



Bartleby's Seitan Stand

Quarterly Update

January 2020

Service Period: October-December 2019

SUMMARY

The last quarter of 2019 was wild. We tested dinner-time service with a six-week pop-up series at our commissary in Stoneham. We launched a better online processing system for pick-up orders, and—following that success—launched delivery service of our nuggets, patties, and sauce to the contiguous United States. That’s a short sentence for what represents a massive expansion of our business reach. We also began offering gift cards, made some super popular specials in October and November, took part in some special holiday catering events, and came *thisclose* to meeting our largest sales goal for the year.

OUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

During this quarter in operation (October-December 2019), Bartleby’s Seitan Stand accomplished the following:

Sales

We had a healthy final quarter of 2019. The number of meals served came in at 5,005, which is a small dip from the previous quarter (down 12%) but a massive increase from the same season last year (up 270%). Total items sold was also down to 3,622, but this reflects the unusual aspect of our holiday catering programs: we were selling single items like a stuffed seitan roast that served six people. Our average ticket price took another jump up, hitting an all-time high of \$12.99.

Our top three menu items were the Spicy Deluxe sandwich, the Original sandwich, and the Wee & Wicked (five-piece nuggets). This was the first time that our popular sweet potato fries were edged out completely by seitan offerings—we are psyched that the demand for our seitan dishes has grown.

We continued to introduce monthly specials through the end of the year. These limited-time menu items have generated a healthy portion of our sales, and have allowed Bartleby’s to flex our creative kitchen muscles. The devils went positively mad over the cranberry sauce on our November special!

- **Tricky Treats** (October): This was a fun one, and a rare foray into desserts. We nabbed orange Halloween oreos and fried them in a fluffy, ultra-light beignet-style batter, and dusted them with powdered sugar. For good devils only. 195 portions sold (9% of monthly sales).
- **Harvest From Hell** (November): A comforting, Fall-worthy bowl. We topped a pile of seasoned waffle fries with five craggy nuggz, and drizzled on top a tart cranberry sauce with a hint of sweet maple and bright orange zest. 86 portions sold (8% of monthly sales).

- **Frickles** (December): We brought back one of our fair-weather favorites to close out the calendar year. Kosher dill chips in a crispy batter make for the most savory, shattery, and addictive fried pickles you've ever had. 65 portions sold (19% of monthly sales).

We set a 2019 goal to reach a total of 15,000 meals served. At the end of this quarter, we had ranked up 14,811 meals served. We were so close! What heartbreak. Though we were just shy of this ambitious number, our efforts still represent a stunning 54% increase from the 2018 actuals.

In November, we made available gift cards for the first time. Bartleby's eGift Cards are digital and hosted by Square, our mobile payment partner. They never expire, and can be used for just about everything from Bartleby's: food and beverage from our truck, merchandise and food from our online shop, and even as tuition for our Seitan School.

Social Media, Website, and Publicity

We continue to see gains across our three social channels:

Instagram: 12% growth (3,741 to 4,127 followers)

Facebook: 14% growth (1,351 to 1,537 followers)

Twitter: 6% growth (433 to 461 followers)

We broke our 2019 goal for Facebook, cracking that 1,500 follower mark. And we just nosed up against our Instagram goal of 4,200 followers, though didn't quite cross the line before the year ended.

We keep our marketing email frequency low, usually distributing a newsletter just once monthly, and occasionally sending another blast when we have extra special news. This thoughtful pace has not worn out our welcome with subscribers—our engagement levels with email messaging is high. Over this October-December span, our open rate averaged 47% (compared to the restaurant industry averages of 20-26%).

We saw a big click rate from the December newsletter, in which we announced that shipping was now available for packaged food items. That message earned an 18% CTR (compared with 6-7% in the previous two months, and compared to the restaurant industry averages of 1-3.5%).

In the final days of 2019, we rebuilt our newsletter pop-up box (we think our settings were a wee aggressive) and have a new version live as we enter 2020. We began this quarter with 439 newsletter subscribers, and gained (just like last quarter) 13% of that figure, working now with 495 names.

Regular Service Completed

Regular services are repeated weekly at the same locations. This fall, that meant Tuesday lunch in Kendall Square, Wednesday lunch in Liberty Square, Thursday dinner in Stoneham, and Saturday lunch in Harvard Square. We had 35 regular services scheduled from October through December. Three of those were cancelled last-minute due to bad weather and related mechanical issues (our tin can of a truck struggled mightily in the snow).

The Thursdays in Stoneham represent our first (semi-regular) foray into a dinner-time service. We hosted a six-week service at Food Revolution, and called the event “Bartleby’s x Revolution.” For four hours each Thursday, we slung our seitan favorites plus a few special menu items (like a return of the wildly popular Buffalo Ranch sandwich). The series also allowed us to test the pre-ordering system online: customers could place their order—and pay—in advance of their arrival to the commissary. This provided a convenience to our suburban customers, and also meant fewer folks waiting in line at the modestly sized Stoneham kitchen.

Special Events Completed

During this quarter in operation, Bartleby’s participated in five special events, and served successfully at all. Five is a significant drop from the previous quarter, but with extra Seitan School sessions and regular evening pop-ups in November and December, we didn’t have as much time available for festivals and brewery visits.

- October 12: Mighty Squirrel Brewing Co., Waltham
- October 19-20: Boston Veg Food Fest, Boston
- October 24: Mighty Squirrel Brewing Co., Waltham
- November 3: South Boston Open Studios, Boston
- December 8: The Vegan Market: Holiday Edition, Somerville

Total Service Rate

Of the 40 total services scheduled this past quarter, Bartleby’s slung seitan at 37. That’s a successful completion rate of 93%, which marks a continued climb up from the previous two quarters (87% for Q2 and 90% for Q3). We’re glad to be moving closer to perfection (with no aspirations of actually being

perfect), and have found that a more realistic approach to scheduling events means we are better equipped to attend and successfully serve at each one.

Holiday Catering

Our commissary, Food rEvolution, is home to a handful of outstanding plant-based businesses. It was the hub for two special catering programs over the holiday. The Vegan Thanksgiving Dinner boasted sixteen delectable feast-worthy dishes, sides, and desserts from Littleburg (Vegetable Kitchen), Ginger Roots Kitchen (Vegan Gluten-Free Meal Prep), Queen of Vega (Desserts from the Plant Kingdom) and yours truly. Each item served 4-6 people, and orders could be collected either at Food rEvolution in Stoneham or at our pals Taco Party in Somerville.

The Vegan Holiday Dinner was a smaller program: ten items total from Bartleby's, Littleburg, and Queen of Vega. We heard strong positive feedback from our devils on both programs. Holiday catering always provides a chance to de-stress, but those following a plant-based diet have few options to create a full feast. The Food rEv holiday catering made 2019 special and wicked tasty for our vegan devils in the area.

General Business

Bartleby's hit two major milestones this quarter. After committing (financially) to an upgrade of our website, we moved the sales of our pick-up orders to our online Shop. Previously, only branded merchandise was available through that system, and we were processing invoices and sales of packaged nuggets and sauce manually. On November 22, we added frozen patties to Shop offerings, and made those, as well as our frozen nuggets and fresh sauce, available for easy ordering/processing with Square, the same POS system used on the truck. Just a few weeks later, on December 10, we announced delivery was available. A watershed moment for Bartleby's, we are now able to ship our scratch-made seitan to the 48 states, opening our reach, our chance to expose our brand, and welcoming in new revenue streams.

We are so proud of and delighted by the success of Seitan School. We held two back-to-back Halloween-themed sessions at the end of October, and one Thanksgiving-themed session in November. The October sessions ("Spooky Brunch" and "Spooky Session") included a chance for students to make our October special, Tricky Treats. The programming of the November session ("Feasting Session") taught students how to make an easy, wicked delicious, and totally vegan pumpkin pie. All those events sold out within hours of opening registration, and we had hefty waiting lists for each.

Reviews and Recognition

A selection of recent online reviews, plus feedback provided via our point-of-sale system, Square:

- Bartleby's is the best on earth. (Square)
- Delicious guilt-free vegan food with amazing sauces. Comfort food for the animal lover. (Google)
- I loved the crunch and the sauces! It really made it seem like I was eating real meat. (Yelp)
- Bartleby's is so frickin' good! Amazing fried seitan sandwiches and sauces, all vegan, delicious, filling, and surprisingly cheap. (Facebook)
- They're amazing! The Spicy Seitanic sauce and their Bartleby's Special Sauce are to die for. (Happy Cow)
- I'm not vegan, but I tried one of their sandwiches. It was great! Highly recommend giving them a try. (Yelp)
- Great food served by great people. I wish the truck was there every day. (Yelp)
- Best nuggz I've ever had, not to mention the incredible sauces and sandwiches. (Instagram)
- A piece of seitanic heaven. Bartleby's is revolutionizing the game. (Instagram)
- Is this allowed? (Instagram)

OUR GOALS

Sales

We continued our work toward a "50/50" sales goal for 2019. We wanted to increase our sales in two areas by 50% as compared to 2018:

- **Sales per shift.** Last year, we aimed to reach 100 orders (or sales) per shift on the food truck. In 2019, our goal was 150 orders per shift. Last quarter, we saw a wild range from a low of 43 in December to a high of 176 in October; the average over the three months was 99 orders per shift.
- **Meals served.** In 2018, Bartleby's served over 10,000 meals. In 2019, our goal was 15,000 meals. Meals served are counted as orders fulfilled on the food truck (during weekday service and for special events), pick-up orders fulfilled, and the equivalent proportions of food moved during private catering events. Though we were just shy of this ambitious number at the close of the year, clocking in at 14,725 meals served, our efforts still represent a stunning 54% increase from 2018.

We continued to watch our speed of sales. In 2018, truck staff used an average of 60 seconds to fulfill an order. From the beginning of our service in 2019, we reduced that average rate to 40 seconds per order, and then ran at a range of 45-60 seconds over the final quarter.

Menu

Monthly specials are fun for our staff (conceiving a new item and executing it with particular ingredients for a short period) and they are an excellent tool for keeping our followers and customers engaged. Bartleby's Seitan Stand is always on the move, and we want our devils to feel that the effort of finding us was worth their time. Having a chance to catch a short-lived special sandwich lends good feelings, and we receive a lot of feedback on these items. The top five specials of 2019, in terms of sales, will be brought back in 2020, along with new creations.

General Business

Bartleby's will make its largest business changes in the first quarter of 2020. At the end of January, we return from our winter break with big, bittersweet news:

Excerpt from a letter dated January 23, 2020:

We have some big news. In many ways this change is exciting, full of opportunity and potential. In other ways, it is heartbreaking.

We are moving Bartleby's headquarters from its birthplace in Massachusetts to northwest Arkansas. And not because we don't love the amazing community here, because we do. Your smiling faces and hungry bellies have made our first two years in operation truly magical. We feel lucky to have so many incredible people who surround and support this project. I never thought this truck would make such a big impact—but wild dreams can come true. Mine certainly did.

Arkansas provides a really unique opportunity for Bartleby's. There is a robust food truck community already established in Fayetteville, our destination, and the warmer climate will allow us to operate comfortably all year long. We are also looking to grow Bartleby's menu, and in the heart of the south we can be immersed in the type of culinary scene that inspired our first recipes. The vegan lifestyle is becoming more mainstream: there are vegan options available at many restaurants, and a fully vegan restaurant slated to open over the next few months. Though the popularity of plant-based dining is surging in Arkansas, the demand currently exceeds the supply. Enter Bartleby's...

You can read the entire letter from Stephanie on the blog.

Toward the end of January, we'll return to truck service, dinner pop-ups, and loads of Seitan School sessions—all giddily crammed into about four weeks of operation. At the end of February, Bartleby's will take an estimated eight weeks off to move its business to Fayetteville, AR. Our projects and goals to the end of the first quarter (March 2020) are largely related to the relocation process:

- Secure new permits and licenses to operate in locale
- Establish commissary kitchen rental space with ample room for fryers, freezers, refrigeration, and truck parking
- Establish relationship with mechanic and food truck shop
- Launch Kickstarter campaign to raise relocation funds; introduce new official logo merchandise as Backer rewards
- Introduce new slogans, taglines, and advertising for Fayetteville community (and the surrounds)
- Complete kitchen test to expand menu offerings for catering gigs
- Acquire Woman-Owned Small Business certification (WOSB), which would make it easier for us to access certain resources and programs to grow our business

CLOSING

We made some big changes in 2019, and the launch of our delivery service is a major step toward expanding our reach beyond the bounds of our Boston hoofprint. Over the course of 2020, we'll be able to experiment with different packing materials, labeling, shipping speeds, and product offerings. The delivery service also represents a way to keep feeding our Boston-based devils after we make our move down to Arkansas.

Rebuilding in Arkansas is parts sad, thrilling, and challenging. Fayetteville's latitude is six degrees further south than Boston, which puts us that much closer to Hell (and ironically, in the heart of the Bible Belt). With warmer breezes to heat our devilish little hearts, we'll be ready to connect to a new community of hungry demons, and continue to raise our call, "to hell with meat!"