



RESTAURANT THRIVES THROUGH PANDEMIC WITH EMAIL MARKETING STRATEGY

With two locations on Chicago's northside, Apple Villa Pancakes has been a breakfast and brunch destination for two decades. It's no surprise; Andy Spentzos has this in his DNA. He started working for his dad's restaurant at age 14.

In 2002, he opened Apple Villa Pancakes. Two years later, he added packaged goods to the repertoire, and began selling the goods inside the restaurant.

"With the breakfast hours, we close at 2 in the afternoon. So while the restaurant sat idle, we're packaging for on-shelf." And then in 2012, he started to get on-shelf in the frozen breakfast section at Jewel and available online at Taste of Chicago to ship nationwide.

Fast forward to 2020, and the packaging business was thriving with the pandemic. But the restaurant business went completely to takeout. So in January 2021, Andy started working with Next Level Northwest to uncover ways to keep his loyal following hungry for when his two restaurants could reopen.

ONE-ON-ONE COACHING

Andy was connected with Jeff Williams, his one-on-one coach for the next 90 days. "Jeff was super flexible. We shifted gears to concentrate on the pieces of the business that could affect growth most immediately," said Andy. He was surprised with the amount of knowledge that was behind him. "It's like another partner bringing a lot to the table – someone who can encourage you and get ideas off the ground to see what impact they can have on growing your business."

His NLNW coach was able to lean on his own experience with a lot of different businesses in the food industry. They concentrated on email marketing for a six-week stretch to more than 8,000 customers. The messaging focused on the quality and consistency of the food, whether you were ordering the packaged goods online or getting takeout from the restaurant. The goal was to ship more pancakes, drive more on-shelf opportunities and expand the takeout business, which was now 100% of the restaurant's revenue.

8000+

EMAIL MARKETING CUSTOMERS

100%

INCREASE IN EMAIL
CLICK-THROUGH RATE

THROUGH THE PANDEMIC:
ONE HUNDRED PERCENT
**EMPLOYEE
RETENTION**

It's like cross-training. As people took on different roles and **LEARNED MORE RESPONSIBILITIES**, they were **PREPARED TO SHINE WHEN WE RE-OPENED.** Andy Spentzos, owner, Apple Villa Pancakes

Next Level Northwest helped Apple Villa get the word out, testing different promotions and diving into what has made Apple Villa such a fan favorite in the Chicago restaurant scene for the past 20 years. The email campaign saw double the click-through rate and had fewer people opt-out than in previous email campaigns. This gave Andy a proven process for keeping in contact with his most loyal customers.

CROSS-TRAINING FOR A HEALTHIER BUSINESS

With his coach's guidance, Andy put a lot more of his staff in charge of different pieces of the day-to-day operations. With more delegation and less micromanaging, Andy was in a great position to reopen his locations once the shutdowns were lifted. "It's like cross-training. As people took on different roles and learned more responsibilities, they were prepared to shine when we re-opened. It had been so long, it was like a first opening; but the whole team was ready."

Along the way, Andy learned a valuable lesson to diversify his revenue streams. He considers himself lucky that he could shift employees to the packaging business and keep everyone employed between the two businesses within the same location during the shutdowns. All the while, Next Level Northwest helped Apple Villa to capitalize on that revenue stream with their email marketing guidance, so it could thrive.

EXPANDING HORIZONS

Emboldened with his restaurant reopened, a proven email marketing strategy, and new contacts through Next Level Northwest, Andy has his sights on expansion to a third location. "The program broadened my circle of people of entrepreneurs and startups. The business support doesn't stop once the 90 days is done. It was a great opportunity to get in front of other Village community leaders to gain momentum for opening another location."

ABOUT NEXT LEVEL NORTHWEST

Next Level Northwest is a not-for-profit business accelerator program that supports existing local businesses. The program was founded by five Northwest Chicagoland municipalities—Elk Grove Village, Hanover Park, Hoffman Estates, Rolling Meadows, and Schaumburg—as a public-private partnership to support regional and local businesses through collaborative and innovative initiatives to help grow local economies. To learn more about Next Level Northwest or to submit an application for your company to join the next class of companies in the business accelerator program, visit www.nextlevelnorthwest.org.

THE PATH TO SUCCESS STARTS HERE



To get started, visit NextLevelNorthwest.org and/or contact your local Economic Development Director for more information.

Josh Grodzin, CEcD
Elk Grove Village
Interim Executive Director
& Director Business
Development and Marketing
T: 847.357.4005
E: JGrodzin@elkgrove.org

Shubhra Govind, AICP
Hanover Park
Director of Community and
Economic Development
T: 630.823.5781
E: sgovind@hpil.org

Kevin Kramer, CEcD
Hoffman Estates
Director of Economic
Development
T: 847.781.2662
E: kevin.kramer@hoffmanestates.org

Martha H. Corner, AICP
Rolling Meadows
Business Advocate
T: 847.870.9004
E: cornerm@cityrm.org

Matt Frank
Schaumburg
Director of Economic
Development
T: 847.923.3853
E: mfrank@cischaumburg.il.us