

Foodservice Updates

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Start the year strong

After a few years in which so many restaurants were operating in survival mode, the start of 2024 feels like a time of greater optimism for restaurants. Technomic expects U.S. restaurants to experience more steady business growth this year after several years of challenging surprises. That, paired with some possible quieter shifts over the coming weeks, makes now an ideal time to put plans in place to drive your success this year. Slower periods are great times to get organized, test out new ideas and train staff. Use quieter shifts to clear out inventory, declutter storage areas or launch new technology. Assess your business over the past year: Where have you fallen short on food safety? Are there bottlenecks in your guest journey that you can smooth out? Areas where you can operate more leanly? Maintenance tasks that have been overlooked or delayed? Addressing those issues now can help you avoid crises later. This practice can also help you determine where you might be leaving money on the table so you can plan (and possibly automate) inventory management and marketing efforts, strengthen your various revenue streams, and potentially target new ones. Now is a good time for experimentation: Maybe you have a new menu, limited-time offer or service model to try on guests – a soft launch can help you collect feedback with less pressure. Focus more time on education, whether that's training staff on new technology or providing a talented employee with some kind of career-development opportunity. Refresh your brand and your culture. Does your dining room décor or website interface feel stale and need an overhaul? Are there steps you could take to boost engagement and morale on your team? Take time to communicate, collect feedback, implement changes and monitor progress. Getting your business off to a strong start can help you better sustain the inevitable challenges that crop up later in the year.





Tech Talk

Are you delivery-ready?

Consumers want restaurant delivery – and not only on cold winter nights. According to research from Statista, the online food delivery market in the U.S. is projected to grow more than 13 percent annually in the next few years, reaching a projected market volume of \$534 billion by 2028. It's a good time to make sure your restaurant's delivery mechanism works as smoothly as it can and offers guests the convenience they demand as you adopt new technology or consider taking on new delivery partners. Looking at your current delivery capabilities, are you able to rely on your system to deliver a consistent and positive experience to guests? Can your system easily scale up as your business changes and grows? Does it meet your budget constraints? Can it help you respond to order inquiries promptly and accurately? Do its features reflect the features available through your third-party delivery partners or do you need to compromise in certain areas? Do you feel that your system empowers you to act on in-the-moment decisions as business conditions warrant? For example, if you want to update a menu item, offer a limited-time promotion, or turn your delivery availability on or off, can you make a change in an easy, agile move? As you set out to preserve or build your delivery business this year, consider what goals you want it to help you achieve. Make sure you and your team understand and can use its full functionality. Where possible, adapt existing processes so you operate with leaner technology. Finally, review your progress on a regular basis so you can course-correct as needed.



Be aware of these common fire hazards

Fire safety is a critical element to get right in a restaurant kitchen. While the statistics about fires only include those that are reported, there are an average 9,076 fires reported every year, causing 107 civilian injuries and \$175 million in direct property damage. Those costs don't include expenses generated by business interruption or other impacts of a fire. This is according to Brian O'Connor, an engineer with the National Fire Protection Association, who was the guest speaker at a recent National Restaurant Association webinar about fire safety in commercial kitchens. Cooking is far and away the top cause of fires and direct property damage, he said. While cooking-related fires generate less cost per fire than other hazards like heating equipment, electrical distribution and lighting equipment, they are far more common than those risks. A number of factors increase cooking hazards. Beyond the ignition of grease in a kitchen, grease may vaporize and build up in a building's ducts and ventilation system. Cooking equipment may not be in safe condition or approved for use. Kitchen equipment might be moved around without a subsequent reevaluation of the fire extinguishing system's placement. Similarly, changes to storage areas or the placement of furniture may not meet fire and building codes. O'Connor offered some tips to help operators stay on top of their cooking risks: Only operate the exhaust of the restaurant's fire extinguishing system with filters, and only use cooking equipment if the exhaust is working. Don't leave cooking equipment unattended. Regular inspections are important too: Inspect cooking equipment annually. Maintain the fire extinguishing system and exhaust every six months. Replace fusible links every six months. Every week, inspect the metal containers used to collect grease drippings and drain or replace them if needed. Follow the equipment manufacturer's instructions for specific guidance on maintenance. For further reference, the National Restaurant Association offers a downloadable guide, *Always Ready: Fire*, which covers the areas restaurant operators need to think about when it comes to fire preparedness and safety.



#FoodSafety

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What's Hot in 2024?

Serving an exciting, on-trend menu is a key component of a worthwhile restaurant experience. So what taste treats belong on your menu this year? The National Restaurant Association surveyed more than 1,500 culinary professionals and narrowed their responses down to 10 trends for 2024. One key theme is global flavor – in soups and stews, including Birria, Chicken Tom Kha, Laksa, Salmorejo and Upscale Ramen; as well as in chicken wings and barbecue. Meat is still on the menu, but it's higher-end options like Wagyu beef that are trending. Culinary professionals are also exploring new ways of preparing in-demand ingredients – such as grilling or cooking cheeses like Provoleta, Queso Fundido, Raclette, Halloumi and Juustoleipa; offering stuffed vegetables including Chiles en Nogada, stuffed peppers and stuffed cabbage rolls; and adding some sweetness to the breakfast menu with hot honey breakfast sandwiches. Regional flavors are still in demand and operators will continue to streamline their menus in an effort to operate as leanly as possible. To get the word out about their menus and promotions, expect to see more operators expanding their use of social media – and TikTok in particular – to boost engagement in creative ways. Could any of these ideas support your plans for the year?



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