, such as rent and staffing. However, with this model, all those costs are much lower or non-existent. Rent too expensive in the city? Move the dark kitchen to a quieter cheaper area. Staffing too high? You only need the kitchen staff. Dark Kitchens are also much greater for experimentation; given its just an online menu and set up, you can change what is offered incredibly fast compared to what it is traditionally, and try things out without a hefty push on new printed menus or social media.

But are they here to stay?

While some may put the Dark Kitchen as a trend to expand all the way up to 2027, some over in the States have cautioned against this. Empower Delivery CEO Meredith Sandland argues that the Dark Kitchen is only as strong as the software restaurants use to run them, and that the weight of the ever-changing delivery landscape will collapse this "house of cards." However, if restaurants use a singular delivery platform for themselves, exactly like what Mealzo provides, it is more likely that this trend can keep moving to bigger heights. Only time will tell!





THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE TAKEAWAY:

Why We Crave Certain Foods

In the UK, ordering a takeaway is a core part of our culture. From the most niche cuisines, to the firm favourites at local restaurants, why customers order certain dishes matters. If a takeaway or restaurant understands exactly why key dishes are ordered, you can replicate this again and again to increase orders. Here are 3 reasons why your customers order what they do.

① Comfort Food

When it comes to ordering takeaway food, often it is a treat or an indulgence after a long work day. With that in mind, emotions play a huge role in a customer's relationship with the food. Studies have shown that the more familiar a dish is, the higher the reward of satisfaction for the customer. This can come from upbringing, and also culture, as these foods tap into a customer's memories as well as their taste buds. Moreover, tradition, such day, make routines in the brain, increasing the likelihood of a repurchase!





2 Nostalgia

For many adults, their childhood is full of positive memories that influence their food habits. Maybe it was getting a chip shop dinner as a treat with their family, or having a particular curry from a particular Indian every Saturday. Whatever it is, that sensation often drives people to purchase the same order repeatedly, all for seeking out that same combination of flavours. This can be leveraged by takeaways by marketing throwback flavours, or using imagery on their packaging to secure that purchase. This works especially well, like comfort food, for cultural cuisines, as food connected with communities has been referred to as "tasting like home".

3 Turning Views Into Orders

In the present day, how a takeaway markets itself can make the difference. With TikTok especially, social media has changed the way local takeaways can increase their orders. While flyers and menus through doors can be influential in a small radius, a good video depicting the food you serve being prepped and enjoyed, as well as offers, set to tune of trending songs and vivid imagery, can work on the modern brain of your customers so they travel further afield to get the taste of what they've just seen. For some, a simple save of a popular video of food can build the customer loyalty as the newest form of 'word-of-mouth'.

Is it all in our heads?

There's so many reasons that the UK craves a takeaway. These are just three ways our brains keep us coming back, and for every single customer they will all be influenced in completely different ways. A modern savvy takeaway knows that utilising this is the way forward, and can turn those first orders into a loyal customer base!

