

Foodservice Updates

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Manage your guests' breaking point on spending

As consumers have paid more at the grocery store and elsewhere due to rising inflation in recent months, they have largely taken rising restaurant costs in stride. But recent reports indicate this could be changing as some foodservice businesses have continued to raise prices after covering their own inflation-related costs. Some operators, particularly fine-dining restaurants, are now receiving pushback from regular guests taking issue with added fees that don't seem to add up – whether it's the doubling of the cost of a bowl of pasta or an inexplicably higher corkage fee for a bottle of wine. To be sure, in an industry of slim profit margins and amid forecasts of a looming recession, operators may be trying to eke out a financial cushion wherever they can. Just know that you may get some resistance from guests – and you may be pushed into a situation where you are honoring previous prices for loyal patrons or otherwise bending your own rules to keep guests coming back. Prepare your staff by explaining the reasoning behind any significant price increases you have implemented, helping them answer guest questions with transparency, and, where possible, avoiding making price increases that may appear to have a flimsy rationale backing them up. To help make big pricing jumps less necessary, bring as much efficiency to your kitchen as possible – from ingredient selection, to waste management, to portion sizing. For example, many chefs report shopping farmer's markets regularly to integrate even more local, plant-forward options into the menu where possible, since this can minimize significant price spikes and help a restaurant avoid passing them on to guests.



Scheduling software's domino effect

If you aren't currently using tech tools to manage your team's hours, profits are likely hiding in your schedule, since having even one extra person on a shift can make a noticeable impact on your bottom line. In addition to using data-based forecasts to determine ideal staffing levels, scheduling software has the positive ripple effect of reducing the time a new manager needs to spend overseeing staff scheduling and getting it right. This, in turn, demonstrates to staff that you care about maintaining an accurate schedule – so when staff are scheduled, they are needed, and when there are extra shifts available for people to pick up, that is made clear and it's easy for them to take them on.



Could your kitchen display system boost efficiency?

As any restaurant kitchen employee can tell you, preparing orders isn't a linear process. Getting all meals in an order across the finish line closely together requires tasks to be prioritized, batched and sequenced. A kitchen display system (KDS) takes much of the mental work out of the equation, making kitchens operate more efficiently and helping to ensure menu items are at their best when they are presented to guests. As a recent Nation's Restaurant News report explained, a robust KDS can help an employee prioritize the order of dishes needing to be prepared, alert the kitchen if a ticket is left unattended for too long, adjust the routing of tickets according to the time of day and anticipated guest traffic, and even pull menu items whose key ingredients have run out. Some systems can communicate with the guest directly to clarify an order or update them on its progress.



Deliciously dairy-free

Do you serve many vegan or vegetarian guests? Even if your answer is no, your clientele may still crave dairy-free foods. A recent survey of consumers in the U.S. and U.K. found that of those who purchase dairy-free foods, nearly 60 percent did not consider themselves vegan. They may simply want to incorporate more plant-based foods into their flexitarian diets. Offering dairy-free alternatives – and thinking beyond the beverage menu to include your appetizers, entrées and desserts – can help.

Food Trends

Dairy-Free Margherita Flatbread

Ingredients:

- 1 ea Pizza Dough
- ¼ cup All purpose Flour
- as needed Vegetable Oil
- ¾ cup Marinara Sauce
- 1 cup Dairy Free Mozzarella Shreds
- 9 ea Basil Leaves, Fresh
- 1 tsp Black Pepper, Fresh Cracked



Instructions:

1. Pre heat a grill to high heat and pre heat a convection oven to 500 Degrees F.
2. Dust a rolling pin with flour and proceed to roll out the pizza dough into a flatbread.
3. On a well-oiled grill, proceed to grill both sides of the flatbread for 2 minutes or until grill marks are present.
4. Transfer the flatbread to a half hotel pan before topping with marinara sauce and dairy-free mozzarella cheese.
5. Bake the flatbread for 3 minutes in the convection oven or until cheese is melted and flatbread is golden brown; Garnish with fresh basil leaves and fresh cracked black pepper before serving.

Recipe and photo courtesy of Danone

Fool-proof contamination prevention

Cross-contamination can happen easily in a busy restaurant kitchen with staff juggling a variety of food preparation tasks. Making it as easy as possible to keep certain foods – particularly raw meat, seafood, poultry and eggs – separate from other foods can help minimize safety risks. That includes having separate containers for these foods when shopping for them/collecting them, having dedicated space on the lowest shelf of the refrigerator for storing the foods (and enclosing them in sealed containers), and using a separate, color-coded cutting board when preparing these foods for cooking. Reinforcing with staff that they must avoid washing these foods is important too, since the splatters can spread germs around the kitchen.



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Make food safety training sink in

Food safety training is never one-and-done, but you don't want to have to review content because the same mistakes happen repeatedly. Food safety and training expert Brita Ball advises operators to consider the purpose of their training, including what they want staff to think, feel and do as a result of it. For example, a senior manager focused on the impact of food safety on the business may respond to a case study about the consequences of a food safety mistake, while a frontline employee may respond better to quick, inspiring lessons delivered in pre-shift team huddles over the course of several weeks or months. Then make the reinforcement of each lesson easy and positive – through signage and other prompts in your facility, consistent results tracking, and positive reinforcement through rewards.



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What do your guests most value about you?

One recent survey found that 80 percent of guests say restaurants help them access favorite flavors that they can't duplicate at home – or at least that's what they think – and that's what drives them to support restaurants. At a time when restaurants are duelling with grocery stores, meal kit companies and even convenience stores for business, it helps to know the reasons compelling your guests to order from you. Are you an end-of-the-work-week treat? Do you offer easy mobile ordering and prompt delivery to suit hungry consumers who want their meal as soon as possible? Do guests trust that you will surprise them with fresh ingredients prepared in inventive ways? Can you package your ingredients in ways that make it easy for a guest to prepare one of your meals for friends at home and look like a talented chef? As you welcome larger numbers of guest orders in person and offsite over the holiday season, solicit people's feedback about what brought them to you over their many alternatives. Their input may help you to develop plans for new offerings that will help you bring people back and keep business steady in 2023 as economic uncertainty – or simply uninviting winter weather – makes eating out (or even ordering out) a tougher sell.



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