

Foodservice Updates

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If your pandemic free pass is over, prioritize communication

You've probably already felt it in your restaurant – guests have lost patience with supply chain issues, staffing shortages and training problems – even if these issues are still part of daily life in your restaurant. Recent research from Ipsos about consumer expectations of restaurants confirmed that people expect that restaurants have found solutions to these problems by now and should be able to offer seamless experiences. If you struggle to do that, lean on communication to ensure you don't alienate guests. For example, Ipsos found that many restaurants fail to communicate consistently, particularly when using technologies that enable pickup and delivery. Nearly one-quarter of restaurants fail to confirm an order or provide a pick-up time, 19 percent don't provide clear pick-up instructions and 70 percent fail to notify customers when their order is ready. Further, it found that restaurants force consumers to use their app for communication instead of their preferred channel – which might be an indication that the restaurant app experience could be improved. In your restaurant, could you fine-tune your guest experience by making small adjustments to your communication and ideally automating your digital communication? That could include ensuring guests are greeted promptly upon entry to the restaurant, confirming their order contents, and keeping them up to date about the process of preparing their order. Making tweaks in these areas could help you get a little grace from guests in other areas where you may still be struggling.



Tech Talk

Use inventory tech to set guest expectations – and retain their loyalty

Your ability to manage what's happening at the back of the house – and particularly the ingredients that you have available – can make as much of a difference to your guest experience as a streamlined ordering and payment process. Your inventory management tools should help you communicate in real time about what you are able to serve guests and what items shouldn't be advertised for sale. At the same time, it should empower you to stay a step ahead of such events so you're not often in the position of having to tell guests you're out of the dish they specifically came to your restaurant to enjoy. While being able to fulfill a guest's anticipated order won't necessarily build their loyalty, not having that dish will certainly chip away at it.



As tech shifts employee responsibilities, a new role emerges



Amid the rise in tech-driven automation, ordering and payment capabilities in recent years, one question often hovers in the background: Will restaurant jobs be eliminated? While it's clear that some roles are becoming obsolete in light of these changes, it's also true that new ones are appearing. Specifically, as restaurants juggle multiple tech-based ordering channels – and vie for guest engagement and sales – they are looking for people who can develop and build upon their digital expertise. Increasingly, large restaurant chains and parent companies of such brands are hiring digital leadership roles – a recent Pymnts report mentions Denny's and Focus Brands as two examples. Smaller, independent brands are likely adapting too. If you have found ways to outsource restaurant tasks to tech, are there opportunities in your business for key staff to take on new responsibilities in digital management and development?

Trends

Making plant-based foods more about the plants

It's that time of year when people across the food industry are anticipating the trends we will see in 2024. Whole Foods recently shared the predictions of dozens of its team members, to include buyers and culinary experts. At the top of their list are plant-based foods that visibly include vegetables or other natural items. Think short labels and recognizable ingredients as opposed to substances that try to mimic meat. That means we're likely to see more protein-rich ingredients that add satiety to a dish and which consumers are apt to have in their kitchens – walnuts, mushrooms, legumes and tempeh, for example. Across your menu, are there opportunities to weave in identifiable plant-based ingredients that can add layers, flavor and satisfaction to a vegetarian dish?



Don't let training problems lead to food safety violations

The connection is clear: In Steritech's assessment of thousands of food safety inspection results across quick-service, fast-casual and casual restaurants this year, the restaurants struggling with safety violations often have training issues. More than budget and labor challenges, inadequate or improper training is likely to cause these violations. But consider this good news – or at least an indication of a problem within your control. In your training program, are you prioritizing your biggest areas of risk, not weighing staff down with less-important facts? Are you focusing on the “why” behind your training so staff can easily make the connection between their work and protecting people's health? Is there common sense behind each lesson so your team understands the context around the training? Does your training account for different learning needs and styles? Have you made your expectations clear? Are you taking steps to make your training engaging and motivating for staff? Build in checkpoints and rewards based on performance – and look for other ways to evolve your training based on what's working well and what's not.



#FoodSafety

Fix weak links in your allergy communication chain

You may have separate preparation areas and tools for foods containing allergens, a staff that can name the big eight allergens that trigger the most problems for people, and clear warnings on your menu encouraging guests to alert staff about allergens. But you can still slip up with an allergic guest if communication from the guest to the server to the kitchen and back isn't clear. In fact, this triggered a severe allergy for a 12-year-old boy in Massachusetts several years ago. Due to a misunderstanding by restaurant staff, the boy was served a pastry filled with peanut butter despite having told the server of his peanut allergy. The boy's mother had an EpiPen on hand – otherwise the allergy could have been fatal. Now, the family is working to advance legislation that would update food allergy training materials and require restaurants in the state to always be staffed with someone who has used the updated materials. What safety mechanisms do you have in place – tech-based or not – to make sure your staff communicates clearly with guests and each other about allergies?



Foodservice Updates

Is it time for a tech check-in?

Restaurant technology has seen a flurry of change in the past several years as businesses have adapted to new revenue streams and ways of placing and paying for orders. Further, many restaurants have been adopting tech to manage multiple new streams of traffic and to ensure that consumers have the same brand experience across the board. If you adopted new tech tools in quick succession to manage evolving needs and challenges in your restaurant, it may be a good time to step back and assess how well your current configuration is working now, in addition to how well it suits your expected trajectory as a business. For example, has your guest traffic settled into a pattern as people have returned to offices or stepped away from them? Are your menu items generating the right response at the right times? Are you getting the information you need about your business in real time – and then making the necessary adjustments to staffing, menus, ordering and promotions as a result? Restaurant technology can be very helpful in collecting the information that you're asking it to gather – but it's also important to look beyond it and assess what information you may be missing. Planning ahead, does your tech need to change or evolve to help you take advantage of opportunities you're missing right now?



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