

Foodservice Updates

Week of:
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In This Issue

- [Making food safety lessons stick](#)
- [Using AI to fine-tune operational efficiency](#)
- [Capitalize on new ways to help guests enjoy restaurant food at home](#)

Restaurants streamline their menus (but expand upon their snacks and drinks)

It may be the ideal way to keep costs in check while offering guests the kinds of appealing options that keep them engaged and bring them back: Offer creative snack foods and beverages that are worth the trip outside of meal times. Think functional beverages – like smoothies that offer an energy boost or other nutritional elements ideal for the pre- or post-workout crowd. The same goes for smaller nibbles that can drive traffic during slower parts of the day, attract a younger demographic, and may be easier to feature on a rotating basis as limited-time offers to keep your menu fresh. A recent Restaurant Dive report says more foodservice businesses are taking this route – simplifying the main menu but growing their options in other areas – in an effort to reduce operational complexity in their kitchens and manage costs.





Tech Talk

Using AI to fine-tune operational efficiency

Across the foodservice industry, AI is impacting operators' ability to pinpoint inefficiencies and make real-time adjustments. This year, look for the technology to help restaurants streamline menus during busy shifts – making it possible to focus on items that require less complicated preparation when a kitchen is at capacity or understaffed, according to TechHQ. In a similar vein, AI is allowing more restaurants to use dynamic pricing during peak periods so they can maximize the benefits of churning out orders at those times – or possibly encourage people to stagger those orders at off-peak hours. On the menu itself, AI can identify a restaurant's most profitable items (or unprofitable items) and highlight the winners for guests in order to help drive more sales in that direction. AI has applications after the meal too: A recent Paytronix report says restaurants on its ordering platform will be able to use a ChatGPT-powered chatbot to automatically engage with guests after they finish their meal, then route their feedback to the store manager.



Making food safety lessons stick

When you think back on the best teachers you had when you were in school, they most likely weren't the ones who talked at you during class, expecting you to soak up everything they said or assigned homework. Yet this is how food safety training goes in many organizations. Making these lessons take hold in the minds of employees calls for a different approach. In a recent podcast discussion, Adam Spach (founder of KAS Concepts, the home of No Boring Training) and food safety experts Matthew Regusci and Francine Shaw covered what tends to make food safety training sessions more effective in getting through to participants. Of course, it's important to teach people the right steps to take to protect safety – but just as important are the why and the how behind the actions. For example, why is it important to take the temperature of a food? Well, a person could end up in the hospital if they eat food that hasn't been thoroughly cooked. The restaurant could even go out of business. To illustrate this, you can share some real-life examples of when this has happened for restaurants. Attaching specific stories to lessons can help them sink in – there are plenty of them available on sites such as stopfoodborneillness.org. Shaw also suggested adjusting how content is shared, encouraging the use of mnemonic devices to help people make associations to food safety knowledge. For example, you might help people remember that poultry needs to be cooked to the highest temperature as compared to other animal proteins by saying that “birds fly high.” Above all, it's important to make food safety training feel less like a lesson and more like a conversation. It helps to encourage food safety discussion not only in classroom settings, but also in team huddles and one-on-one meetings. This can also encourage people to share their own examples of things they have seen on the job that may serve as learning opportunities for others.



#FoodSafety

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Capitalize on new ways to help guests enjoy restaurant food at home

As challenging as the pandemic made running a restaurant or other foodservice business, it also triggered a wave of creativity among operators as chefs were challenged to find new ways to bring restaurant-quality food to people at home. Now, though consumers are free to return to restaurants, many continue to seek ways of enjoying quality food without the hassle of cooking or leaving the house. A new business stream has emerged from this. On the surface, it sounds like catering, but it's more about marrying the experience of restaurant dining with the comforts of staying at home – and it's helping many operators remain profitable right now. In fact, it's contributed to 2024 being the year of the dinner party, according to Eater. For example, a recent report notes the growing appeal of Moveable Feast, a company that hires chefs to prepare meals for up to 12 people that are then shipped to points around the country. The idea for the business was born out of the pandemic, when Moveable Feast cofounder John Stubbs was looking for ways to support chefs. While participating in the business does generate some in-person restaurant visits, it mainly gives the restaurants an additional means of getting their brand out to hungry consumers. Similar meal packages are popping up around the country in cities featuring high-end restaurants. increasingly, consumers looking to host a dinner party can pay to turn their home into something like a small satellite location of that restaurant, with the multi-course food and drink menu prepared and served by the restaurant's chef. Regardless of the kind of food and drink you serve, can you envision new ways of bringing it to your guests and their friends on their own turf?



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