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Chennai: Kirana stores go hi-tech, get custom apps to run business

Aparna Desikan | TNN | Apr 14, 2020, 09:49 IST

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Neighbourhood grocers have catered to many residents during the lockdown

Residents near the North terminus road in Tondiarpet or Vallal Pachaiyappan Street in Kancheepuram buy provisions from their grocer in the nook, flipping through the store's app, as more neighbourhood kirana stores are launching their apps, aided by startups, to reach out a newer and their loyal customers.

Mahesh S, proprietor of Tondiarpet-based MyBasket, got his own app little over a week ago. "We don't deliver at the moment, but customers can avoid the hassle of standing in a queue. Using this app, one can order online even during non-business hours but they can pick up the next day while the items are already packed and ready," he said. Still on a trial basis, Mahesh has not opened the app to everyone. "We will open it to more people soon. Managing volumes of data and bills is difficult when you already have fewer people and advance orders on the app help us there too," he said.

Besides partnering with an existing food delivery app to deliver groceries, kirana stores are now getting their own apps by partnering with companies including GoFrugal, Snapbizz, Jumbotail – which offer tech support for kirana stores, initially free till September.

Some kirana stores which were initially taking orders on WhatsApp were unable to manage large volumes and hence moved to having their own apps. "Before lockdown, we could manage, but now I am getting on average 150 orders per day, and recently it peaked to 290 orders. With restrictions from the government on the store timing and the number of staff, I can only serve 50%-60% of these orders," said Murugan S, proprietor, Raja Shop Inn, who uses the app Order Easy. He added that after recently coming on board, they can free up the current resources from manual work and quickly service 500 customers a day.

GoFrugal is seeing a 30% rise in store owners coming on board. "These applications will enable the store owners to practice social distancing and also continue to provide services with online ordering and contactless delivery," said Kumar Vembu, founder, GoFrugal.

Having their own app is also convenient from a stockkeeping perspective. The store owners add that partnering with food delivery companies, which recently began servicing essentials, means double the work when it comes to keeping track of stock. "There is no dependency on external agencies. We can deliver all across Kancheepuram with just 25 delivery boys," said Zainul Abideen, proprietor, Kanchi Supermarket.

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