



Eishaus: Overcoming pandemic challenges to create two profitable businesses

As Tom Von Den Benken neared the end of his corporate career, he looked forward to 2020 as an opportunity for a fresh start. It would be the year he would finally fulfil his lifelong dream of opening a coffee shop, Eishaus, which would serve coffee, German-style ice cream and desserts.

Then, COVID-19 hit. With dine-in suspended and long-term uncertainty on the horizon, Tom knew he would need to change directions in order to make his dream a reality. The pandemic's food service limitations inspired some creative problem solving from Tom and his daughter Addie, his new business partner.

Challenges

Eishaus launched in 2020, just as the pandemic crippled the food service industry. The team aimed to open a coffee house with a dining area but had to shift gears to focus on quick-serve meals from a walk-up window. Cost, complexity and counterspace were key considerations.

Solutions

Working with Panasonic's in-house Culinary Sales team, father and daughter Tom and Addie Von Den Benken selected the SonicChef® high-speed oven. It offered them the ability to create delicious hot meals quickly, without the need for a hood, costly fire-suppression system, large kitchen or highly-trained staff.

Results

With SonicChef®, Tom and Addie were able to quickly create new meal options that could be served from their window – exceeding the bounds of what they thought was possible with their space, equipment and staff. Food could be prepared by any staff member with consistent results. They have since expanded their business, adding additional SonicChef® units.

Given the economic uncertainty, Tom and Addie were hesitant to invest heavily in a large space for their Eishaus. Minimizing costs meant leasing space without a dining room, which brought with it a kitchen that offered limited counter space. The resourceful entrepreneurs had a plan: to serve their German-inspired coffees and desserts from a take-out window. But they needed a partner to make it happen.

The father-daughter team looked at speed ovens as a solution to find the sweet spot of cost, capability and ease of use. They evaluated many options but chose the Panasonic SonicChef® High-Speed Oven. The versatile piece of equipment checked all the boxes: it was the most cost-efficient option available to them, had a small footprint, was stackable and was ventless – a key consideration. But Addie was still skeptical of the finished product the oven could turn out.

A foodie becomes a believer

If you haven't used a speed oven like the SonicChef®, it may be difficult to understand how it can create food textures that rival a dish prepared in a sauté pan, grill or broiler.

"I remember thinking, 'It's just not possible. It won't work,'" Addie recalls. "But I'll admit, it's amazing."

A case in point: breakfast burritos. Even after using the SonicChef® a few months, Addie thought the complex combination of scrambled eggs, cheese, vegetables and a tortilla that needed to remain soft with a crisp touch was too large a challenge for the Panasonic oven. For weeks, she was hesitant to even try it. But with guidance from her Panasonic Culinary Support Specialist, Matt Rigney – a trained chef himself – the SonicChef® delivered.

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Once we had all the ingredients, it took just a few calls between me and Matt, and a couple of test runs to create a perfectly delicious breakfast burrito – which is now our best-selling item.

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Addie Von Den Benken
Eishaus

Matt adds, "Because we had worked so closely together on other menu items, I knew the finished product Addie wanted to serve. And with my understanding of how the SonicChef® inverter performs, I could quickly guide her. It's so easy to use, I can help a beginner prepare a delicious meal from 1,000 miles away."



Simplified menu creation

Tom and Addie credit Panasonic's highly knowledgeable and accessible culinary support team with enabling a wider menu. When developing new menu items, they could get 95% of the way there with just a few phone calls to Matt, who provided personalized guidance and support throughout the process. The rest was down to in-kitchen experimentation.

For the creation of their new Tot Bowls, Tom and Addie went from the drawing board to serving a fully tested dish to customers in about an hour. This, too, was an instant hit that came together easily, "We are not professional cooks. This oven is just incredibly simple to use," Tom said.

Matt explains that this is not uncommon. "Once users get the hang of the SonicChef®, there's nothing holding them back."

Once Tom, Addie or another team member perfect a new menu item, like flatbreads or pastries, it's just as easy to make preparation repeatable. That's because, in addition to a number of pre-set cooking programs, team members can quickly upload new settings via an Excel spreadsheet using the oven's SD-card slot. This also simplifies the process of onboarding new equipment – Eishaus has added two additional SonicChef® ovens since opening. The user-friendly pre-set operation also allows for adjustments on the fly to accommodate special orders or tweak a dish if needed based on supplies.

The age of hybrid workers

Though launched during in a pandemic, Eishaus has been so successful that the Von Den Benken family opened a second spot right next door, Frosthaus, which offers a larger and more complex hot food menu. The two kitchens share more than a common wall – they share the same staff from time to time.



The SonicChef® allows an Eishaus barista, for instance, to prepare meals in the Frosthaus kitchen – it's that easy to use. Tom says these “hybrid” workers help the team make the most of a tight labor market.

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Many people are exiting food service right now, and it's hard to find experienced workers. But with easy-to-use equipment like the SonicChef®, anyone can be trained to prepare hot food, with the same results each time.

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Tom Von Den Benken
Eishaus

A counter employee can enter the kitchen, prep a sandwich, put it into the oven and return to their customer while the food is being cooked, or begin prepping another meal. This solution eliminates the oversight needed to cook food on a stovetop or traditional oven, allowing the worker to focus on other tasks.

In addition to the ease of use, the staff appreciates the quick cleanup. Cleaning that used be done after a shift can now be finished quickly while Frosthaus is still open. Another benefit Addie hears from staff is the increased safety of the SonicChef® compared to a kitchen equipped with fryers and open flames. All exterior surfaces are cool to the touch, which makes a tight prep line a friendlier place to work.

The technology just works

Panasonic inverter technology gives the Eishaus team precise control over meal preparation, treating food better.

“The SonicChef® inspires me,” Tom explains. “If it can be done in the oven, I can do it.”

This confidence has helped the family build a promising business, giving Tom even greater options for the next chapter of his career.