Couch to Couch
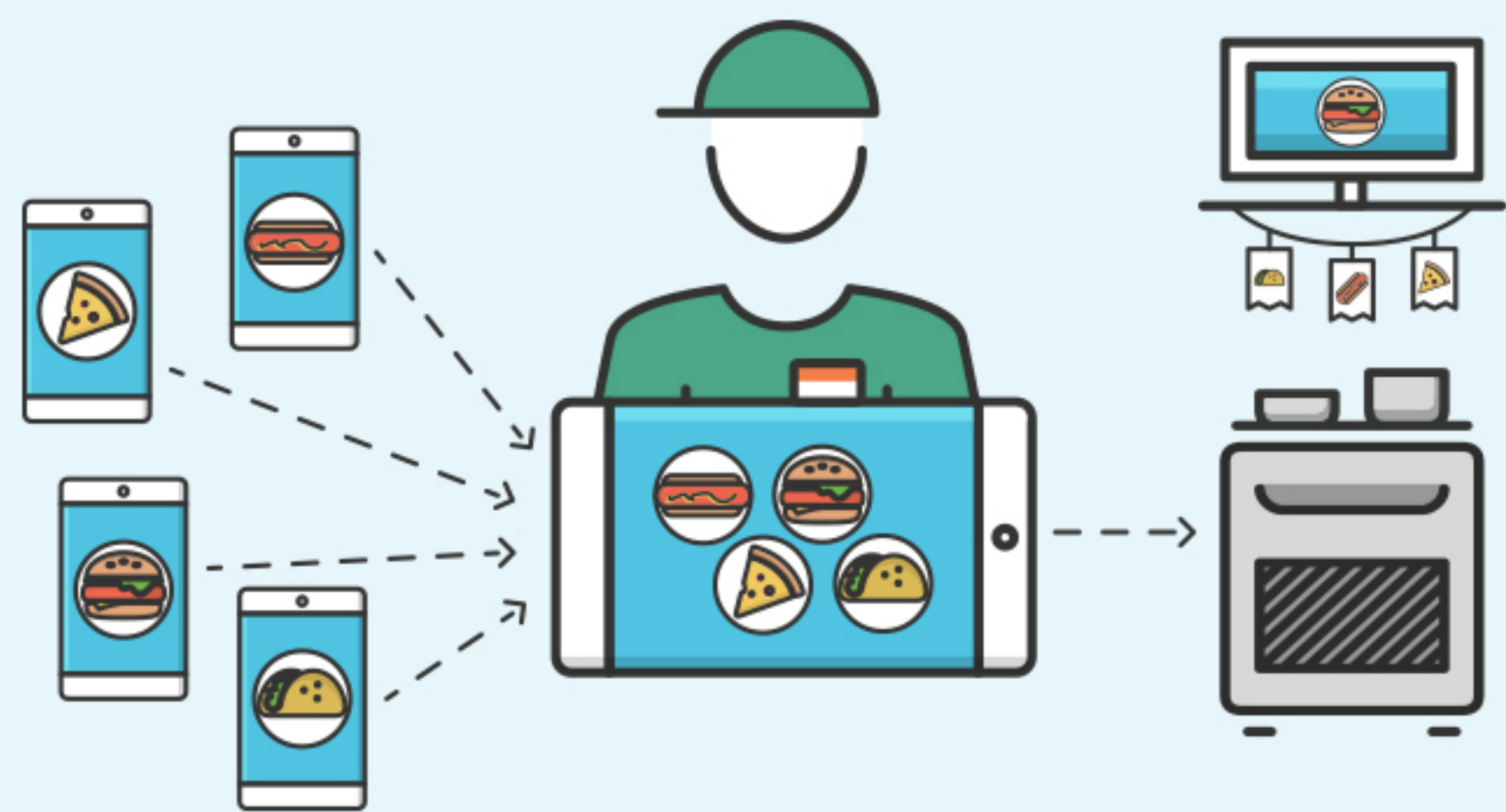
Whether customers order through a third- or first-party platform, it's the experience that matters most.

Third-Party Ordering	First-Party Ordering

Order

Customers often begin by Googling your brand and clicking on the first ordering option that comes up, which is frequently a third-party aggregator. This is the point at which a c-store risks losing control of its customers. Third-party aggregators are great for acquiring new customers, especially those who didn't know that your c-store offered ordering and delivery. However, these aggregators can be a needlessly expensive tool when primarily serving existing customers.

Order

With a first-party ordering system customers order through a branded app or an online system that is connected directly to the POS. Menus update automatically, and the brand has complete control over how food items are presented. If the kitchen runs out of something, that option disappears from the menu and unfulfillable orders are avoided.

In the Store

In the store, orders are received by a designated tablet for the aggregator. The on-site staff must monitor each tablet for new orders and then enter them into the POS by hand. It's a process that lets a c-store onboard a new aggregator quickly, but since orders could get entered incorrectly or be missed entirely, there's the potential for mistakes and disappointed customers. Also, the third party may not have fully up-to-date menus, which could lead customers to order items that are unavailable or inaccurately priced, and the staff has no way to get in contact and correct the order.

In the Store

Instead of landing on a tablet, orders go directly into the POS and right to the kitchen. The staff no longer needs to watch for orders and reenter them, thereby eliminating a point of failure and increasing customer satisfaction. Even when those orders come in through a third-party, having ordering software means that those can be handled through a single screen, rather than through multiple tablets.

Kitchen

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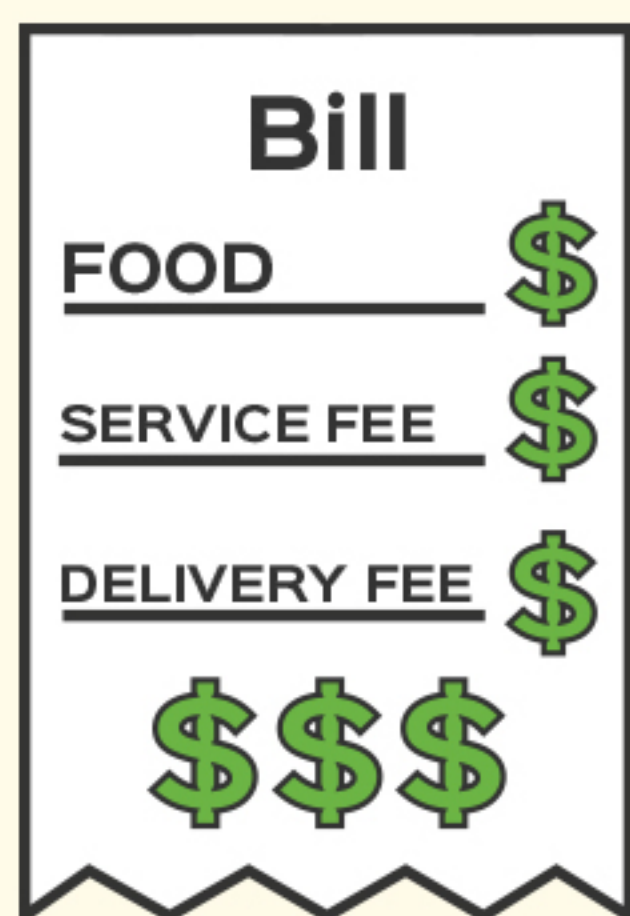
Packaging

Opening the package is a key part of the guest experience, but it's even more important for those who ordered through a third party since this is their first direct touch with the c-store brand. The experience must be great, plus it can include a direct solicitation to join a branded loyalty program or a way to order directly next time.

Packaging

When guests engage with your first-party ordering platform, you know they are fans of your brand. Your packaging can help grow even deeper brand loyalty by promoting your loyalty program. Just as the digital experience needs to be engaging, so does the packaging. Little things must be right, like napkins and utensils, but planning must also be put into the types of packages you use, how the food smells, and how it looks when the package gets opened. Salads must be crisp and bright, soups must be hot, and pastries must look as if they just came out of the case.
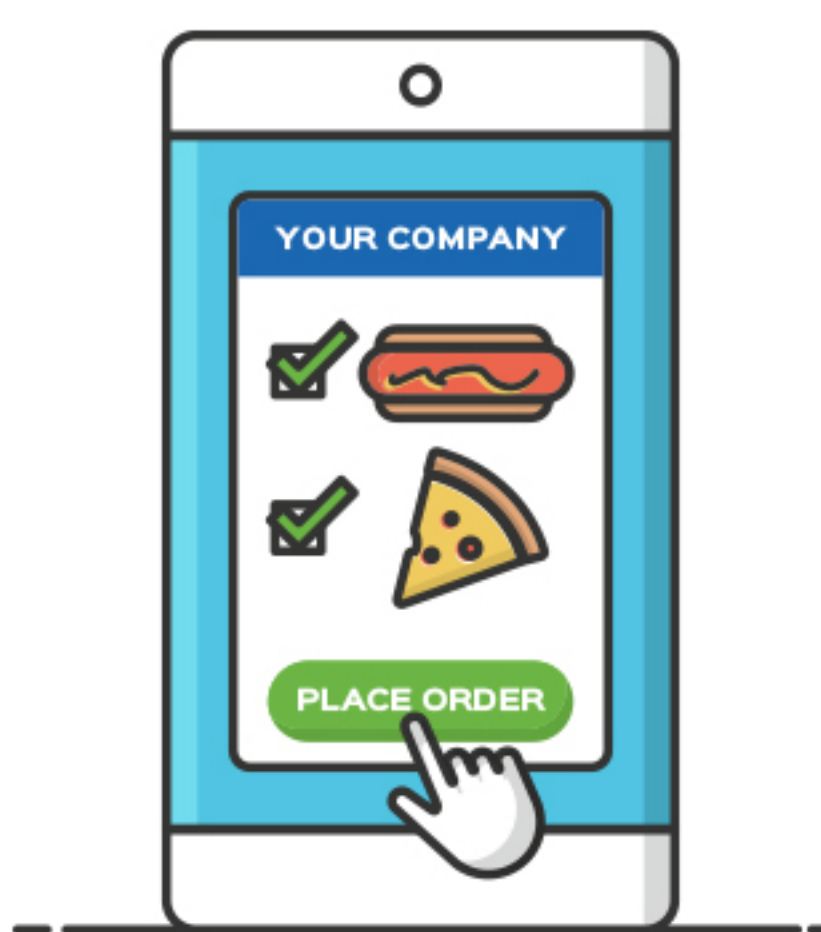
Fulfillment

The vast fleet of delivery personnel provided by third parties offers a great alternative to managing your own. At the same time, not controlling the full workflow can cause problems for your brand. When drivers arrive late or accidentally deliver orders to the wrong location, customers may direct their complaints to the brand, not the aggregator.

Fulfillment

Today's customers expect curbside pickup, which is why it has emerged as a key offering for many c-stores. Those that want to offer delivery can hire their own drivers, but there's also the option of working with a third-party aggregator just for the delivery services. This kind of arrangement enables a brand to take advantage of an existing distribution network while retaining its customer data.

Bill
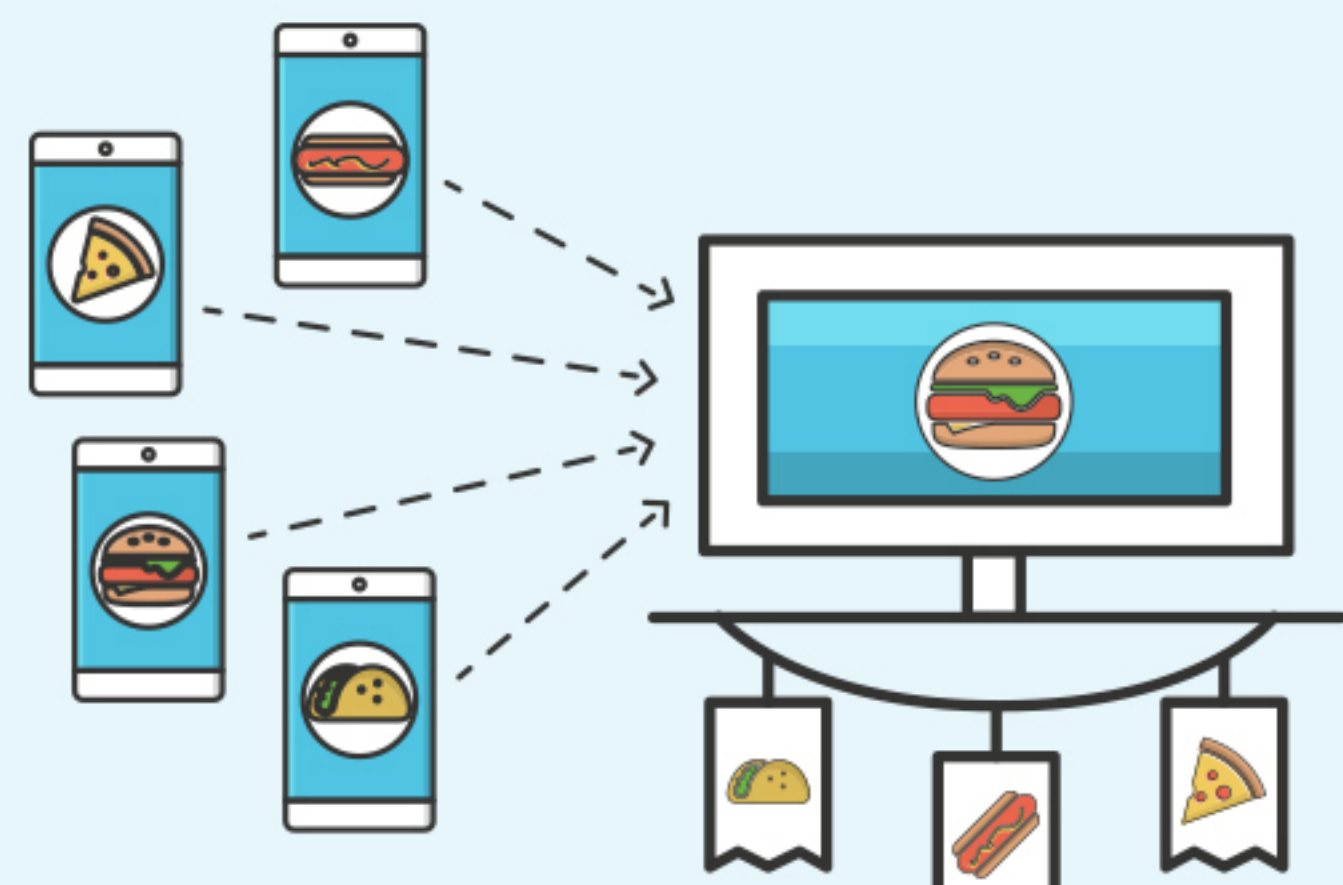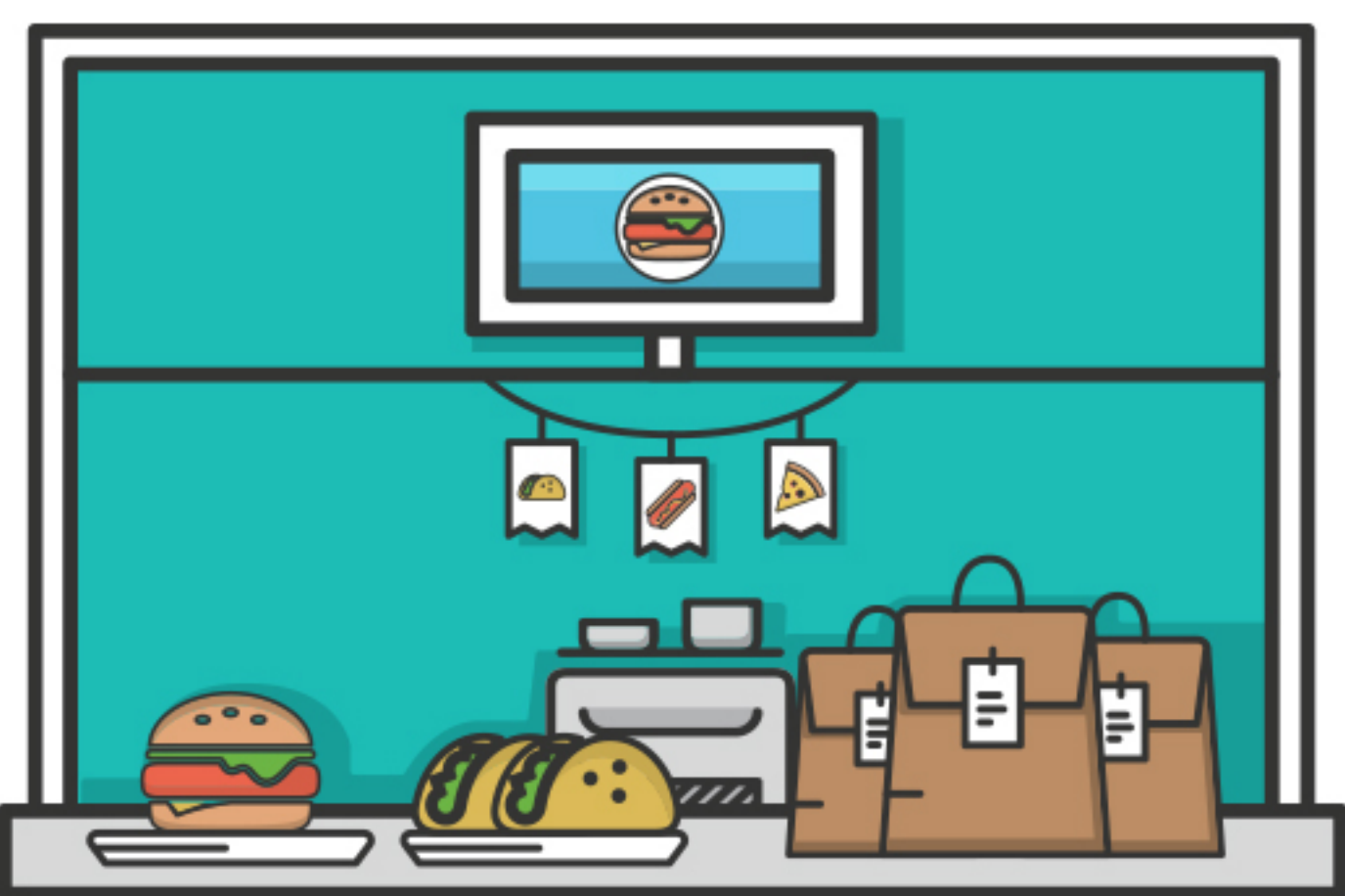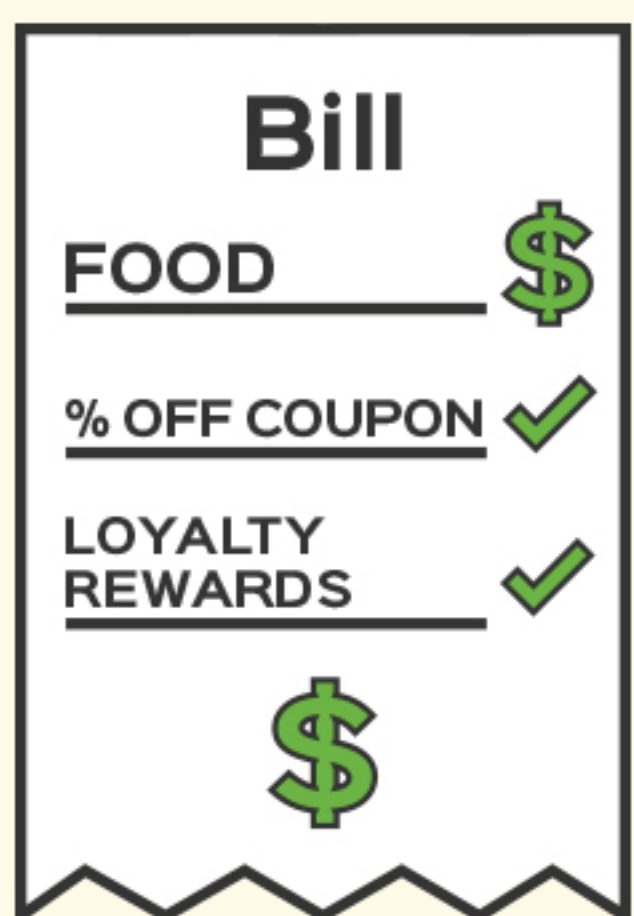FOOD — $
SERVICE FEE — $
DELIVERY FEE — $
$$$

Value

With markups as high as 30%, third-party aggregators can come at a considerable cost. Introducing new customers to the brand is certainly valuable, but if existing customers are ordering through a third party, the expense is harder to justify. And since those existing customers can't earn or use their loyalty rewards, the brand isn't able to access information that might drive additional revenue.

Bill
FOOD — $
% OFF COUPON ✓
LOYALTY REWARDS ✓
$

Value

Controlling the order-and-delivery experience enables customers to earn and use their loyalty rewards. C-stores are also able to offer other services, like a subscription for free delivery or a bonus item for orders over a certain size. These types of offers help keep customers coming back and spending more in the long term.