

Foodservice Updates

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Making outdoor dining work for all

Dining pods, igloos and other creative outdoor seating options continue to be a needed source of revenue for restaurants. In an industry of narrow margins, the benefits of these spaces can't be unseen – operators would be foolish to let go of the opportunities they now know these spaces provide to boost profitability, advertise menu items to people passing by, and cater to guests who simply don't feel comfortable eating in a crowded dining room anymore. (In fact, data that Yelp released earlier in the year indicated that the total number of restaurants listing outdoor dining on their website was more than 26,000 – up from less than 8,000 in February of 2020.) However, the novelty of these spaces has had time to wear off and not everyone wants them where they live. As a result, it has become more common for restaurant operators to face criticism from neighbors for everything from noise pollution to increased rodent activity due to the use of outdoor dining areas. But there are ways to keep the peace if you're struggling. A recent opinion piece on Restaurant Dive suggested that outdoor eateries could be built without speakers – or that restaurants be required to turn down the music at a certain hour in the evening. Cities might offer restaurant operators a standard kit of materials designed to keep them clean and safe for guests, neighbors and others. People who live adjacent to the restaurant could be offered a special discount or other perk when they visit to help secure their buy-in. The holiday period can be a good time to extend some of this goodwill to help smooth out relations and generate some winter business in the months ahead.



Let tech open up your training

When you think about training your staff, do you consider primarily the on-the-job coaching you offer to help them do their job? If so, you could be missing a big part of what helps you build staff knowledge and retention at your restaurant. Using a combination of tech-based tools in your training program can help you build engagement, improve information retention, and minimize disruptions and gaps in institutional knowledge when long-time staff leave. As a recent Restaurant Technology News report explains, employing a combination of gamification, microlearning modules and videos can help reduce cognitive overload, help staff get up-to-speed quickly, and ensure the information sticks.



Living on the edge

Not every restaurant has the resources to invest in the latest tech. But observing what happens for those that do can offer a window into how the industry is evolving – and what consumers will begin to expect as a result. Taco Bell is now making a significant move into edge computing – technology that is currently already being used in sectors such as energy and manufacturing to make fast decisions (with help from 5G internet speeds) from data collected by connected devices. Taco Bell is using edge computing to support digital order placement, which allows it to process requests and account data using a mix of cloud services, connected devices and software at the restaurants themselves – and to do so at lightning speed, according to a recent Wall Street Journal article. A computer server at each restaurant accepts data from digital and in-person orders and loyalty accounts, then combines it with kitchen operations to make rapid decisions. In practice, this means an employee can be alerted at the precise time he needs to drop potatoes into the fryer for an order of nacho fries so they are ready just as the delivery driver arrives to collect them.



Could breakfast be your most important meal?

Recent research from the NPD Group found that breakfast traffic has been growing at U.S. restaurants and was within 1 percent of recovering its pre-pandemic levels. Quick-service restaurants capture the vast majority of breakfast traffic – 87 percent of it – so if you’re looking for ways to build business in this daypart, consider how you might entice guests with offerings that can be enjoyed on the go, or which can travel easily to home or office. That’s particularly true as many people have resumed their pre-pandemic schedule, along with the eating habits that go with it.

Food Trends

Whole Grain French Toast Bowl with Acai Cream

Ingredients:

| | |
|--------|--|
| 1 cup | Whole Grain French Toast Sticks cut into cubes |
| ½ cup | Mixed Berries |
| 1 t | Flax Seeds |
| 1 t | Chia Seeds |
| 1 T | Sliced Almonds |
| 2 cups | Vanilla Greek Yogurt |
| 1 cup | On Top |
| 3 oz | Sambazon Acai Berry Blend |



Instructions:

1. Combine Vanilla Greek Yogurt, On Top topping and Sambazon acai berry blend, set aside.
2. Place 1 cup French toast cubes on one side of the bowl and ½ cup of the acai cream on the other side. Carefully place the berries, flax seeds, chia seeds, and sliced almonds on top of the acai cream.

Recipe and photo courtesy of Rich's

Strengthen this building block of your food safety culture

Does your restaurant's food safety culture run deep – or could it easily become watered down with the departure of certain staff who reinforce it? If you can bring greater standardization to your food safety processes, both within a facility and across your locations if you operate more than one, this will go a long way in helping you ensure the consistency you need to weave food safety into the fabric of your business. Consider all of your food safety processes. Are any of them unnecessarily complex – or applied slightly differently in one location than another? How can you make each process simpler, easier to follow, and applied in a standard way across your organization?



#FoodSafety

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Protect against winter fire safety risk

At a time when your restaurant may be using more heaters, both indoors and outdoors, to make your spaces more comfortable and accessible regardless of the weather, it's important to give your equipment and staff a fire safety check-up. The risk of fire increases in the winter months – and some of the newer or temporary structures you may be heating can present an additional risk to your restaurant if heaters aren't used properly. In addition to maintaining indoor appliances that can pose fire safety hazards, like your vent hood, now is a good time to deliver updated fire safety training to your staff and make sure your fire extinguishers are in good working order.



Foodservice Updates

Set holiday expectations

High inflation and a shortage of staff could mean the holiday season will be looking a little different this year at many restaurants around the country. According to research from Alignable, 48 percent of operators aren't hiring seasonal or permanent employees, and another 8 percent are laying off employees because revenues no longer support additional hires. At the same time, consumers have been steering their purchases toward more experiential things – to include travel and restaurant meals, as Mastercard CEO Michael Miebach shared on a quarterly earnings call in late October. When consumers spend right now, they're looking for something special – and that sentiment only ramps up around the holidays – but that can be difficult for restaurants to offer consistently with a skeleton crew. To avoid creating a recipe for guest disappointment and staff burnout, now is a good time to steer your holiday guests toward the experiences that you're best able to manage with a smaller team than normal.



That could mean focusing on promoting holiday meal bundles to be eaten at home, closing your dining room to accommodate more special events where you can more easily plan ahead with staff and supplies, and promoting gift cards for VIP experiences you're offering in the slower winter months. If you're operating as usual, just make sure you're serving a menu that's as easy and fast as possible to execute with a limited crew.

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