

Foodservice Updates

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An urban-grown restaurant format spreads out

As turbulent as the past few years have been for the restaurant industry, they have also sparked a positive transformation – in how restaurants are managed and operated, as well as in the design of restaurant concepts themselves. That is creating opportunities where they may not have been as visible before. Case in point: Food halls, once largely urban destinations, have been moving out to the suburbs, as well as onto college campuses. There are currently about 360 food halls in the U.S., up from 220 in 2019, according to research from the brokerage Cushman & Wakefield. That number is due to jump again in 2024, with another 124 food halls under development across the country, and is expected to climb even higher later this decade. The growth is happening in regions as diverse as Nevada, Alabama and North Dakota. The food halls are collections of chef-driven concepts that are providing opportunities for newer chefs to test their ideas in spaces available at a lower price point than would be possible in a city. The most successful concepts are tapping into consumers' desire to have an entertaining experience around food. They have a captive audience in college students and in suburban hybrid workers who are motivated to try new foods and eager to connect with coworkers and friends.



Tech Talk

Delegating the repetitive side of service to tech

There are certain service tasks in your restaurant that can easily be delegated, allowing you to provide better service (and with fewer staff) as a result. Maybe you have a website with a lot of functionality that serves as a hub for multiple business streams. Or you're spending too much time answering the same questions from guests. Are you leaning into your technology to help guide people through your website and answer common questions? Can you automate the processing of orders from guests through a kitchen display system and allow for detailed modifications – all while minimizing errors and bottlenecks? Can you quickly direct targeted promotions to multiple segments of guests? Using technology in these ways can help you “set and forget” certain repetitive tasks so you can spend more time where it matters – in front of your guests and developing the kinds of offers they are craving.



Looking for an automation model?



As the capabilities of automation continue to spread across restaurant kitchens and their broader operations, many businesses may be in the position of not being able to make near-term changes due to cost constraints or simply because it can be difficult to let go of certain tasks that have long been done a different way. Fortunately, in an industry that's built around data, there are plenty of data-driven examples demonstrating how automation is transforming various restaurant tasks – and quick-service restaurants will likely be the ones showing the industry how it's done. A survey of operators by PYMNTS found that QSR operators plan to automate nearly half of all store tasks over the next two years, while full-service restaurants plan to automate just one-quarter of these tasks. It will be worth tracking the growth trajectories of various restaurant categories in the coming years to see where investments in automation are paying off – or not.

Trends

Don't forget the flowers

As you weave more plant-based ingredients into your menu and guests continue to seek health-boosting ingredients, floral flavors can help. Flavors such as jasmine, rose, lavender and hibiscus have been on the rise in recent years and continue to spread – particularly on the beverage menu in flavored sparkling waters, teas and alcoholic drinks. A new report from the Institute of Food Technologists says there is a lot of upside potential for floral flavors due to their association with wellness – think mood-enhancing lavender and calming elderflower. Flowers visually elevate an experience too. Look for more menu innovation with floral notes in foods as well, including the use of edible flowers in their pure form.



Take care with sharp tools

As the holiday season draws bigger crowds to restaurants, the energy in restaurant kitchens can become more frenetic and you need your team to be in top form. It may be a good time to ensure your staff has a good handle on using kitchen tools safely. Knives, slicers and other machinery with sharp blades pose hazards, especially if your staff is new, inexperienced and feels pressure to prepare food quickly. Your training should ensure that your staff knows how to keep kitchen tools in good condition, which tools to use for various tasks, how to handle and operate them correctly, and how to clean them safely.



#FoodSafety

Audit your facility for the risk of slips, trips and falls

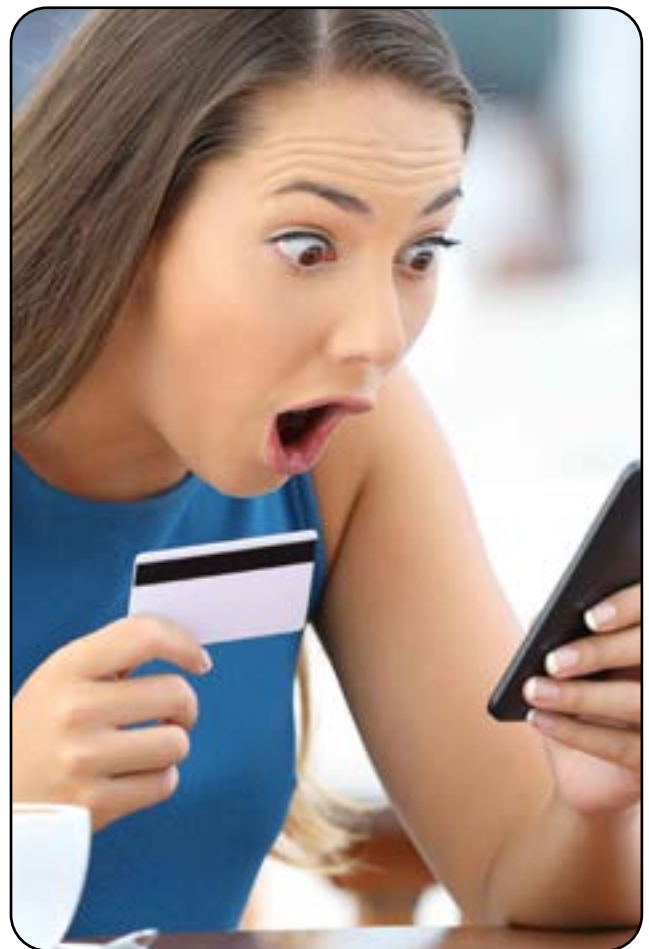
Injuries involving slips, trips and falls are common in restaurants – and they can result in lost productivity as well as fines and other significant expenses. Wet or greasy floors that aren't cleaned up promptly, wet weather conditions and poor lighting can elevate the risks around your restaurant. Before winter weather sets in, it's a good time to walk through your facility and identify areas that may pose risks. Check for sufficient lighting in walkways, areas of uneven flooring or poor traction, and obstacles or tripping hazards in high-traffic areas inside and out.



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Using tech for better human connection

Much as some consumers – and restaurant operators – might worry that technology is gradually replacing the human touch in restaurants, the businesses that can find the sweet spot between tech and human connection are in a powerful place. They not only know how to provide great service, but they also know what specific messages have the best chance of connecting with guests and motivating them to visit repeatedly. This recent Fast Company interview with restaurateur Danny Meyer demonstrates what can happen when that is missing: Meyer shared a story about an occasion when his restaurants sent out a mass email to all customers on their list. At the time, the restaurants were trying to fill tables during a snowstorm, and the email invited guests to bring their own bottles of wine to the restaurant and have them served with no corkage fee. But for the email recipients who didn't drink alcohol, the message did not connect (at best) and in some cases even caused offense. Imagine how that attempt at engagement might have gone differently if the message about wine was directed to just the wine connoisseurs in their guest database, and separate offers were sent to similarly specific segments of guests. They would have ensured that the guests who responded to the offers were primed to have a good experience there. Just as importantly, they would have avoided turning off a guest who had already bought into their brand and willingly shared their email address, thinking the restaurant was a business who understood their preferences. Do the systems you have in place help you create the kinds of offers that connect with guests and make them feel understood?



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