



How Customers Helped a Marketplace-Turned-Restaurant Succeed

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More often than not, experience does not teach us exactly what is going to happen; it teaches us how to deal with the unexpected. When Daniele Puleo, a 30-year veteran of the restaurant industry, and his wife, Christina, decided to open CiboDivino Marketplace in Oak Cliff's Sylvan Thirty complex in Dallas, Texas, they had a dream of a wine shop and takeaway market that would serve the neighborhood. But the neighborhood had other ideas.

Customer requests and marketplace trends prompted the couple to evolve the original idea of a market to more of a neighborhood eatery first, and market second. As CiboDivino celebrates its three-year anniversary this month, it looks as if their intuition and ability to adapt has paid off.

The space was originally set up as a wine shop and specialty foods store that also included a gold-tiled pizza oven. But the Puleos assumed it was the imported goods and other gourmet items, like prepared meals, craft beer, and some meats and cheeses that would be most popular among guests.

"We really believed that people would take home our specialty foods and cook," says Christina. "But from the beginning we started selling a lot of pizzas, and [customers] weren't buying products to cook."



Guests would come in, order a pizza, buy a bottle of wine, and then want to enjoy it on-premise. “After a couple of months, we realized that we didn’t have enough seating,” she says.

So in that first year, CiboDivino added more seating, and eventually added 10 family tables, reorganizing the space so there was more room for eating and less for shopping. After noticing those families took advantage of a small front lawn as a play area for children, the owners made plans so parents could enjoy a glass of wine and a meal as they watched over their kids.

“We’d spent a lot of time in Napa conceptualizing this place, and we knew that outdoor seating was key to the atmosphere we were looking to create,” Christina explains, acknowledging that with all the children playing at the front, those interested in a child-free evening ended up feeling a bit shut out from outdoor seating.

So the couple continued to pivot, adding an upscale patio on the north side of the building that could be a relaxing experience for adults. It doubles as a special event area for birthdays or showers, and its flowing curtains that catch Texas breezes bring a bit of Napa or Napoli to the experience.

Soon, guests were clamoring for more than pizza. “We are very present on-site owners, so we’re here almost every day, and people get to know us,” Christina explains. “And Daniele has a following.”

Previously, Daniele had worked for six years at Daniele Osteria, a restaurant named one of the 10 best restaurants—and Daniele one of the best chefs—by D Magazine and The Dallas Morning News. It wasn’t long before CiboDivino guests began asking him to cook.

So he began adapting Puleo family recipes to expand the menu, working closely with executive chef Ryan Olmos to execute a farm-to-table strategy, and continuing to hand-select the 350 wine labels on offer. Thanks to this collaboration, CiboDivino now offers Sunday brunch, and the marketplace has partnered with Caviar for delivery of some of its most popular pizza, pasta, salad, and panini selections.

This Dallas hotspot has found success because owners were attentive. They watched what customers were purchasing through inventory tracking and on-site presence, and they developed an environment where guests felt comfortable voicing requests.

“We are here to serve the neighborhood,” Daniele says. That’s a neighborhood full of guests who enjoy his family recipes along with seasonal items from Olmos and pizza hot from the ovens—guests who come to the shop for farm-raised meat, local veggies, and wine. On a busy Friday night, 300 people can walk through the doors, and Daniele has plans to bring in even more by teaching tasting classes.

With owners who have a clear intent of service and willingness to go with the flow as requests flow in, CiboDivino Marketplace’s evolution is poised to continue.