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The coronavirus diaries: Tony Lorenz, Lorenz Consultancy

Anthony Lorenz, the founder of Lorenz Consultancy explains how his business has worked tirelessly with over 100 London clubs, bars, restaurants, and casinos, advising and negotiating with their landlords in order to find fair solutions to this crisis.



by **HEATHER SANDLIN** — Thursday, 9 July 2020, 12:00 in [Comment](#), [Coronavirus](#)

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Having negotiated rent reviews and lease renewals in the hospitality industry for over five decades and throughout the recessions of 74, 84, 94 and 2008, I thought I had seen it all. But, I have never witnessed anything quite like this.

In times of economic crisis, we always switch our team into corporate rescue mode. This began in earnest in early March, when a club owner called me in despair saying he had only taken £12,200 that week – down from £160,000 normally. His questions were simple: how would he pay his landlord his rent? How could the business carry on?

Since then, our phones (and Zoom line) haven't stopped ringing with calls from tenants with similar worries about how they will make rent payments given the forced closures and no income.

Reach 12,000+ restaurants
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We have worked tirelessly with over 100 **London** clubs, bars, restaurants, and casinos, advising and negotiating with their landlords in order to find fair solutions to this crisis.

Much of our work has adjusted to virtual conversations. There's no doubt that it makes negotiating harder as there is nothing quite like meeting someone in

person, but it does mean that we're able to hold more conversations through the day – which has been invaluable.

The early period of the crisis can be summed up as one of frustration with most landlords (not all) initially failing to acknowledge that operator issues were their problem. As we've progressed over the recent months, many are beginning to understand that without engagement and assistance, liquidations will be rife – which will damage them and the industry.



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Experience counts in these negotiations, and having handled four previous recessions, I understand that this is a matter of striking balance between landlords' and tenants' positions. My team and I have been spending the days encouraging dialogue and compromise on both sides to find workable and realistic solutions that won't leave landlords with empty properties.

Absolute transparency is essential for successful negotiations, so we have been helping our operator clients give an accurate picture of the prospects they face, by opening their books and explaining plans for returning to profitability. Sensible landlords are now listening to these concerns and are beginning to strike deals.

We also have a number of landlord clients and are conversely working with them to understand the position of their operators and proposing appropriate solutions accordingly.

I have also been helping friends in the industry with some of the great campaigns that could support the industry from the ‘[UK’s Grand Outdoor Summer Café](#)’ calling for streets to become al fresco dining spaces to ‘[National Time Out](#)’, which is seeking a nine-month pause on rent payment.

Sadly, we’ve already seen a number of high-profile restaurants, such as Siren at [The Goring](#), Texture, and The Frog in Hoxton, confirm that they won’t be re-opening their doors, as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. Given the ongoing issues, they sadly won’t be the last.

The Government have sensibly extended the moratorium where landlords cannot evict tenant for non-payment of rent from March to September.

The coming weeks and months will be vital for the survival of the industry and it is critical that landlords and tenants engage with one another with clarity and transparency, to find solutions that help them both through this crisis – and the Government has a guiding role to play within this.

We will continue to negotiate for good outcomes that can safeguard the future of the industry.

By Anthony Lorenz, Founder of [Lorenz Consultancy](#)



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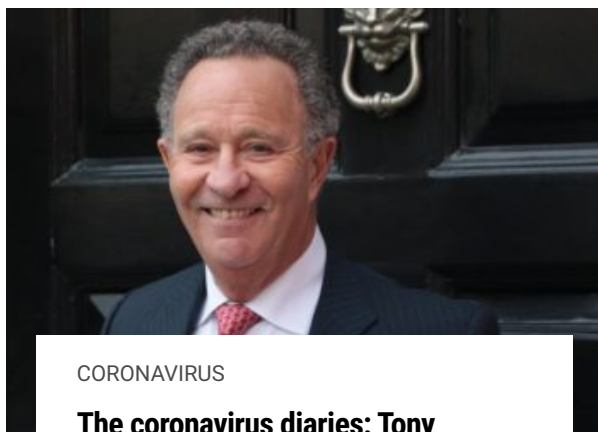
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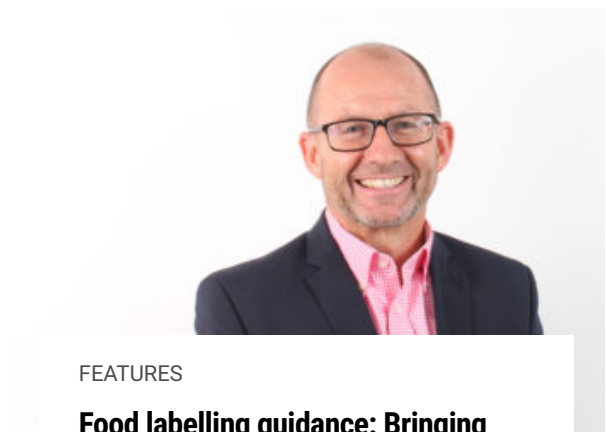


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BY **HEATHER SANDLIN**

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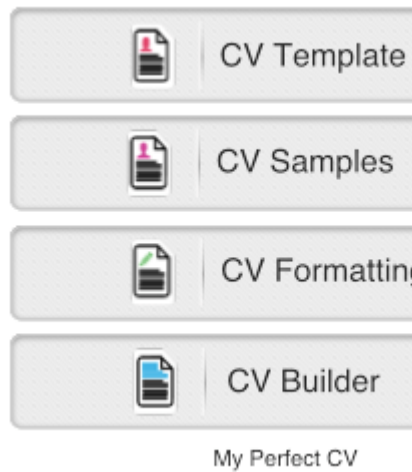


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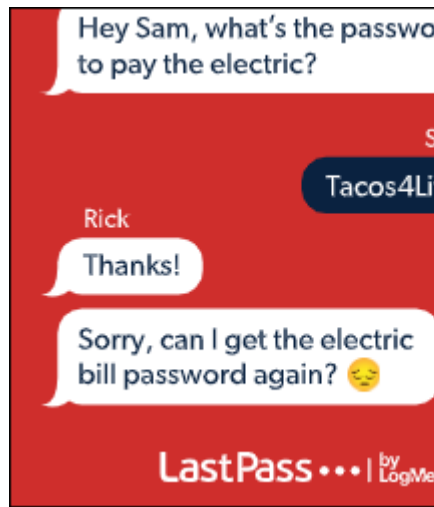
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The coronavirus diaries: Pizza Hut

As a brand, Pizza Hut has not only adapted, but has come away with key lessons and learnings to take forward as lockdown eases. It hopes it can now support other brands making these transitions, too.



by **HEATHER SANDLIN** — Wednesday, 8 July 2020, 8:00 in **Comment, Coronavirus**

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Pizza is what we know best. We're proud of the pizzas we've delivered and business growth we've seen in our sixty years as a brand, from our humble beginnings in Kansas to becoming a global brand – but when coronavirus hit, being designated an 'essential service' posed an entirely new set of challenges and opportunities.

The shift from delivering our customers a quick and easy meal to being tasked with helping to feed the nation during a time of crisis was something that we were privileged to support on and something that came naturally to us. Customers and team members, from our chefs to our drivers, have always been our top priority, so it was natural to put new measures in place to keep them safe. The communities in which we operate are important to us – so it also felt instinctive to work with [Deliveroo](#) to be able to provide 300,000 free meals to our hardworking NHS heroes.

As a brand, we've not only adapted, but we've come away with key lessons and learnings to take forward as lockdown eases and we hope we can support other brands making these transitions, too.

Redefining agility in Covid

Once granted essential status from the Government, we moved quickly to keep our team members and customers safe. We paused our dine-in and takeaway operations and for delivery, we had to be fleet of foot – or perhaps more accurately, moped – to ensure we could comply with all the latest guidance, which changed almost daily.

For example, we immediately enacted a contact-free delivery policy, which was pioneered by our Huts in Asia before being adopted by brands in the UK. Drivers would agree a location with the customer to leave the meal and then stay at least two meters away as the customer retrieved it. This policy has been updated and refined over the past few months to keep everyone safe and happy. We definitely benefitted from being able to spot and implement innovations from across our markets during this time.

A key way we were able to ensure all of these processes were in place with a devolved franchise model and over 10,000 employees across the UK was working directly with everyone in our network. Where franchisees would normally handle communications within Huts, to make sure everyone was kept abreast of changes like masks or even to just share morale-boosting thank-yous from the community, we set up new internal communications channels and were in touch with everyone, every day.

Bringing Covid lessons into a post-Covid world

After lockdown eases, we may not need to keep a special menu in place to support social distancing in kitchens, or contact-free pick-up for drivers, but there are a few lessons we will put at the heart of our operations once the threat of Covid passes.

First and foremost, we've found new ways of connecting with our team members. We rely on people – from franchisees to delivery drivers – to make Pizza Hut thrive, but we have been absolutely blown away by the passion,

commitment and effort our people put in over lockdown. We have always appreciated and worked hard to support our teams, but due to the speed with which the changes were being implemented and the genuine gratitude we wanted to share, we had to adapt how we communicated from a corporate perspective. We will absolutely be keeping our regular contact, discussions and updates in place following Covid.

Additionally, we've changed how we interact with customers. Like many brands before coronavirus, we used our marketing to share deals and pictures of delicious food. In lockdown, however, this wouldn't have delivered what the public really needed – reassurance about health and safety, and a sense of community at a time when we couldn't be together in person. The narrative may shift over time, but we have learned what it really means to listen and respond to the needs of our customers – and this we will take along with us on our journey post-Covid.

Finally, we've been surprised at some of the little changes that worked so well. Working from home has been a huge success for our corporate team, with colleagues dialling in from around the world to share ideas and considerations – this has sped up our global best practice and will help us moving forward. Cash-free payments is another small shift we may maintain. It was needed for contact-free deliveries, but proved to save time and effort across the board. If it works, it works, no matter how small!

For restaurants newly opening...

It's an exciting and daunting time for restaurants beginning to open their doors. While the lessons for Pizza Hut won't apply to every unique business, I would offer the following advice for restaurants:

1. Be flexible: you're not necessarily going to get everything exactly right from day one, but the key is adaptability. Listen to your team and customers so you can strike the balance everyone needs for safety *and* for service.
2. Talk, talk, talk: when you turn around the open sign, you're going to be doing so under very different circumstances than when you closed in March. Communication is key to make sure your customers – and teams – know what is different, what changes might be coming up and how to best go about interacting. Over-sharing is not only 'okay' but encouraged in these circumstances.

3. Do your reading: while I hope this overview of our adaptations and lessons has been helpful, I know you'll have questions specific to your business that we can't answer. However, so many brands will be sharing their own experiences, tips, tricks and more over the coming weeks. Make sure you learn as much as you can from others. We've all got to have each other's backs in these times!

And finally – good luck to everyone re-opening or thinking about re-opening in the next few weeks. I hope that you, your teams and your customers are able to enjoy and flourish in the new normal.

By Neil Manhas, MD of Pizza Hut UK



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