Menu Photography and Content Creation

A practical phone-photo, short-video and content production system



PRACTICAL GUIDE / WORKED EXAMPLES / EDITABLE TEMPLATES

Tools for independent restaurant owners and managers

Start with one practical change

For restaurant teams creating accurate, reusable food images without a full studio. This toolkit covers planning, simple lighting, realistic styling, short video, permissions, asset management and captions. It goes beyond a photo audit to help you run a complete small shoot. All examples are hypothetical. Adapt camera controls and export settings to your device and destination.

Inside this toolkit

1. Plan the image before the dish arrives
2. Use simple light and stable framing
3. Style food honestly and capture a useful set
4. Check rights, people and private details
5. Edit, label, publish and learn

Make the templates your own

Read the short guide, work through the example, and choose the forms you need. The printable forms follow the guide. The companion Word file lets you change instructions, add your restaurant name, and replace every blank or bracket before use. Duplicate a clean copy for each new shift, campaign, employee, or event.

Edition October 2026. Examples are original and hypothetical. This is an operating resource, not legal, employment, accounting, or food-safety advice. Confirm location-specific requirements and get qualified review where needed.

Plan the image before the dish arrives

Choose the image’s job: help someone understand a menu item, show a portion, explain pickup or communicate the atmosphere. A beautiful close-up may be poor menu information if the guest cannot see what comes with the dish. Write one purpose for each planned shot.

- Choose two or three priority dishes for a small first shoot. Confirm current recipes, portions, plates, garnishes and availability with the kitchen.
- Assign a shoot lead, food preparer and service contact. Schedule outside the busiest preparation period and agree what must stop if service needs the space.
- Prepare the location, clean lens, charged phone, stable support, clean background and an approved asset folder before food arrives.
- List required orientations and crops. Leave room around the dish so one original can support several formats without cutting off important details.

Hypothetical 45-minute plan: 10 minutes to set up and test an empty plate, 20 minutes to photograph three dishes as they arrive, 10 minutes for storefront and pickup details, and five minutes to label files. Add time if preparation or permissions need it.

Keep the shoot compatible with food-safety procedures. Do not place phones or props on food-contact surfaces, obstruct exits or return handled display food to customer service unless your approved procedure allows it. The shoot must not create a safety shortcut.

Use simple light and stable framing

Start beside a large window with indirect light, or use a consistent existing light source. Place the dish so the light comes from the side rather than directly behind the phone. Take a test image and look for visible texture, believable color and distracting glare.

- If direct sun creates harsh patches, move the table farther from the window or choose a different time. Do not improvise unsafe covers near heat sources.
- Avoid mixing strongly different light colors when possible. If a dish looks orange or green, change the lighting setup before relying on a heavy filter.
- Use the main camera at a normal setting and move to compose the frame instead of relying on heavy digital zoom. Keep the phone stable and check focus at full size.
- Try overhead for a flat spread, a three-quarter angle for a plated meal and eye level for a tall item. Let the shape of the food choose the angle.

Hypothetical test: photograph the same bowl from overhead and at a three-quarter angle. Compare whether the toppings, depth and portion are clear. Select the image that answers the guest’s question rather than the one with the most dramatic blur.

Quality gate: the important food is sharp, bright areas retain detail, colors look plausible and the background does not compete. Check the image on a second screen if available. Camera features vary, so verify focus and exposure controls on your device.

Style food honestly and capture a useful set

Use the portion, ingredients, packaging and garnish the guest can actually receive. Wipe accidental plate smears and arrange the real components neatly. Do not create an oversized “hero” serving, add unavailable ingredients or edit in a topping that is not included.

- Capture a complete dish first. Then make a detail, a portion/context image and a usable alternate crop. A set is more useful than ten nearly identical close-ups.
- Keep props relevant and minimal. If a drink or side is not included, compose carefully and explain that in accompanying copy where needed.
- For short video, film one action at a time: plating, a pour, packaging or a handoff. Hold a stable frame before and after the action so editing is easier.
- Show genuine kitchen practices. If a setup reveals an operational problem, fix the practice rather than merely cropping it out for marketing.

Hypothetical sequence: a full sandwich-and-side image for the menu, a close-up of the cut sandwich for texture and a boxed pickup image for convenience. The same approved portion appears in all three.

Google’s Business Profile photo guidance calls for focused, well-lit images that represent reality without significant alterations or excessive filtering. Source 1. As a practical standard, keep edits to useful corrections such as crop, straightening and restrained exposure/color adjustment. Review the result against the actual product.

Check rights, people and private details

Owning the restaurant does not automatically mean owning every photograph taken there. Keep a record of who created each asset and what uses are permitted. The U.S. Copyright Office explains that the photographer generally begins as the copyright owner, subject to exceptions such as qualifying work made for hire. Source 2. Other jurisdictions can differ.

- For a hired photographer, confirm the written license or ownership terms, permitted channels, paid-ad use, editing rights, credit and duration before relying on the images.
- For guest-created content, request specific permission from the actual rights holder. A tag, hashtag or public post is not your permission record.
- Get appropriate permission before featuring identifiable people. Staff should be able to decline without pressure. Avoid featuring children unless the relevant guardian permissions and local requirements are properly addressed.
- Inspect backgrounds for receipts, contact details, order screens, payment information and private conversations. Stage a clean example rather than exposing live customer data.

Use original audio or audio licensed for the intended commercial use. Availability in an app does not by itself establish that the same track is permitted in paid advertising or on another platform.

The included permission checklist is a planning record, not a legal release. Use a suitable reviewed agreement when needed. Restrict access to signed records and avoid putting personal details in shared asset filenames.

Edit, label, publish and learn

Keep original files unchanged and export separate publishing copies. A simple folder structure can be Originals, Selects, Approved and Archived. Use filenames that identify the item, shoot date and version, such as itemname_YYYYMMDD_angle_v01, without guest names or other private information.

- Select for accuracy first, then clarity and visual appeal. Reject soft focus, misleading portions, strange color and clutter that cannot be safely removed.
- Make restrained edits and compare the export with the original. Check each destination’s current size, aspect ratio and file requirements instead of assuming one export fits everywhere.
- Pair each asset with a clear caption, verified availability, one next action and useful accessibility text. Describe the image rather than filling image-description fields with keywords.
- After publishing, inspect the actual crop, text readability, audio/captions and link on a phone. A scheduled or uploaded asset may not yet be public.

Hypothetical test: publish two accurate images of the same item in otherwise similar posts on comparable dates. Record reach, menu clicks and measurable orders. A difference is a useful clue, not proof the image caused the result; timing and audience can differ.

Review monthly: retire discontinued items, refresh changed portions and remove expired offer graphics from the active folder. Keep a small library of approved images that staff can find quickly. Success includes fewer wrong or outdated assets, not just higher engagement.

Template 1. Small-shoot planner

Shoot date/time: [date] | Lead: [name] | Kitchen contact: [name] | Service priority contact: [name] | Location: [place].

Decision	Plan
Business purpose	[menu clarity / launch / pickup / atmosphere]
Priority dishes	[two or three current items]
Accurate portion and presentation	[kitchen-approved reference]
Light and background	[window/light; clean surface]
Phone, support and storage	[device; battery; folder]
People / asset permissions	[needed records and owner]
Safety and service limits	[approved space; stop condition]

Time block	Shot / action	Owner
[start-finish]	[setup + empty-plate test]	[name]
[start-finish]	[dish sequence]	[name]
[start-finish]	[location/process images]	[name]
[start-finish]	[select, label and back up]	[name]

Before food arrives: [ ] lens clean [ ] background checked [ ] lighting tested [ ] permissions confirmed [ ] shot list visible. Missing item that blocks the shoot: [issue or none].

Template 2. Full restaurant shot list

Select only shots you can use. Capture actual offerings and spaces. Mark each Complete, Reshoot or Not needed. Check consent before including identifiable people.

Shot	What the guest should understand	File / status
Complete signature dish	Normal portion and included components	[file/status]
Food detail	Texture without hiding overall portion	[file/status]
Overhead spread	Which items are separate or included	[file/status]
Eye-level tall item	Height and real presentation	[file/status]
Actual pickup packaging	What travels and how it is packed	[file/status]
Current menu display	Readable and accurate information	[file/status]
Storefront and entrance	How to recognize and enter	[file/status]
Pickup counter	Where to collect an order	[file/status]
Representative seating	Actual layout and atmosphere	[file/status]
Team or preparation	Authentic process with permission	[file/status]

For each priority dish: [ ] complete view [ ] detail [ ] context [ ] alternate crop. Common quality check: sharp subject, believable color, no misleading extras and no private information. Reshoot priorities: [list].

Template 3. Short-video storyboard

Video purpose: [one useful message] | Intended destination: [channel] | Featured item: [item] | Target duration: [brief length appropriate to destination]. Check current platform requirements before export.

Sequence	Picture / action	Text or audio	Check
Opening	[finished item or guest question]	[clear opening line]	[subject visible immediately]
Detail	[one preparation action]	[verified ingredient/process]	[safe practice; stable frame]
Context	[portion/packaging/service]	[what guest receives]	[no misleading extras]
Next step	[finished item or practical location]	[availability + action]	[accurate link/terms]

Hypothetical script: “What is in our [pickup meal]? [Show actual main]. [Show included side]. Packed like this for collection at [verified point]. See today’s menu at [link].” Do not imply the meal travels well unless that is a tested, accurate claim.

- Audio rights/source: [original or licensed; permitted uses].
- People and background privacy checked: [name/date].
- Captions reviewed against spoken words: [name/date].
- Final phone playback test: [crop, readable text, sound-off clarity].

Template 4. Rights and privacy checkpoint

Asset/group: [ID] | Reviewer: [name] | Date: [date]. This checklist records decisions and evidence; it is not a model release or substitute for a suitable license.

Question	Evidence / action
Who created it and controls the rights?	[creator; agreement reference]
Which uses are authorized?	[website/social/paid ads/print; limits]
May we crop, edit or add text?	[permission terms]
Are recognizable people featured?	[permission record or reshoot plan]
Are children visible?	[avoid / appropriately reviewed permissions]
Do music, art, logos or props need rights?	[license or remove/replace]
Any private data in image or audio?	[inspect; reshoot/redact safely]
Any expiry, credit or withdrawal conditions?	[requirements and owner]

Permission-request draft for a rights holder: “May [restaurant] use your photo [exact asset/link] on [specific channels] for [purpose], including [organic or paid use], during [period]? We would [permitted edits] and credit you as [credit]. Please confirm the scope you approve. No use will begin without agreement.”

Store the response with the asset record. If ownership, authority or scope is unclear, pause that asset and choose one you can verify.

Template 5. Asset library and export checklist

Asset ID / file	Item / shoot date	Rights / accuracy	Use / review date
[file]	[item/date]	[permission ref; approved by]	[channel/date]
[file]	[item/date]	[permission ref; approved by]	[channel/date]
[file]	[item/date]	[permission ref; approved by]	[channel/date]
[file]	[item/date]	[permission ref; approved by]	[channel/date]

- Original preserved: [location]. Approved export: [file/version].
- Accuracy: [ ] correct portion [ ] current garnish/packaging [ ] extras clearly explained [ ] item still available.
- Image: [ ] focus [ ] natural color [ ] restrained edits [ ] clean background [ ] crop does not mislead.
- Destination: [ ] current file specifications checked [ ] text readable [ ] accessibility text included [ ] link tested.
- Rights/privacy: [ ] scope covers use [ ] people/audio permissions checked [ ] no sensitive background details.
- After upload: [ ] public appearance checked [ ] status recorded [ ] expired graphics scheduled for removal.

Retire or reshoot when: [recipe/portion/packaging changes; rights expire; item leaves menu]. Library owner: [name]. Next monthly check: [date].

Template 6. Caption worksheet and content test

Asset ID: [file] | Guest question: [what they need to know] | One message: [main point] | Verified detail: [fact] | Next action: [menu/order/reserve].

Menu caption draft: “[Item] with [actual components], served as [accurate portion/detail]. Available [verified times/dates]. [Included/excluded extras if needed]. Current menu: [link].”

Process caption draft: “A look at how we prepare [item]: [one accurate process detail]. Here is the finished portion you can order at [location/channel]. [Availability and link].”

Useful image description: “[Main dish and visible components] on [plate/packaging], shown [angle/context].” Describe essential visual information; do not add unverified ingredients or subjective claims as facts.

Test record	Entry
Question and one variable	[complete dish vs detail; other factors kept similar]
Post dates / audience / channel	[conditions]
Observed reach and menu clicks	[counts; definition]
Measurable completed actions	[orders/reservations, if available]
Limits on conclusion	[timing/audience/other changes]
Decision	[keep/reshoot/test again; reason]

Final approval: [name/date]. Publish only after every factual placeholder and permission requirement is resolved.

Sources and use notes

Official reference sources were checked during preparation in October 2026. Numbered source mentions in the guide refer to the entries below. Original worksheets, examples, and calculations are 63Labs planning tools, not material endorsed by these organizations.

1. Google Business Profile: Manage photos and videos

Accurate, focused, well-lit imagery; limited alterations; current upload specifications and statuses. Checked 23 October 2026.

https://support.google.com/business/answer/6103862?hl=en

2. U.S. Copyright Office: What photographers should know about copyright

General U.S. photograph ownership and work-made-for-hire distinctions. Does not replace a reviewed license or local legal advice. Checked 23 October 2026.

https://www.copyright.gov/engage/photographers/

Before use

Replace hypothetical values with verified restaurant data. Confirm responsibilities, approval limits, dates, offer terms, and local requirements. Do not send drafts, promise prices, or change operating procedures until the appropriate owner has approved them. The pack does not include legal contracts or ongoing updates.