

Foodservice Updates

In This Issue

- Pandemic-era changes worth keeping | Salads that sing | Food safety to go | Your safety procedures will continue to be on display
- |Go from manual to automatic this year | Do your tech tools enhance communication?

Build a brand that succeeds on the road

Throughout the past year, takeout and delivery have occupied a larger part of many consumers' lives than they did before. Even as we emerge from the pandemic and people return to restaurant dining rooms, expect your customers' off-premise food habits to persist. According to the National Restaurant Association's 2021 State of the Industry Report, 68 percent of consumers say they are more likely to purchase takeout from a restaurant than before and 53 percent say takeout and delivery have become essential to the way they live. How authentically do your restaurant's values translate to an off-premise experience? If your business prides itself on treating customers like family and remembering their favorite dishes, are you including a personal note in their to-go bag and using tech to track their orders and feed that data into your loyalty program? If your brand is focused on protecting the environment, are you providing recyclable, compostable or reusable packaging? As restaurants have transitioned to greater tech adoption in the past year, some operators may feel they are losing the personal touch – or the more experiential brand elements that once helped consumers connect with them. But that doesn't have to be true. While you may be losing face-to-face connections with your customers, you can lean on supporting elements of your brand – like your business background story, staff personalities, service mindset, behind-the-scenes anecdotes, food selection and packaging – and rethink how you communicate them. If a delivery driver dropped off a bag of food from your restaurant to someone who had never visited your restaurant before, what would the person's impressions of your business be?



Do your tech tools enhance communication?

It's never been more important for restaurant operators and employees to understand – in real time – how their business is functioning. Nowadays, there is technology available to monitor everything from an incremental change in the price of a key ingredient to the identity of a customer approaching your restaurant. But old-fashioned communication between company leaders and the managers and front-line employees interacting with customers may get lost in the shuffle – and that's a problem at a time when safety procedures and employee policies are evolving so regularly. According to a new survey of 100 senior restaurant leaders, direct communication (as opposed to company-wide updates) goes a longer way in connecting with employees in a more personal way, showing respect, imparting company values and relaying the up-to-date information employees need to do their jobs well. As you consider new tech tools to adopt this year, prioritize those that can help boost direct peer-to-peer and cross-location communication, as well as the effective sharing of best practices.



Go from manual to automatic this year

When various processes and tasks across your business must be done by hand, they are easier to put off until later – and that makes any lurking problems less visible, makes your results less accurate, and lets waste creep into your operation. Looking across your business, what tasks tend to fall behind schedule? Which ones are a slog to get through? If you put in some time up front, chances are you will be able to harness technology to monitor those tasks – or even complete them outright. This will not only free up time, but it will also ensure you have the kind of real-time business information at your fingertips that will allow you to make waste-minimizing decisions in the moment.



Marinated Vegetable Salad

Ingredients:

- 1 cup Carrot, sliced
- 2 cups Broccoli Florets
- 2 cups Cauliflower Florets
- 1 cup Grape Tomatoes, halved
- 1 cup Yellow Pepper, diced
- 1 cup Cucumber, sliced
- 1 cup Celery, bias cut
- 1 1/4 cups KRAFT ZESTY ITALIAN DRESSING
- 1 cup Feta Cheese, crumbled
- 1 tablespoon Fresh Basil, chopped

Salads that sing

Your guests know they need to eat their vegetables. Still, for many of them, preparing vegetables in craveable, inventive ways at home can be a tedious challenge – particularly during the work week. Your restaurant can be a helpful go-to source at these times. Think about mixing up your salads with marinated, roasted vegetables, surprising spices, house-made dressings and unexpected combinations that make vegetables something your guests will come back for.

Food Trends



Instructions:

1. Combine all ingredients in a mix bowl and allow to marinate in the refrigerator for at least 2 hours.
2. Toss before serving.

Recipe and photo courtesy of Kraft Heinz



Food safety to go

If you have managed to keep business coming in during the past year, you have likely made major shifts in how you get your food to customers – by creating a curbside pick-up service, developing and expanding upon your delivery service, or both. Has your food safety plan expanded at the same rate? At a time when off-premise sales represent a commanding portion of overall restaurant sales, your commitment to keeping your food safe for guests can't stop at your front door. Since your standards may differ from those of other restaurants, determine how you want your particular safety values to come through to customers who are enjoying your food beyond your dining room. Trace the path of your to-go orders and anticipate potential problems: Are you using take-out containers that don't adequately insulate foods? Not enforcing the wearing of masks on your team during curbside pick-ups? Packing bags of food that could tip over easily while in transit? Neglecting to secure containers with tamper-proof seals? Your safety protocols go far in representing your brand right now. What do your safety methods say about you?



#FoodSafety

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Your safety procedures will continue to be on display

Consumers have been paying more attention to how their food orders are being handled by your staff – and you can expect they will continue to keep a watchful eye on how their orders are prepared for some time. In your efforts to be COVID-safe, make sure not to neglect standard customer-facing food-safety protocols that can lead to contamination – or negative Yelp reviews of your commitment to guest safety. That means paying attention to how your staff is handling cutlery and serving tongs, scooping ice, placing food in packages to go, and cleaning their hands in the midst of using your POS and preparing orders



Foodservice Updates

Pandemic-era changes worth keeping

To be sure, the vast majority of restaurant operators wouldn't want to relive the challenges of the pandemic. But it hasn't been all bad: The past year has also stripped away the clutter and forced operators to focus on making the kinds of improvements and adaptations that kept business running. As times improve, those changes should become permanent – while other possibilities should be considered with a more wary eye. Here are five key pandemic-era changes to embed in your operation (if they aren't already permanent): Be transparent with your guests – about the origins of the food you serve and how you protect consumer safety – and make those elements central to your brand. Keep your menu simple to enable you to more flexibly manage your inventory and waste. Harness data to help you stay current about customer preferences, supply-chain challenges and areas of your business that are generating excess costs. Find ways to offer a personal touch while allowing guests to minimize physical contact with surfaces and other people – whether they are using your restroom or paying for their order. Finally, embrace structures that will allow you to be more nimble in the future. That could mean having a real estate footprint that can easily adapt to different service models, or adopting technology that allows you to more easily scale up and scale down your staffing based on changes in the weather.



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