

Foodservice Updates

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Step up your suggestive selling – beyond the drive-thru

Intouch Insight's newly released 23rd Annual Drive-Thru Study tracked the performance of key brands in the quick-service space – and some of the lessons are worth considering in other restaurant categories as well. For instance, suggestive selling was again found to be a useful means for restaurants to direct guests' attention to special offers and boost check totals. While it tends to add time to transactions, it doesn't do so evenly: In the drive-thru setting, it added an average of 10 seconds to service time, but when the suggestive sell occurred after the order was placed (versus during the initial greeting) the orders took 28 seconds less to complete. Restaurant brands that are less focused on shaving seconds off the order completion process can still reap benefits from consistent suggestive selling – but surprisingly few brands follow through with it. (In the study, only 56 percent of the measured interactions across all brands included suggestive selling – even though it's a more natural practice in the quick-service category.) That said, the brands that have implemented AI to automate suggestive selling upsold 88 percent of orders. In your online and app-based orders, are you automating suggestive selling – and incorporating AI-based applications to make consistent, targeted suggestions? Even if you're not operating in the drive-thru space, if you're not yet making additional suggestions based on a person's ordering history, at a time when they are hungry and already craving your food, you are likely leaving money on the table on more orders than you might expect.



Tech Talk

Make way for digital makelines

If you're looking for ways to manage high guest demand and unsteady labor with the help of technology, brands are offering new examples of how it can be done – or at least how they are approaching it based on the popularity of different menu items. Take Chipotle, which recently introduced a test of an automated digital makeline in collaboration with Hyphen, a foodservice platform that helps automate kitchen operations. A Fast Casual report says the brand will be using the automated makeline for digital orders of its bowls and salads, which comprise 65 percent of its business. Each dish travels along the makeline as an intelligent dispenser releases the desired ingredients. When the item arrives at the end of the makeline, a staff member places a lid on the dish and adds any final requested items to the order. The goal is to free up employees for other tasks and increase capacity for (and accuracy of) digital orders. It's easy to see how this might help a restaurant better adapt to employee absences as well. Looking at your menu, are there certain dishes that make up a large portion of your sales and would be easy to automate?



As the value of data grows, so do privacy concerns



As data is becoming a more powerful predictor of business success, restaurants are transforming into data warehouses. In the process, they must consider their responsibilities for protecting both themselves and the people who offer their personal information. One recent real-world example of this is White Castle's use of a terms & conditions page on their drive thru ordering screen, which is perhaps a sign of similar policies to come in restaurants making use of guest data. The general public is increasingly aware of how valuable their data is – and that it must be protected. A recent Forbes report suggested that consumers' growing awareness of data privacy is generating trust issues, which isn't a big surprise considering the regularity of cyber breaches. As you set out to collect data from guests and others, it is becoming more important to have a technology provider you trust to help you understand how you're using and protecting that data – and what immediate steps to take if you lose control of it.

Trends

Thinking of your menu as medicine

As awareness continues to grow around the connection between the food and drink people consume and the physical and mental benefits (or consequences) of it, an opportunity is opening up in foodservice. Food, in general, has become its own wellness category, viewed by many as a form of medicine that can protect the gut, brain and heart. In the process, consumers are becoming more aware of the specific foods, nutrients, colors and ingredient combinations they should be incorporating into their diets. Looking at your menu, are there gaps you can fill with delicious but also health-forward ingredients?



Reduce waste to improve food safety

Your waste management and food safety practices go hand in hand: If you have too much excess stock, you run the risk of serving ingredients that are past expiration. At the very least, this may give your guests a less-than-great dining experience with you, but at worst, you may expose guests to a foodborne illness caused by spoiled or expired ingredients. By keeping a close watch on your stock and using automated tools to monitor it, you're better able to plan in advance to ensure your restaurant is preparing and serving foods while they are still fresh. In the process, you'll be offering guests a safer dish. A recent Restaurant News report details how Internet-of-Things (IoT) devices can help restaurant kitchens gather data on temperature, humidity, light exposure and other conditions that can impact food quality. Are you using these tools to optimize your inventory management and minimize waste?



#FoodSafety

Maximize your food safety program's return on investment

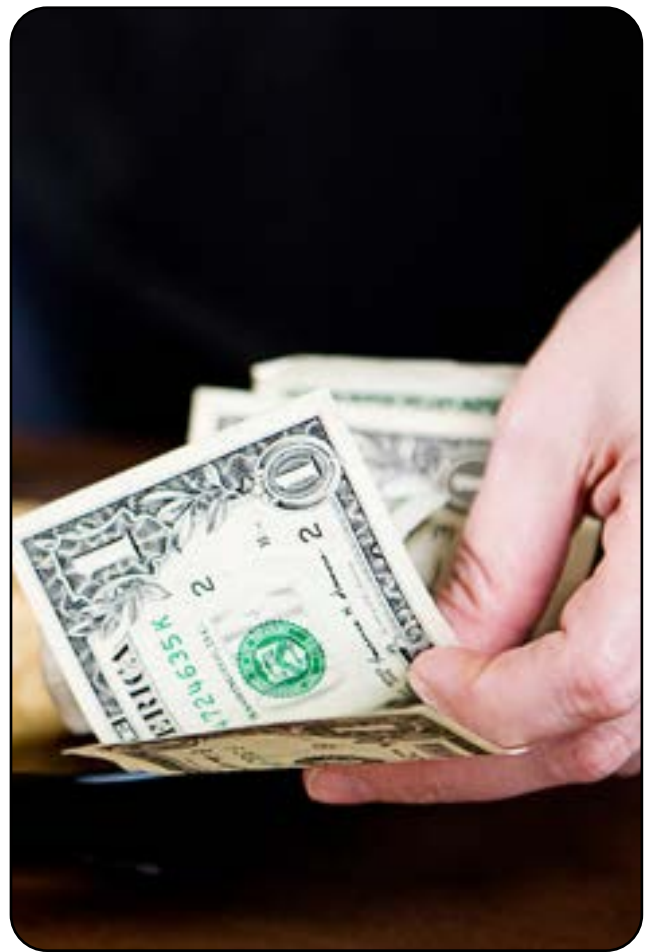
In an environment where restaurants are being extra cautious about spending, directing resources toward food safety can feel like an investment that doesn't give back as much as it should. But as food safety experts shared during a recent webinar from the National Restaurant Association and Steritech, restaurants that are committed to food safety experience benefits such as fewer issues with guests around food quality and safety, easier inspections (and less need for reinspections and follow-up training), and better records of recruiting and retaining staff. To realize those benefits, they said, restaurants must set clear and measurable goals; collect and analyze accurate, frequent, consistent data to measure performance against goals; then report back to the organization so everyone knows what needs to be done to close the gap and what they can do to help the business reach its goals. Any goals should be SMART: Specific, measurable, action-based, realistic and time-bound. Specifically, there should be systems in place to allow you to measure what's happening, people have to understand what steps they must take to reach their goals and have the tools they need to handle their tasks, and there should be clear, connected milestones to keep everyone on track. Looking at your own food safety program, are there gaps that this structure can help you fill and help you generate a stronger return on your investment?



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Eliminate discomfort around tipping

In the past few years, tipping has experienced a strange evolution. During pandemic lockdowns, consumers embraced it as a means of expressing appreciation to restaurants going the extra mile to remain open. But as restaurants' adoption of the automated systems to facilitate tips dovetailed with a return to relative normalcy, tipping fatigue has set in, with consumers taking to TikTok to express frustration with being prompted to leave a large tip for the purchase of a muffin. To be sure, tips are still an important part of compensation for restaurant employees, and operators may need to take some steps to help guests navigate the new environment and feel good about leaving a tip when they choose to do so. A recent report from the National Restaurant Association advises restaurants to clearly communicate their tipping policy to guests – on the tipping screen, on receipts, or on menus, for example. Are you pooling tips? Which staff benefit? How are tips helpful to your team? When prompting guests to tip using a tipping screen, consider how much service you have provided and decide whether to use a dollar amount or percentage. If you're a bakery or coffee shop, you might suggest a few small dollar amounts under \$10, whereas a fine-dining restaurant might suggest a few different percentages of the food/beverage cost (not including tax). Or, offer a combination of options at different times of day based on what you're selling – your POS should allow you to customize your display. Include a "no tip" option and don't make the first option on your screen the largest one – no guest likes to feel like they have to hunt for a less-than-top-tier tip while the server stands by. Finally, weed out tipping options that are clearly out of place, like a 50 percent tip on a quick-service burger. If you're fortunate enough to have guests looking to leave such generous tips, just give them the option to leave a custom tip of their choice.



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