

# How TouchBistro POS & Reservations Helped La Bartola Navigate the Pandemic



Partners in life sometimes become partners in business. That's the case for Ivan Castro and Pedro Afif, co-founders of [La Bartola](#), a vegan Mexican restaurant in Toronto's Little Italy that opened during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ivan and Pedro met in Mexico and both have a passion for the mountain region of Oaxaca. After immigrating to Toronto, Ivan, a chef, was inspired to bring the flavors, aromas, and culture of Oaxaca to Toronto.

Named after a Mexican folk song, La Bartola is a salute to the home and places the two partners love and a tribute to the women of Mexico as a backbone of the culture.

While Ivan and Pedro had solidified the restaurant's concept, reaching opening day would prove more challenging than either of them had expected.

## La Bartola's challenge: Opening a restaurant during the pandemic

Opening a restaurant during a pandemic is not for the faint of heart. Planning an opening amidst Toronto's lockdowns involved false starts, waiting, and pivots.

"We had an opening date and we were very close to the opening preparations, and then we didn't open so then we had to push it back four months. Pausing was very challenging because we had nothing to do but wait," Ivan says.

## A flexible POS to the rescue

La Bartola needed a flexible-yet-powerful point of sale (POS) system that could adapt to its ever-changing needs. Ivan and Pedro found that with [TouchBistro POS](#).

**"TouchBistro really helped us from the beginning," Pedro says. "Customer service was a great surprise for us. They helped us define what we needed before we opened because we didn't know what we needed. That helped us a lot."**

The team was able to learn how to use the iPad-based POS system quickly thanks to its familiarity.

"It's so second nature. The learning curve is very short [with TouchBistro]. I really enjoy the way the system is very [portable] and 'smartphoney.' It's fast and simple [to learn]," Pedro says.

Because of the severe labor shortage affecting the hospitality industry, La Bartola had to ensure its team could do more with less.

"One of the features that I love the most about TouchBistro POS is its ability to split bills," Pedro says. "It makes things so easy for servers and for the restaurant's operation as a whole."

Another feature that eased pressure on the team is TouchBistro

POS' mobility. Because of the restaurant's long interior, Ivan and Pedro split the space into three sections: a chef's table, the "Oaxaca room," and a bar, "which is inspired by apothecaries and markets in Mexico," Ivan says. During lockdowns, La Bartola also had a front and a back patio.

While the restaurant's unique configuration adds a wow factor, it can be challenging for employees to navigate.

"When we are super busy, it's kind of complicated for our staff work," Ivan says. Fortunately, with just a wifi connection and iPads, servers could reach various sections of the restaurant's dining room and patio with TouchBistro's mobile POS system.

When Toronto implemented lockdowns that restricted restaurants from offering indoor dining, La Bartola needed the flexibility to adjust its POS licenses as its needs and the city's restrictions changed. It could do that with TouchBistro.

**"In the beginning, we needed a ton of licensing and then we had to cut it back because we were semi-closed. Because of the flexibility of the POS we were able to rescale it up. That flexibility in licensing really helped us," Pedro says.**

During lockdowns, cash flow slowed down. TouchBistro was able to offer La Bartola delayed billing to ease financial pressures until business picked back up.

“We created a heart-to-heart relationship with [TouchBistro] because when we opened we were ready to go, and then we had

## From surviving to thriving

Ivan and Pedro have made it through the most difficult part of the pandemic, and it's made them more savvy, resilient restaurateurs. Instead of focusing on survival, they can now invest their energy into growing the business. With TouchBistro POS and Reservations, they're ready to handle whatever comes their way.

For instance, reports from TouchBistro POS help the restaurateurs make informed business decisions.

“Because of [TouchBistro's] reports we noticed that one of our best-sellers was the [taco] tasting platter,” Ivan says. “So we decided to add another tasting platter. Instead of six tacos, [it's a] 10-taco tasting platter.”

As for [TouchBistro Reservations](#), Pedro says that the platform “really helped us to create a relationship with our customers. It provides the clients an easy experience to book. When they reserve through the system, they have a chance to leave a comment and to let us know if they have a request or if there's something that they're coming in for that's special. We appreciate that information because it allows us to serve our customers

## A bright future for La Bartola

Equipped with TouchBistro, La Bartola has made it through several lockdowns and turned into an established restaurant. TouchBistro POS has provided the flexibility La Bartola needed to kick off operations and the insights Pedro, Ivan, and their team need now to thrive. With TouchBistro Reservations, the restaurant has been able to exceed guests' expectations and keep them coming back for more.

to close. TouchBistro was super kind and they froze our billing and they have done it after every lockdown, so that's been a great support,” says Pedro.

better and meet their expectations. If they're here for a birthday or an anniversary, we are always better prepared in advance when they let us know.”

Features such as customized guest profiles and post-dining reviews also, “gives us insight into their experience. [Guests] leave a lot of reviews because the system follows up with them after [a visit] so there's a lot of information coming that we find very useful for insights,” Pedro says.

Something that they learned through reviews is that diners want to spend more time at the restaurant. Because of those insights, Pedro and Ivan extended seating times.

TouchBistro Reservations doesn't just benefit customers. It also makes managing bookings easier for employees.

**“I really enjoy the mobile app. It gives us the ability to check in on how the place is doing. I like that it integrates into the phone and you get messages with cancellations and reservations modifications, so it always keeps us in the know,” says Pedro.**



**Do you want to manage your entire restaurant from one system?**

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