

# Foodservice Updates

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## Help for the holidays

The coming holiday period is an opportunity to engage guests, encourage some extra spending, and hopefully give people an incentive to return and keep your business humming during quieter periods this winter. But you need to plan for it. According to a survey of restaurant operators by ResDiary, only 18 percent of early planners were never fully booked over the holiday period, compared to 34 percent of all restaurants surveyed; 82 percent of early planners made significantly more money over the holiday period; and only 10 percent of early planners did not say they struggled with no-show guests, compared with 26 percent of all restaurants surveyed. Hopefully you've already got a solid plan to generate holiday sales but there is still time to fine-tune your practices to protect your margins this season. Ensure you've optimized your menu with high-profit items (and have developed some subliminal cues to lead guests to your best ones). Scrutinize your food waste and make adjustments to your food ordering and preparation so you can minimize it. Consider how people are getting in touch with you to make bookings, order food or buy retail items – how can you use web-based and automated systems to ensure you're not missing inquiries, orders and sales? Be the gift that keeps on giving into 2024 by offering gift cards and other incentives to return in the New Year. Finally, prepare your team from a scheduling and training perspective – make scheduling clear, arrange backup support where possible, offer incentives for staff working on key holiday shifts, and provide any special training they need to deliver your best service during the holiday season.



# Tech Talk

## More connected? Avoid being more vulnerable.

Your restaurant is likely becoming more digitally connected all the time – not only with guests, but also with equipment across your kitchen and with vendors across your supply chain. While this connectivity brings greater control and oversight of how your business is operating in real time, it also creates new security vulnerabilities. Are you doing all you can to protect the data you store and the devices that collect and transmit it? A recent Restaurant News report advises restaurant operators to prioritize network security protections including (but not limited to) encryption and protocols for authenticating users. It's also important to scan regularly for potential vulnerabilities. Your technology service provider should provide support here – and have a number you can call whenever concerns arise.



## Tech's trickle-down effect



When deciding where to invest in technology improvements, it makes sense to focus on the back of the house first. Once you have support with employee scheduling, inventory management and other operational functions, your staff should have more time to deliver positive experiences for guests (which also helps them feel more positive about their jobs). This is the approach that Domino's – long a trendsetter in the restaurant tech space – is taking with their embrace of new AI tools the brand is developing in partnership with Microsoft Cloud and Azure OpenAI Service. According to a recent report from Nation's Restaurant News, Domino's is working on a generative AI assistant to support employees and personalize customer service, with special focus on invisible back-of-house technology. The brand's chief technology officer said she believes helping the team access information and make decisions more quickly can help them respond more promptly and effectively when mistakes are made. This makes people's jobs easier to do – and will likely trickle into the front of the house in the form of shorter order times, fewer mistakes and a better overall experience. It's worth bearing in mind as you consider tech priorities, regardless of whether you're implementing generative AI or not.

# Trends

## Zeroing in on plant-based preferences

If your guest response to plant-based meat replacements on your menu has fallen short of your expectations, you may be part of a trend. A recent Restaurant Dive report mentions that at grocery stores, repeat buyers of plant-based meat are becoming harder to find – and even those who buy it aren't giving up conventional meat. Meanwhile, restaurants have been trying to figure out the extent of guest demand for these meat analogues. Some brands have dropped them and are instead focusing on offering a great experience with conventional meat, or simply innovating with whole vegetables to offer a less-processed plant-based meal. All of this goes to show that plant-forward consumers remain difficult to define – and it will be important to continue to collect data about how guests respond to your offerings along the protein spectrum.



## Food safety slip-ups at breakfast? You're not alone.

Food safety can be an especially pressing problem at breakfast. That's according to data that food safety consultancy Steritech collected from tens of thousands of food safety assessments from quick-service, fast-casual and casual restaurants in the first seven months of this year. Across these restaurant categories, the breakfast daypart generated a significantly higher number of food safety violations than lunch and dinner combined. Does this hold true for your restaurant? If so, can you identify how you might navigate around the root causes behind safety issues early in the day? Talk to Team Four if you need guidance on how to best uphold food safety standards amid budget constraints, labor challenges or training shortfalls.



**#FoodSafety**

# #FoodSafety

## Know when to weed out your food prep tools

Has your food preparation equipment seen better days? Even if you're careful with cleaning and sanitizing knives, cutting boards and other food preparation surfaces, these items do degrade with time and can pose cross-contamination risks if they're not replaced after longtime use. To help ensure your food preparation tools aren't letting you down, create and maintain an inventory of these items – noting when they come in and when they should be replaced. Pay particular attention to any food preparation tools that can rust, chip or develop crevices that are difficult to clean thoroughly.



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## Keep loyalty simple

The battle to win loyal guests continues in the restaurant space – and lately, many restaurant brands are vying with each other to stand out in the market with perks including special experiences and merchandise in addition to food. Amid economic challenges like higher interest rates and more controlled consumer spending, loyalty programs have become critical for restaurant brands. However, some brands have been pushing so hard to attract guest sign-ups that those with franchisees are getting some pushback from operators about the new offerings (and therefore delivering an uneven experience with regard to the loyalty rewards offered). If you're trying to fine tune your loyalty program right now, it's most important to be able to run it consistently and efficiently. Above all, keeping your loyalty program members interested and engaged means keeping your program simple. It should be easy for your guests to sign up and understand how they can accumulate rewards – and they shouldn't have to jump through hoops to redeem them. Your guests should have the same loyalty experience across your stores. When you can deliver these things, you may be surprised to see how much your loyalty members value them. Case in point: An annual loyalty survey from Deloitte found that as consumer participation in loyalty programs has increased, it's been fairly even across paid and free programs. So you may have an opportunity to offer a paid program that allows you to deliver a more premium experience and incentivize additional guest engagement and spending.



Team Four/Value 4 provides customized Supply Chain Solutions and Business Consultancy to the foodservice owners and operators throughout the United States. To find out how we can help your business save money contact us at:

1-888-891-3103 or visit our web site at [www.teamfourfoods.com](http://www.teamfourfoods.com) and [www.valuefour.com](http://www.valuefour.com)