

Foodservice Updates

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Perfect your packaging

The pandemic has put restaurant packaging under a magnifying glass. That will only increase this winter, with fewer (if any) dine-in guests in your restaurant. Your packaging is what ensures the experience of eating your food is as good at a distance as it is in your dining room. Is yours up to the task? The materials you're using – as well as your to-go menu – should be adjusting to the times. If items your restaurant is known for don't travel well – like burgers and fries – make new packaging a priority. While the pandemic has posed seemingly endless challenges for the restaurant industry, it has also sparked innovation – including the development of new packaging options (along with new uses for existing packaging, like paella being delivered in pizza boxes). Eco-friendly options are on the rise right now – and will likely again be more of a consumer demand as we emerge from the pandemic, which has caused many restaurants to return to plastic and Styrofoam packaging for the short term. If you're making packaging changes right now, consider packaging made from biodegradable materials or easily renewable sources like bamboo, as this report from Stylus explains. As the distribution of the vaccine makes life feel safer, you may also be able to return to reusable containers that guests can return and refill. A recent McKinsey report said post-pandemic, packaging companies will need to think about three requirements going forward: sustainability, hygiene and effective direct-to-consumer design. Restaurants should have a growing number of packaging options available to help them perfect the off-premise experience.



Make sure your tech enhances your service

The technology you're adopting now to bring efficiencies to your business and minimize contact may have the unintended effect of distancing your guests from your staff – and the service they have come to expect from your brand. As you introduce technology into your business, make sure that it includes features that somehow replicate (and ideally, enhance) your service. When your return customers order food from you online or via your app, are they prompted with information on their past orders to help streamline the processing of their current order? Whenever they are in the vicinity of your restaurant, could you use predictive analytics to send them a promotion they are likely to crave? Using artificial intelligence can help you demonstrate that you know a guest well – and fill any empathy gaps that exist when a guest has less human contact with your brand.



Get ready for a data deluge

The pandemic has made us all the more reliant on data from a growing number of sources – and the restaurant brands using their own data most adeptly (and pulling from useful external data sources too) have been the ones most able to steer their way through the challenges of the past year. In its recent list of top-five predictions for restaurant tech in the year ahead, Restaurant Technology News said operators will need to be ready to take advantage of the “tidal wave of data” resulting from their interactions with consumers. So how could this look in practice? If you have a large customer base of sports fans, the report says, you could be combining your first-party transaction data with player stats, weather changes and your inventory to predict sales on game days. And that model adjusts depending on the demographics you're serving: Whoever your ideal customer is, there are multiple sources of data that can predict how that person will make decisions. Are you collecting data from sources that can help you make the best decisions in the year ahead?





Pipette with Charred Cauliflower and Peruvian Aji pesto

Ingredients:

- 1 ¼ Box, Barilla Pipette
- 5Tbsp, Vegetable oil
- 3Garlic cloves, chopped
- 3Tbsp, ginger Chopped
- ¼ Cup, Toasted cashews
- 1 ¼ Cup, cilantro (Stems and leaves) 4Tbsp, Aji Amarillo paste
- 4Cups, small cauliflower Florets
- Salt and pepper to taste
- ¼ Cup, Cilantro leaves
- ¼ Cup, cashews toasted and chopped

Presto pesto

Pesto is a menu game-changer: Not only can it add vibrant color to a dish, but there are so many variations of it depending on the produce, herbs, nuts and oils you have on hand. Create a minty pesto to lighten up a rich dish, a smoky variation to add depth, or a spicy one infused with global spices to elevate a new menu item.

Food Trends



Instructions:

1. Bring a large pot of water to a boil and cook the pasta according to the directions, reserve 1 cup of the pasta cooking water.
2. In a blender combine the garlic, ginger, cashews, cilantro and aji paste and pulse until coarsely ground.
3. Add the vegetable oil and pulse until a pesto is formed
4. In a large 12 inch skillet heat 1 Tbsp of vegetable oil until almost smoking, add the cauliflower and saute for 2-3 minutes or until lightly browned, season with salt and pepper then remove from the skillet and place onto a plate.
5. In a large bowl add the pesto and pasta cooking water, drain and mix the pasta until well incorporated. Fold in the cauliflower then garnish with cilantro leaves and cashews.

Recipe and photo courtesy of Barilla



Are you going far enough with your contactless experience?

Contactless ordering and payment have been on the rise since the beginning of the pandemic – and to be sure, they are safeguards guests appreciate. But there are many other touchpoints in your facility that concern consumers right now. Trace the path of a typical guest in your restaurant – are there touchpoints you can remove or other safeguards you can apply to make them more sanitary? Do guests have to touch parts of your trash bins – both those in restrooms and others placed in or around your dining rooms – to discard waste? Do they have to hand over a table marker to claim their order? When they visit a restroom, do they have to use an air dryer that can spread contaminants through the space? If possible, place contactless paper towel dispensers in restrooms and near bins or compactors. Help limit the need to touch dispensers and door handles throughout your facility – or make it possible for people to sanitize their hands afterwards.



#FoodSafety

New guidance to protect your indoor air

As helpful as cleaning and sanitizing surfaces in your restaurant can be, protecting your guests from COVID-19 is largely about safeguarding the air they breathe – by maintaining physical distance between your staff and guests and between guests themselves, and taking steps to purify the air flowing through your facility. In December, the National Restaurant Association updated its pandemic operating guidance to include recommendations for HVAC maintenance, the use of portable air purifiers, and the best way to protect the safety of staff changing air filters, among other recommendations. Review the new guidance here (<https://bit.ly/38CbrqU>).



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Think local this year

A number of recent reports are calling 2021 the year of local digital marketing for restaurants. It makes sense: Travel could still take some time to return to pre-pandemic levels and consumers will continue to rely on local businesses – and their smartphone searches – to connect with businesses they like in their neighborhood. Making sure you're as visible as possible online to people in your area can have significant benefits: According to data from Hubspot, 97 percent of consumers searched online to find a local business and 64 percent of

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those searching for restaurants online followed through with a purchase within an hour. If you're just ramping up your local digital marketing efforts, claim and optimize all local pages (via Google My Business local packs), respond to online reviews in a timely and professional way, and then optimize your ranking factors (these tips (<http://bit.ly/3rosIMV>) may help you improve your local search engine optimization if you need help). If you're curious to know what restaurant brands are generating the best sales growth as a result of their local digital marketing efforts (and what they're doing to stand out), check out this recent report from the marketing technology firm SOCi (<http://bit.ly/3aGuW4w>).



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