

The Luxury Gift of Meals for Yourself & Others

Food & Spirits: In today's busy, busy, busy world, there is no more invaluable a treasure than time. Families once gathered around the table for meals on a regular basis. Today it's a rare occasion, mostly because people don't have the time to shop, prepare, cook, serve and clean up after a meal. This is why we're seeing an upsurge in the "home meal replacement" market -- a category that refers to wholesome, prepackaged meals sold at retail and elsewhere to serve as a substitute for what the consumer would normally prepare at home or eat in a restaurant.

The biggest trend we've seen in this market is the gift arena. Delivered food is the latest (and an incredibly easy) way to give anyone a "kitchen retreat." Think new parents, seniors, family, aging parents, clients, or your favorite "domestic engineer." Practically any important date on a calendar is an opportunity to give someone the gift of time: Christmas, birthdays, anniversaries, weddings, baby due dates, etc.

You have probably already seen these types of entrees at your local grocery store, either packaged fresh ready to grab-and-go in the deli section, or the traditional TV dinner section of the frozen foods aisle. However, the demand for home-delivered food is what is really skyrocketing, especially if you can order the food from the convenience of your own computer. Many online home meal replacement companies like ours, MagicKitchen.com, are seeing unprecedented growth because the price of convenience is at an all-time premium.

There are many good options for home meal delivery, but here are a few features to look for:

Quality ingredients -- Does the company clearly state what's in the meal, and can you recognize all of the ingredients? Do they use organic and/or local products? Does each description offer nutritional information? Are there options for people with specific dietary needs, such as low-sodium, low-cholesterol, low-carb?

Customer service -- If you have trouble ordering online (or are technology-averse) can you easily reach a live human being by phone? Many companies have staff ready to discuss and help you order your meal plan.

Flexible delivery schedule -- Does it fit your needs?

Variety of meals available -- Does the menu offer enough different products to keep your interest.

Customizable meals -- If ordering several meals, can you switch out one entrée for another?

Appetizing -- Photos of what you're ordering are a must. And it MUST make you salivate.

Also to be considered is whether the meals arrive fresh or frozen. Fresh is always great for immediate consumption, but consider how quickly your schedule can change on an hour-by-hour basis. For this reason many people opt with meals that arrive frozen so that they can be heated up whenever your stomach rumbles. This way you dictate when you're ready to eat, rather than an expiration date.

These meals are not just for home base. Consumers love the portable convenience for just a few of these scenarios:

- ☐ Lunches at the office
- ☐ Vacations at the cabin in the mountains or at the lake
- ☐ Elderly parents or other family who can't cook for themselves
- ☐ Older children eating at home by themselves while you are out or away.
- ☐ Babysitters or caregivers

When you can afford the very best in life, there is practically no excuse for wasting the most precious commodity, which is time spent together with friends and family.

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