

Foodservice Updates

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Taking care of your top guests

Your loyalty program members are valuable – but do you know exactly how valuable? A recent Paytronix study may provide some insight. It collected in-store and online transactions for full-service restaurants, quick-service restaurants and convenience stores that occurred between January 1, 2020 and June 30, 2023. The results confirmed that active loyalty program members are climbing steadily, with FSRs seeing a 16 percent increase in members and QSRs seeing a 24 percent increase over the course of the study. But how these people are spending is more telling: The research found that in 2022, FSR and QSR active loyalty members had check sizes that were at least 5 percent higher than those of non-loyalty members. Further, the top 10 percent of active loyalty program members were responsible for nearly half of all loyalty visits (and spending) across concepts. These guests are true VIPs. In your restaurant, are they getting some special focus? There is a lot of noise in the loyalty space right now, with restaurant brands making bold offers aiming to grab people's attention and generate increased program participation. But the offers may not even be practical for most guests. Drilling down on the data you have about your best guests will always be most helpful in determining how to take care of them. What do these guests love about your restaurant? Is it your homemade pasta? Your inventive desserts? Your friendly staff? Can you build an event, a reward, or simply include a personal touch around these elements for your best guests?



Tech Talk

Bring transparency to your supply chain

How well do you understand the path your menu items have to take to make it from their source to your restaurant? Being able to trace the journey accurately can help you zero in on the origin of recalls promptly (before they pose food safety issues), identify bottlenecks that delay products en route to you, and generally give you greater confidence in the safety and quality of what you're serving. As a recent article in Restaurant News indicates, the Internet of Things can connect each link of your supply chain using sensors, RFID tags and blockchain technology – and it is an important tool to bring transparency to the path your food takes before it reaches your guests. If there are links in your supply chain that you don't see as clearly as the others, ensure your suppliers are on the same page about food safety and the best ways to protect it.



At FSTEC, restaurant tech gets back to basics



If you're feeling overwhelmed by the restaurant technology options available today and where they seem to be taking restaurants, you might be relieved to hear about the key themes that emerged from FSTEC, the annual conference of foodservice information executives and technology vendors. A Nation's Restaurant News report from the event, which was held in Dallas in late September, indicated that it was less about robots and the flashier side of tech than it was about back-of-house software solutions and a general sense of caution about finding technology that provides the best value. Restaurant operators are watching their spending right now and feeling cautious about stepping into new territory with technology. There was a focus on how tech can support back-of-house efficiency – how restaurants can marry AI and operational data to better manage tasks such as inventory management and employee scheduling, for example. Further, there was some push and pull between the need for technology and the desire to provide traditional hospitality. How is your business balancing the two?

Trends

Creative cross-cultural collaboration

In a report earlier this year, Michelin-starred chefs said that as the world has reopened to travel, cross-cultural cuisine is offering new and creative opportunities to restaurants. Think Thai-Spanish tapas and even Japanese-Italian dishes – combinations that pique guests' curiosity and promise to enhance the experience of dining out with others. Trying this doesn't require you to turn your menu upside down – it could be about hosting a guest chef from a partner restaurant to create dishes for a special event or creating a limited-time offer for your loyal guests. Are there opportunities for your restaurant to push the cultural boundaries of its menu?



Holding everyone accountable for food safety

In an environment where so many employees are new, it can be easy for people to look to others to manage food safety tasks. But in reality, it needs to be part of everyone's job description. Does everyone on your team take ownership of it? In a recent report in *Modern Restaurant Management*, food safety expert Francine Shaw advises operators to support food safety through regular evaluations, internal audits and performance reviews. Make sure your staff have feedback mechanisms to report issues too. This can help you identify problems and stop them in their tracks, prompt some (non-punitive) corrective training on the spot, and also give you an opportunity to recognize and reward staff who consistently demonstrate a commitment to protecting food safety. When your team sees that their food safety efforts are valuable – to you and to them – you'll be able to weave them into your restaurant's culture.



#FoodSafety

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Be pest-aware

Pests are looking for shelter during the cooler months and your kitchen is likely a warm, fragrant attraction for them. But you can take steps to prevent an infestation – or at least spot the early signs of one and handle it before it becomes a full-blown safety problem. In addition to having your staff check pest traps regularly, ask them to be aware of other warning signs: cardboard or other containers that look like they have been chewed, shredded paper or cardboard that rodents might use for nesting, droppings, the sounds of scratching or other possible animal activity in the walls, unusual smells, or insect activity in or around bins or food storage areas.



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Zero in on what makes you special

It's competitive out there: According to research from the National Restaurant Association, 47 percent of operators expect competition to be more intense than last year. To be sure, the number of tools that operators have at their disposal to collect data and draw conclusions from it are raising the bar for competition. But despite the reams of metrics operators can study about their business, gaining an edge (and building authentic connections with guests) still really comes down to traditional marketing and public relations – knowing who you want to be, understanding your audience and why people come to you, and then crafting options and offers that fit neatly into their lives. This is especially critical if your business looks very similar to others in your neighborhood. A recent report from Modern Restaurant Management demonstrates the power of understanding your uniqueness in a crowded field. It shared case studies of two coffee shops operating in similar environments – they were in comparable city locations, had many competitors nearby, and had similar menus and interiors. On the surface, one might think of these businesses as interchangeable. But one business positioned itself as a destination for people working in nearby corporations, while the other positioned itself as an expert about coffee. This key difference was the seed that helped the businesses craft distinct events, social media posts, menus, atmospheres, you name it. So what makes your business unique? Understanding this and communicating it clearly to the public is the first step in building the loyalty that your restaurant needs to succeed.



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