

SURVIVAL & GROWTH GUIDE

RESTAURANTS IN TIMES OF CONFLICT

How Middle East F&B Operators Can
Protect, Pivot & Profit

30
HACKS

60
DAY PLAN

6
PARTS

PROTECT

Retain every guest
you already have

PIVOT

New revenue streams
for uncertain times

PROMOTE

Marketing on
a tighter budget

POWER

Menu Technology

Strategies from **The F&B Hack** by Abhi Bose



Abhi Bose
CEO & Founder, My Menu
Author, The F&B Hack



A Message from Abhi Bose

The Middle East has always been a region of remarkable resilience. Its restaurants, cafes, and hotels have weathered economic cycles, pandemics, and global uncertainty - and they have emerged stronger each time.

The current conflict is creating real hardship. Tourist arrivals are down. Corporate travel has slowed. Expat communities are anxious. Discretionary spending is shrinking. Many restaurant owners I speak to are asking the same question:

“What do I do now?”

This guide is my answer. It combines marketing hacks from my book *The F&B Hack* with the technology of *My Menu* - and layers in lessons from operators who have navigated crises before. It is not theory. It is a playbook you can begin executing this week.

Not every strategy will suit every restaurant. Pick the ten ideas that resonate most, commit to them for 60 days, and measure the results.

The restaurants that survive conflict periods are not always the biggest or the best-funded. They are the ones that adapt fastest. Let us adapt - together.

Abhi Bose

CEO & Founder, My Menu | Author, *The F&B Hack* | Dubai, 2025

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Part One - Understanding the Impact

Chapter 1

The Reality on the Ground

Conflict in the Middle East does not affect all restaurants equally. Understanding exactly which forces are working against you is the first step to countering them.

Who Is Most Affected

- Tourist-dependent restaurants in high-footfall zones (malls, waterfronts, hotel strips) - visitor numbers can drop 30–60% during active conflict periods.
- Corporate-dining venues - business travel and entertainment budgets are among the first to be cut.
- Fine dining - discretionary high-spend occasions shrink as consumer confidence falls.
- Venues relying on international expat communities - outbound relocation accelerates during conflict.

Who Is More Resilient

- Neighbourhood and community restaurants - local regulars remain loyal.
- Value and mid-market dining - guests trade down, not out.
- Delivery-strong operations - people order in when they prefer to stay home.
- Comfort food and familiar cuisines - emotional eating increases during uncertainty.

The Core Truth

People still eat. They still celebrate birthdays, anniversaries, and paydays.

They still want moments of comfort and normalcy.

Your job: make your restaurant their destination for that - even now.

The Five Pressure Points

1. **Footfall decline:** Fewer walk-ins as people reduce unnecessary outings.
2. **Spending caution:** Average spend per cover drops as guests think twice about extras.
3. **Staff instability:** Key team members may relocate; recruitment becomes harder.
4. **Supply chain pressure:** Certain ingredients become harder to source or more expensive.
5. **Morale:** Both team and guests carry anxiety into the dining room.

Each of these is manageable. The sections that follow address all five directly.

Part Two - Protect Your Core

Chapter 2

Retain Every Guest You Already Have

In good times, acquiring new customers is a growth strategy. In hard times, retaining existing ones is a survival strategy. It costs five to seven times more to acquire a new customer than to keep an existing one. Right now, your CRM is worth more than your advertising budget.

Hack 1: Activate Your Guest Database - Today

If you are using My Menu, your CRM has been building itself silently every time a guest scans your QR code and logs in via Facebook, Google, or Apple ID. Segment by last visit date, meal preference, spending tier, and dietary preference - then send targeted WhatsApp or SMS messages that make each guest feel known.

The F&B Hack - The Miss You Box

At Yugo, a guest who had visited every week simply stopped coming for 45 days.

A single personalised food box arrived at his door: 'We Miss You at Yugo.'

He returned the next day. He had stopped because of a waiter's attitude.

Cost: less than AED 50. Value recovered: thousands per year.

Hack 2: The Two-Tier Loyalty Programme

Tier 1 - Friends of [Restaurant]: 10% discount, signed up at bill presentation. Script: 'Are you a Friend of [name] yet?' Target: 99% conversion.

Tier 2 - Family of [Restaurant]: 20–25% discount, reserved for your top 5% of spenders. Add a personalised touch - engraved item, reserved table, priority treatment.



My Menu Feature - Digital Stamp Cards

Stored in Apple Wallet and Google Wallet. No app download. No physical card to lose.

Create multiple stamp cards per category - coffee, cocktails, burgers.

Supplier sponsorship possible: a beverage brand funds the reward.

Loyalty and Cashback module handles earn-and-burn mechanics automatically.

Hack 3: The Recovery Campaign

- **21-day lapse:** WhatsApp message with a personalised offer - 'We saved your favourite table. Come back this week - appetisers on us.'
- **45-day lapse:** Direct delivery of a signature dish or small food parcel with a handwritten note.
- **90-day lapse:** A personal phone call from the manager. Simple, human, almost always effective.

In a conflict period, people often withdraw from social routines out of anxiety rather than dissatisfaction. A personal reach-out is genuinely uplifting - and reminds them that normalcy still exists.

Hack 4: Surprise & Delight

Predictable rewards are appreciated but forgotten. Unexpected gifts create emotional memory. Run a weekly initiative: five randomly selected regulars receive an unexpected upgrade or gift at the table - no announcement, just the moment itself. The cost is negligible. The word-of-mouth effect is significant.

Hack 5: Real-Time Feedback

My Menu's guest feedback module prompts guests immediately after the bill is settled. A guest who submits a complaint and receives a personal call from the manager within 30 minutes is nearly always retained. Respond to every Google and TripAdvisor review. Your online reputation is your most powerful marketing tool when people research before going out.

Part Three - Pivot Your Revenue

Chapter 3

New Revenue Streams for Uncertain Times

A single revenue source is a vulnerability. Restaurants with multiple channels - dine-in, delivery, takeaway, catering, events, subscriptions - are fundamentally more resilient. Now is the time to open those channels.

Hack 6: Make Delivery a Proper Business Unit

- Create a delivery-specific menu on My Menu: optimised for travel and margin, different from your dine-in menu.
- Start marketing your direct online menu: My Menu allows you to have different menu for delivery and takeaway. And as it is sold at zero commission give higher discounts to engage with guests directly. Use CashBack feature to increase repeat orders.
- List on all platforms. UAE: Talabat (Arab guests), Noon (South Asian), Deliveroo (European expats). List on all three. With every delivery, share direct order link with discount promo code for direct orders.
- Optimise platform ranking: faster prep times and higher average order value lift your position in results.
- Avoid flat discounts. Use combo promotions and bundle deals instead.

The F&B Hack - The Direct Delivery Move

The bento box at AED 45 generated only AED 4 profit after platform commission.

Solution: QR flyers with '20% OFF first direct order + 20% cashback every time.'

Within months, 25% of all delivery orders were direct - zero commission.

My Menu's online ordering module delivers this with 0% commission charged.

Hack 7: Ghost Kitchen - Your Second Brand

If your kitchen has capacity - and during a downturn it probably does - a ghost kitchen costs almost nothing to launch. Create a delivery-only brand: different name, different cuisine, different price point. Same kitchen. Same staff. Same equipment. Reach out to other non-competing restaurants in different locations and allow each other to run a lighter delivery menu off each other's kitchen saving costs for both and increasing reach across the city!

My Menu supports multiple separate digital menus from a single account - run your ghost kitchen independently with its own ordering flow and branding.

Hack 8: Meal Subscriptions

- **Office Subscription:** 5 lunches per week, pre-ordered, fixed rotating menu. Target nearby office buildings directly.
- **Family Subscription:** Weekly family meal for four, delivered Friday evening. Restaurant quality at home.
- **Resident Subscription:** Partner with nearby building management. Monthly dining credit programmes scale well.

My Menu's direct ordering and future-ordering features allow guests to pre-order and schedule deliveries in advance - perfect infrastructure for subscriptions.

Hack 9: Gift Vouchers - Cash in Advance

Gift vouchers are cash in advance. During Ramadan, Eid, birthdays, and anniversaries, guests who are cutting back personally still buy gifts for others. My Menu's digital gift voucher feature: offer a 'pay AED 75, get AED 100' structure. Market to your loyalty base as 'give the gift of a great meal.'

Hack 10: Catering as a Separate Business

- Create pre-set catering menus with clear costing. Never quote custom every time.
- Join BNI (www.bni.com) - 314,000+ members, 11,000+ chapters. Hosting a weekly breakfast meeting is an instant recurring catering contract.
- Use My Menu to allow online catering pre-orders with advance scheduling.

Hack 11: Gamification - Make Slow Nights Exciting



Rolling Mondays - Real Results from The F&B Hack

A restaurant placed two dice on every table on Mondays.

Roll double sixes: entire meal free. Roll double ones: 50% off. Anything else: complimentary dish.

Expected cost: approximately 15% of the bill per table.

Result: Monday became the third busiest night of the week.

Zero ad spend. Zero influencer. Two dice and a story worth telling.

- Spin the wheel: guests spin for a prize at arrival - free dessert, discount, free drink.
- Mystery Menu: chef decides, fixed price. Guests who love it become regulars.
- Birthday age discount: your age equals your discount percentage. Major social sharing.

Hack 12: Themed Nights That Fill the Calendar

- Comfort Food Wednesday - generous classics at a set price. Comforting and accessible.
- Family Night - kids eat free when two adults dine. Targets hesitant families.
- Quiz & Dine Thursday - trivia night with a set menu deal. Builds a regular weekly crowd.
- Throwback Thursday - menu prices from five years ago, one night only. Huge social traction.

Promote themed nights via My Menu's campaign banners - triggered when guests open the menu, with a countdown to the next event.

Part Four - Promote Smartly

Chapter 4

Marketing on a Tighter Budget

The instinct during a downturn is to cut marketing spend. The restaurants that market through difficult periods consistently outperform those that go quiet. The key is to spend smarter, not necessarily more.

Hack 13: Own Your Community

- **WhatsApp Insider Club:** Invite your top 100 regulars to a private group. Post first access to new dishes, early booking for special nights, exclusive offers. Zero cost. Creates a community invested in your survival.
- **Facebook Group:** Groups get significantly higher organic reach than pages. Use for behind-the-scenes content, chef stories, community moments.
- **Residential building and community groups:** Partner with nearby communities. Offer residents-only deals in exchange for being featured.

Hack 14: Hyper-Local Targeting on Meta

With as little as AED 20 per day, Meta allows you to target people within a 1–3km radius of your restaurant, filtered by age, interests, and dining behaviour. Your customer is local. Target them precisely.

- 15-second food preparation video - no text, music only. Let the food do the talking.
- Carousel of your top five dishes with prices - aspirational but accessible.
- Guest testimonial on screen over a photo of the dish they love.

Use My Menu's Order Through Rate analytics to identify highest-converting dishes - feature those in paid ads.

Hack 15: Instagram Reels - Free Reach

Reels account for approximately 50% of time spent on Instagram. They are free. Post every 2–3 days. Content that performs during conflict:

- ‘Day in the kitchen’ - 30 seconds with your chef. Authentic, personal, human.
- ‘Behind the dish’ - how your signature item is made. Educational and aspirational.
- Staff introductions - people come back for people, not just food.
- Themed night previews - tease upcoming events with countdown stickers.

Hack 16: Micro-Influencers - Pay Only for Results

Micro-influencers (5,000–50,000 engaged followers) deliver far better ROI in budget-constrained environments. Use referus.app - influencers earn a percentage of every booking they generate. You pay only for results. No fixed fees during uncertain times.

Hack 17: The Google Reputation Play

- Ensure your Google Business Profile is fully complete: photos updated, hours accurate, menu link active (use your My Menu QR link), special attributes marked.
- My Menu’s feedback module can redirect satisfied guests directly to your Google review page after payment.
- Respond to every review within 24 hours. A thoughtful response to a negative review often impresses prospective diners more than the review harms you.

Hack 18: Ramadan and Eid - Your Biggest Opportunity

In the Middle East, Ramadan is not a slow period for restaurants that position correctly. It is potentially your highest-revenue month.

- **Iftar set menus:** Families and groups book together - covers per table increase dramatically.
- **Suhoor experience:** Late-night dining after midnight becomes a social ritual. Dedicated late menu required.
- **Corporate Iftar packages:** Many companies allocate specific budget for team Iftar events.
- **Future ordering:** My Menu’s advance ordering lets guests book and pre-order Iftar menus up to 30 days ahead.
- **Timed menus:** My Menu publishes your Ramadan menu automatically - appearing after Maghrib, disappearing at Imsak.

Part Five - Power Your Operations

Chapter 5

Technology as Your Competitive Edge

Every crisis accelerates technology adoption. Restaurants that invest in the right tools during downturns consistently emerge with structural advantages when conditions improve. My Menu was built precisely for this context.

Hack 19: The Digital Menu as Upsell Engine

My Menu increases average check value by 5–30% through:

- **Autoplay food videos:** The visual of a beautifully plated dish drives ordering decisions more powerfully than any verbal recommendation.
- **Triggered campaigns:** When a guest visits the Mains section, a pop-up appears for the complementary wine pairing or the sides combo deal.
- **Timed menus:** Your lunch promotion disappears at 4pm. Your Ramadan menu appears at sunset. Zero staff intervention.
- **AI menu descriptions:** My Menu's built-in AI generates compelling, appetising descriptions for every item.

Hack 20: Social Login - Every Scan Is Data

My Menu's Social Login converts each anonymous QR scan into a named, contactable guest record with a single tap - via Facebook, Google, Apple ID, or WhatsApp OTP. The record updates automatically every visit, tracking ordering history and average spend. Zero manual data entry.

Hack 21: WhatsApp Marketing - 90% Open Rates

Email open rates average 20-25%. WhatsApp message open rates exceed 90%. My Menu's integrated WhatsApp marketing sends image and video messages - not just text - making promotions far more persuasive.

- **Lapsed guests (21+ days):** 'We miss you - here is a reason to come back this week.'
- **Birthday month guests:** 'Your birthday deserves to be celebrated - we have something planned for you.'
- **High spenders:** 'As one of our most valued guests, we'd like to invite you to a private tasting evening.'

Hack 22: Multilingual Menu - Speak Their Language

My Menu supports 50+ languages with automatic OS-based language detection. When an Arabic-speaking guest scans your QR, the menu opens in Arabic. When a Hindi-speaking guest scans the same code, it opens in Hindi. During conflict, international communities become more insular - they seek comfort in familiar language. My Menu also supports 70+ currencies.

Hack 23: QR at Every Touchpoint

- **Takeaway packaging:** QR on every box linking to your direct ordering page and loyalty programme.
- **Office and residential flyers:** QR codes in nearby buildings linking to delivery menu with a first-order discount.
- **Hotel and clinic receptions:** Tent card: 'Order from [Restaurant] - delivered in 30 minutes.'
- **Events and pop-ups:** Your QR code is your order capture mechanism with zero infrastructure.

Hack 24: Pay at Table

My Menu's Pay at Table allows guests to settle bills instantly from their phone. No waiting. No card machine passed around. During conflict, guests are cautious about time in public spaces. Faster table turnover means more covers without additional staff.

Hack 25: Order, Pay & Collect

For cafe, bar, and QSR environments: My Menu's Order, Pay & Collect with digital signage eliminates queuing entirely. Guests order from their phone, receive a collection number, and pick up when ready. Reduces wait time, increases throughput, appeals to the guest who wants minimal contact.

Hack 26: Reduce Costs

Automating orders allows you to run a much leaner operation. You can allocate existing staff to focus on direct delivery runs. Also consider consolidating systems such as My Menu which has digital menu, ordering, loyalty, gamification, stamp cards and reservations all in one for USD 31 per month so why pay for separate systems.

Part Six - Prepare for Recovery

Chapter 6

Positioning for the Rebound

Every conflict period ends. The restaurants that maintained visibility, sharpened their offer, and kept guest relationships warm will capture the recovery surge disproportionately. Prepare for recovery during the conflict - not after it.

Hack 26: Build Your Content Library Now

Quieter trading periods are the ideal time for food photography and videography - the photographer can work without disrupting service. My Menu's food photography and videography service produces visual content that populates your digital menu and fuels social media for months ahead. Every dish with a food video generates measurably higher order rates.

Hack 27: Train Your Team

- Upselling technique - genuinely helpful suggestion, never pressure.
- My Menu platform fluency - every team member should guide guests confidently.
- Emotional hospitality - guests are anxious; they need more warmth than usual.
- Review collection - using My Menu's post-payment feedback prompt proactively.

Kitchen incentive: offer the chef who creates a new dish a fixed fee per unit sold, plus a bonus if it becomes a bestseller. This produces motivated teams and innovative menus simultaneously.

Hack 28: Strategic Partnerships

- **Adjacent businesses:** Partner with the gym, yoga studio, or salon nearby. Mutual discount cards generate cross-referrals at zero cost.
- **Corporate neighbours:** A monthly dining credit programme for nearby staff - predictable revenue for you, a valued employee benefit for them.
- **Residential buildings:** A resident dining programme with building management generates consistent local footfall.
- **Community and charity:** A visible community initiative generates genuine goodwill and organic media coverage.

Hack 29: Menu Engineering

Review your menu using the matrix below every 6–8 weeks as consumer behaviour shifts. Use My Menu's Order Through Rate (OTR) analytics to find items guests view but do not order - your repricing opportunities.

Category	Margin	Popularity	Action
STAR	High	High	Feature prominently. Protect at all costs.
PLOWHORSE	Low	High	Reprice or reduce portion. Protect volume.
PUZZLE	High	Low	Reposition - use in upsell campaigns.
DOG	Low	Low	Remove. Simplify menu. Reduce kitchen complexity.

Hack 30: Dietary Inclusivity

- Halal (not applicable in the Middle East): 25% of the global population is Muslim. Make Halal visible and prominent in your menu and digital presence. Although all restaurants are Halal in the Middle East.
- Vegan: 3–5 strong vegan dishes - not afterthoughts, but full-flavoured, beautifully presented items.
- Gluten-free: clearly tag all gluten-free options. 'Gluten-free restaurants near me' is among the highest food-related Google search terms.

My Menu allows dietary tags on every item - gluten-free, vegan, dairy-free, nut-free - and guests can filter the entire menu by preference.

Appendix - The 60-Day Action Plan

Appendix

Your 60-Day Conflict Playbook

Choose your ten most relevant actions and assign them to the schedule below. The goal is not to do everything - it is to do the right things consistently.

Week 1–2: Protect & Assess

#	Action	Tool / Resource
1	<p>Audit your My Menu CRM - segment by recency and behaviour</p> <p>How many active guests? How many lapsed 21+ days?</p>	<i>My Menu CRM</i>
2	<p>Launch or reactivate your two-tier loyalty programme</p> <p>Brief front-of-house on enrolment script at bill presentation</p>	<i>My Menu Loyalty</i>
3	<p>Send 'We Miss You' campaign to all 21-day lapsed guests</p> <p>Personalised WhatsApp or SMS - personal, not generic</p>	<i>My Menu WhatsApp</i>
4	<p>Ensure Google Business Profile is fully complete</p> <p>Photos, hours, menu QR link, attributes, correct category</p>	<i>Google Business</i>

5	<p>Run menu engineering review - Stars, Dogs, Puzzles, Plowhorses</p> <p>Identify what to feature, reprice, reposition, and remove</p>	<i>My Menu OTR data</i>
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Week 3–4: Pivot & Launch

#	Action	Tool / Resource
6	<p>Launch your first themed night</p> <p>Quiz Night, Family Night, or Comfort Food Wednesday</p>	<i>My Menu Campaigns</i>
7	<p>Create and launch digital gift vouchers</p> <p>'Pay 75, get 100' structure - promote to loyalty base first</p>	<i>My Menu Gift Vouchers</i>
8	<p>Launch direct delivery QR flyer campaign</p> <p>500 flyers with QR to direct ordering, deployed nearby</p>	<i>My Menu Online Ordering</i>
9	<p>Identify and launch one ghost kitchen concept</p> <p>New name, delivery only, different cuisine - same kitchen</p>	<i>My Menu Multi-Menu</i>
10	<p>Test gamification on one slow night</p> <p>Rolling dice or spin the wheel - measure covers and revenue</p>	<i>Props + social media</i>

Week 5–8: Scale What Works

#	Action	Tool / Resource
11	Begin 'One Hack a Day' LinkedIn content series 30 posts in 30 days - one insight per post, builds authority	<i>LinkedIn</i>
12	Launch WhatsApp Insider Club for top 100 guests First-access offers, behind-the-scenes, exclusive invites	<i>WhatsApp</i>
13	Run hyper-local Meta ad campaign AED 20/day, 2km radius, food video creative of signature dish	<i>Meta Ads</i>
14	Add food videos to top 20 menu items Commission My Menu photography and videography service	<i>My Menu Content</i>
15	Secure two corporate or catering contracts BNI chapter hosting, office block outreach, or hotel deal	<i>BNI / Direct outreach</i>

The Single Most Important Truth in This Guide

Every conflict period in history has been followed by a recovery.

The restaurants that capture that recovery are the ones that stayed visible, stayed connected to their guests, and adapted relentlessly - not the ones that waited for conditions to improve.

Start today. Not next week. Today.

Ready to implement these strategies?

Start your My Menu free trial today - no credit card required.

Existing clients - reach out to your Account Manger today! We are here to help!

www.mydigimenu.com

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