

# Foodservice Updates

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## Time for some spring cleaning?

The new season brings new food to the menu and will likely inject some new energy into your restaurant as tourism season begins in many parts of the country. As Ashish Alfred, chef and owner of the Alfred Restaurant Group, told Modern Restaurant Management recently, it's a good time to do some spring cleaning to make sure the back of your house is ready – and to give it a refresh if not. That includes taking a careful look at your menu to ensure you're focusing on quality over quantity with your options, as well as making sure you're doing so in a way that is profitable, minimizes waste and simplifies food preparation for your staff. Doing more with less extends to other areas of your business too: Enhance your efforts to cross-train staff to build skills across your team, identify opportunities to automate or simplify food preparation and compliance tasks, and review supplier contracts to make sure you're getting the most you can from your agreements. You may also be able to extend the reach of your business in low-labor ways through online ordering and delivery. Then, think about how you might provide creative, experiential, high-value experiences for your guests in the months ahead. Depending on the range of guests you serve, that could mean planning a series of onsite events that showcase your chef or specialty menu items, or finding new ways to get your food onto guests' tables in their homes and offices.





# Tech Talk

## Use tech to smooth out these bottlenecks for guests

What technology makes the most sense for you adopt in your restaurant? Much of it depends on your service category and your guests' attitudes about using tech, according to new research published by the National Restaurant Association. In the association's first post-pandemic research about technology integration in restaurants, it found that while three-quarters of operators say using technology gives them a competitive edge, many still see opportunities to do more with it. While some tech that makes perfect sense in a quick-service setting would feel out of place in a fine dining restaurant, a universal theme came through in the research: Guests across the board like technology that facilitates ordering and payment – whether that happens via a smartphone app or a tablet at the table. If you can identify bottlenecks in this area and resolve them in ways that are intuitive for your guest demographic, this could be a helpful place to focus future tech investment. It may help you capitalize on the final interactions you have with guests before they collect their order from you or leave your restaurant after a meal. When their experience is smooth, they are primed to join your loyalty program, leave a positive online review, or share photos of their experience with friends. Does your existing tech provide an easy and positive final interaction with a guest?



# Combine tech-based and analog food safety controls

Despite the rise in real-time, tech-based controls designed to help businesses monitor foodborne illness risks, outbreaks continue to be an issue for foodservice operations. The CDC recorded 519 norovirus outbreaks between August 2023 and January of this year, a sharp rise from the previous year's numbers, and Salmonella has impacted people across 32 states in recent months. On top of food safety technology that helps foodservice operations monitor protocols and stay alert to problems, old-fashioned food safety practices are just as important. A Food Safety Tech report says this should include thorough, frequent handwashing; proper hand hygiene prior to handling food; and the use of alcohol-based sanitizer as an added precaution – not a substitute – for handwashing. It's also important to clean and sanitize high-touch surfaces and equipment regularly – and wash and sanitize produce to eliminate contaminants (the recent Salmonella outbreak was linked to cantaloupe and pre-cut fruit products). The report also advises careful handling and proper cooking of seafood, particularly shellfish, and having an employee policy with clear guidelines for managing staff illness, especially regarding when it's important to avoid handling food or reporting to work.



**#FoodSafety**

# Foodservice CEO

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## Understanding the data you're gathering

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Advancements in restaurant technology in recent years have shown the potential to provide significant value, transforming how restaurants work and manage resources. But at the same time, the areas where restaurant operators can invest in tech have become so diverse – ranging from mobile POS systems to robotics to generative AI – that it can be difficult to know where to focus tech spending and how to allocate funds, particularly as expenses increase in other parts of restaurant businesses. Bank of America Global Research found that IT budgets have doubled since the pandemic, now accounting for 7-10 percent of revenue. They expect spending to continue at that level going forward. As a result of tech spending to date, many restaurants are awash in data about their businesses. What's less clear is whether they are in the strongest possible position to benefit from the layers of insights that data can provide. Cristin O'Hara, Restaurant Group head for Bank of America Commercial Banking, said recently that it would be prudent for restaurants to prepare for the next phase of using technology to improve performance by investing in specialists who can analyze the data that various technologies generate, then make recommendations on the best ways restaurants can profit from those insights. "Those that don't spend the time and money on that now, I think, are going to be behind the curve," she said.



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