

Foodservice Updates

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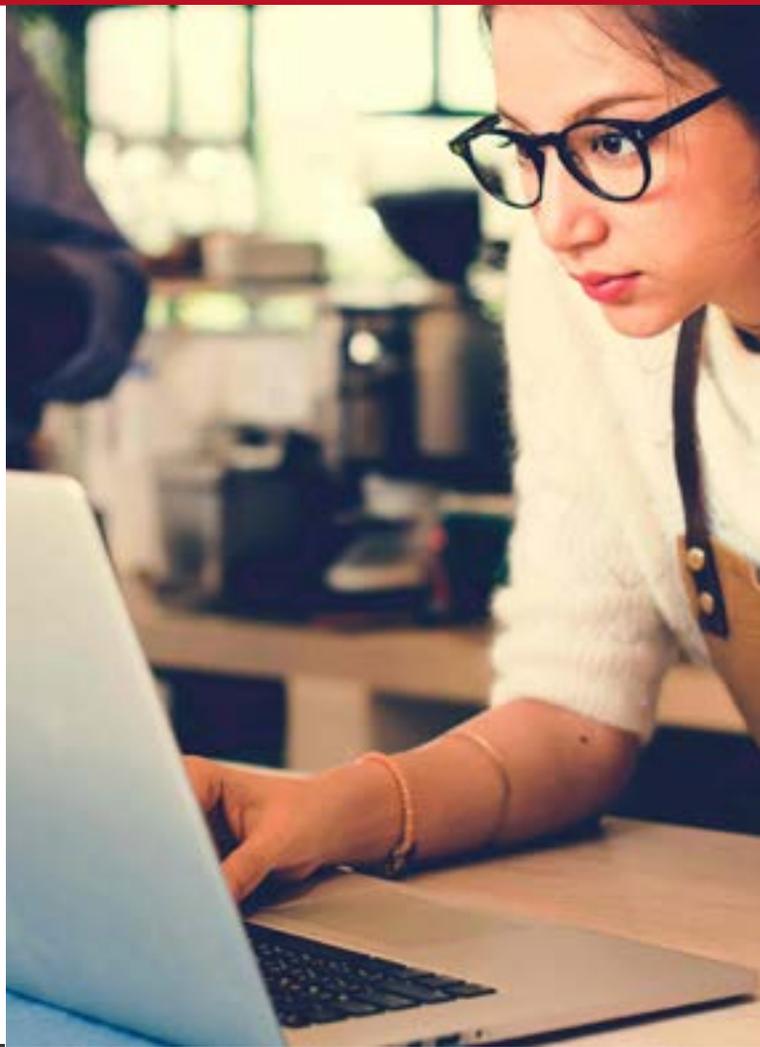
The opportunity in loyalty

A majority of consumers – 55 percent – don't use a restaurant loyalty program, according to a new study from William Blair. For restaurant operators, this represents a big opportunity for growth at a time when competition for restaurant spending is stiff and loyalty programs can cultivate stronger attachments to brands. As restaurants have stepped up their pursuit of guests in the past few years, these programs have evolved well past the punch-card system and even the digitized system of accumulating rewards points. Nation's Restaurant News highlighted some of the newer offerings to come to these programs – and many of them focus on gamification, customization or otherwise elevating the experience around buying food from a certain restaurant. Jimmy John's and Chipotle, for example, have introduced a competitive element to their programs: At Jimmy John's, the "gauntlet" challenges guests to purchase all 25 sandwiches on the menu within a set time frame in order to win a Jimmy John's beanbag chair, while at Chipotle, a sweepstakes-style program enhancement dangles the opportunity for 3,100 members to win free food for a year. Other brands are playing with the subscription model, offering tiered program options – some free and some paid – that unlock exclusive menu items, provide early access to events and products, or allow members to access different levels of giveaways and other perks.



Pave a smoother transition to new tech

If you're considering tech investments this year – and most restaurant operators are – your approach to the human side of new systems is just as important as the technology itself. By identifying the main problems you need to solve (drilling down to the specific information you need at the level of the transaction, for example), you can clearly define your priorities and focus on the tools that can address them. What roadblocks – in the form of existing contracts and systems – are currently in your way? How will any new tech integrate with your existing systems and allow for greater customization and flexibility down the line? Consider how to blend these systems seamlessly. That involves getting the right people involved to account for how existing and new tech is used, who throughout your operation is using it, and how it can deliver for those people in ways that will improve their ability to do their job without a difficult training process. This can also help you foresee what might go wrong and minimize the chances of it happening. Identify some ambassadors at various levels of your organization who can help tout the new system, demonstrate it to others and answer questions as people get up to speed.



Make your data portable

By this point, restaurant operators know how important it is to capture data. But what happens when restaurants collect data from catering customers, loyalty club members, retail customers or other parts of your operation – but the information remains stuck in its various silos? As you collect data, ensuring that you can extract it, then combine it with other data across your business and derive meaning from it, won't only help your business now – it will also put you in a stronger position to adjust as the business needs to change. What tools do you currently use to ensure your data can be moved around and be informed by the other intelligence you have collected about your guests' habits?

Food Trends

BLT Pasta Salad with Yogurt Dressing

Ingredients:

- 3.5 pounds Spinach, baby
- 3.5 pounds Penne, pasta, dry
- 4.5 pounds Cherry Tomatoes, fresh, halved
- 1 pound Cheese, shredded
- 25 ounces Bacon, cooked, LS
- 37 ounces Dannon® Lowfat Plain Yogurt
- 8.5 ounces Mayonnaise, RF, LS
- 4 ounces Vinegar, white
- 2 Tablespoons Dill, dried
- 1 Tablespoon Garlic, granulated
- 1 Tablespoon Onion, granulated
- 1 Teaspoon Black Pepper, ground
- 1.5 Teaspoons Salt, kosher



Instructions:

1. Cook pasta according to directions and cool.
2. CCP: Cool from 135 to 70 within two hours and cool from 70-below 41 in four hours.
3. Mix Dannon® Lowfat Plain Yogurt through salt together in a large mixing bowl. Let sit overnight to maximize flavor and thicken slightly.
4. To assemble add: 1/2 cup cooked pasta, 1/2 cup baby spinach, 1/4 cup cherry tomatoes, 0.25 ounces cheese, 0.5-ounce cooked bacon to a boat or bowl.
5. Serve with 1 ounce of salad dressing drizzled on top or on the side.
6. CCP: Hold cold, below 41 degrees.

Recipe notes: Dressing makes 50 ounces of dressing.
Optional serving style is to mix salad ingredients in a large bowl with dressing and serve immediately.

Recipe and photo courtesy of Danone

Say yes to yogurt



Yogurt is one of those menu superstars: It proves its worth across dayparts as a main ingredient, a supporting player, or as an invisible ingredient elevating the health of a dish. At a time when guests are more aware of their gut health, yogurt is also in-demand. In addition to featuring it more visibly in parfaits and smoothies, let it stand in for sour cream in dips, dressings, sauces and marinades. Or lean on it to lighten up pancakes, breads and cakes. It's also ripe for experimentation on your dessert menu – try it as a frozen bark combined with fruit and nuts.

Check up on your mobile food safety plan

Spring is in sight – and as the weather warms, gathering outside to sample food becomes even more appealing. If you operate a food truck or otherwise serve your food offsite, it can be even more challenging to adhere to the standards you follow to keep your guests safe from foodborne illness. As you prepare for warm-weather offsite events, ensure that the facilities you're using (or the adaptations you're planning) allow for proper cleaning and sanitation, hand hygiene, plumbing, refrigeration to safe temperatures, pest control and waste management.



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Serve a safe buffet

The past few years have been an odd period for buffets. As they have begun creeping back in various forms, now may be a good time to ensure your facility and staff are up to speed on the safety protocols that can manage the food safety risks buffets can pose. Make sure your staff have easy access to handwashing sinks throughout their shift. Ensure tongs and other utensils are changed often and washed thoroughly to prevent cross-contamination. Clean and sanitize food serving surfaces regularly. Finally, make certain you have a reliable (preferably digital) system for checking and recording the temperatures of the hot and cold foods you're serving, as well as for replacing them promptly.



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Understanding Gen Z preferences

While inflation has been weakening in relation to where it was in the middle of 2022, it's still proving to be stubborn. Although economists are cautiously optimistic that things are headed in the right direction, restaurant operators are still likely seeing guests react to the challenges on their wallets. But their responses likely differ by generation, according to research from Technomic – and that may impact how operators decide to promote their menu and market to these in-demand guests. In a recent podcast for Restaurant Business, Technomic's Lori Rakoczy said younger consumers in Gen Z aren't looking to cut out restaurant dining altogether in response to higher prices. What they will do is choose less expensive menu items across their preferred restaurant segment or even their preferred restaurant itself, and they will comparison shop for their favorite foods in third-party ordering platforms, which make it easy to find a cheaper burger in town. Knowing your breaking point on price will continue to be important to attracting this crowd – including considering point-of-sale data in relation to costs and studying how that is impacting traffic, as well as tracking the competition to better understand how their prices compare. For this generation, elevating their experience is about convenience. That means doubling down on digitally driven methods of ordering and pickup processes and minimizing wait times – such as making it seamless for them to order ahead but eat their meal in your dining room, or otherwise leaning on your digital tools to ensure you can get food to these guests at the time they are expecting it.



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