Foodservice Updates

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Using tech to understand and innovate your menu

Cutting costs when expenses continue to climb

This is not your parents' senior living facility

The impact of allergen awareness on your business

A standardized recipe management system paves the way for improved inventory management while facilitating staff training and boosting guest satisfaction.

Using tech to understand and innovate your menu

The average restaurant wastes 4-10 percent of their purchased food, according to a study by the National Restaurant Association. Foodservice operators who conduct weekly inventory turnover calculations tend to uncover sources of waste, save time and boost their bottom line – and automated inventory management is becoming a commonly used tool to help with this process. But before operators can draw reliable information about their inventory, they need to first understand their menu inside and out – what equipment they need for each item, what ingredients are critical and which can serve as substitutes, how to standardize recipes across locations where specialty ingredients may differ, and where there might be opportunities to innovate, for example. Technology is helpful here too. Modern Restaurant Management reported recently that the bakery chain Le Pain Quotidien adopted an AI tool that serves as a clone of its founding chef, Alain Coumont. The tool, which they call Alain.AI, is used by the bakery's locations around the world to standardize recipes and get help developing the menu. It has compiled the bakery's 10,000 historic and current recipes into a closed database that the team can use to develop new recipes more efficiently. Going forward, they plan to plug food and beverage trends into the database so they can develop recipes that reflect those trends, as well as create clones of consumers to better understand and support their food and drink preferences. Tech-driven tools that support recipe consistency and menu management are becoming increasingly common – and can help you ensure that your business prepares a dish to the same high standard each time, all while providing the foundation for you to better manage inventory costs from there. Looking at your database of recipes, how consistently do you include elements such as your yield, portion size, ingredients, mise en place, cooking instructions and methods, plating instructions, photos and other information that ensures consistency?

Cutting costs when expenses continue to climb

While inflation is down across the U.S. economy, costs continue to be a strain for many foodservice operators. The National Restaurant Association's most recent State of the Restaurant Industry report found that higher labor costs are an issue for 98 percent of operators and higher food costs are hurting 97 percent. The upcoming election has added a layer of uncertainty to the economic landscape. While operators may feel they are running as leanly as they can, there are likely areas to trim expenses. Consider whether you can take action in these parts of your business: Winnow down your supply chain, retaining relationships with longstanding suppliers where you may be able to negotiate better deals. Scrutinize your menu and limit it to your most-profitable, best-performing items. Measure, track and reduce your food waste. Use technology that gives you up-to-the-minute information about your business. Fast Casual reports that Sbarro uses real-time data to reduce errors, ensure their cost of goods sold is accurate, and pinpoint where problems with sales and products may exist across locations. Conduct an energy audit, use sensors and staff training to ensure less-essential appliances are turned off when not in use, and develop a longer-term plan for replacing/upgrading equipment that operates inefficiently. Maximize staff hours through cross-training and scheduling software to streamline labor. Finally, keep your books current to promptly identify issues. Restaurant Finance Monitor suggests some tips: Each day, record sales through your POS. Automate your accounts payable and payroll. Reconcile your accounts frequently – ideally daily through automated tools. Review your profit & loss statements and prime cost each day to ensure you're making the right decisions about your staffing, menu and inventory.

This is not your parents' senior living facility

How demographic shifts are driving change in senior living facilities

The number of older Americans is on the rise. In 2034, Americans aged 65 years or older will for the first time outnumber children under the age of 18. These shifting demographics are challenging ideas about the ideal living environments for people as they age. Intergenerational living environments, which some research has found are associated with higher life satisfaction and lower mortality rates, are becoming more common as a result. In recent years, intergenerational communities have been developed on college campuses such as Arizona State University and Lasell University, and some senior living facilities are also opening themselves up to the public in ways that may be less noticeable to younger demographics. As Fast Company reported recently, the North of Main Café in Bellevue, Wash. looks like a typical urban coffee shop serving up espressos and pastries, but if you look closely, it's connected via an internal entrance to the Watermark at Bellevue, a 110-unit assisted-living facility. Such businesses are aiming to provide natural opportunities for people of different generations to interact.

Research from Generations United has found that multigenerational and age-friendly communities can reduce age segregation; decrease social isolation, depression, and loneliness; and improve community infrastructure and facilities.

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Even for senior living facilities without a purposeful intergenerational component, there are innovations underway to support the needs and interests of the Baby Boomers who will be moving into these communities. Foodservice Director reports that Restaura Hospitality Group is among the companies looking to bring the latest developments in technology and culinary to dining operations for senior living communities. They are focusing on building active senior living communities rather than skilled nursing facilities. In the process, they are taking cues from the work being done at the MIT AgeLab, which conducts multidisciplinary research into translating technologies into practical solutions to improve people's health and allow them to be active throughout their lives. Such changes may have the indirect effect of making these communities more appealing to the families and friends of residents as well.

The impact of allergen awareness on your business

Food allergies affect approximately 15 million people in the United States and are responsible for about 30,000 emergency room visits and 150–200 deaths annually, according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). Nearly half of fatal reactions come from food served in restaurants or other foodservice establishments, and managing allergies can be complex due to their changing nature. The economic impact in the U.S. is $25 billion annually, but the real danger is the potential for death, as seen in a recent case where a doctor with severe allergies died after eating at a Disney World restaurant despite warning the staff. Risks run even higher in places such as senior living facilities, where residents rely on others to keep them safe.

Conducting a risk assessment can help you identify potential hazards, determine who might be affected, and evaluate the effectiveness of current controls. It will help you incorporate safety protocols including allergen checklists, ingredient labeling, segregated workstations to prevent cross-contamination, and staff training to ensure you manage allergy risks according to each person's role. Clear, consistent verbal and written communication with guests, staff, caterers and volunteers is critical. This includes keeping accurate records of ingredient changes, which can help prevent incidents and can support your defense of insurance claims as needed. Your actions can also provide an experience that builds trust and loyalty with guests. By designing allergens out of menus where possible, providing clear ingredient info, and showing empathy toward guests with allergies, you can ensure guest safety and satisfaction.