

Foodservice Updates

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Managing your cost-conscious guests

Restaurant prices have undergone a reality check in recent months and years. If, like the vast majority of operators, you have had to hike menu prices to keep pace with such stresses as inflation and rising staff compensation, your guests may scrutinize their spending a bit more – perhaps cutting back on visits or ordering less when they do. Or, they may visit you on occasions when they are apt to eat a bit less – like for an after-work snack and beverage with a friend or a pre-workout boost. But you can take some steps to manage the perception that you're stretching guests' budgets and also drive off-peak traffic by making your between-meal dining occasions feel more special. For example, you can double down on your value options – guests are still apt to respond to offers of combo meals, meal bundles and other items that make them feel like they are getting more for their dollar. Pour some creativity into your between-meal periods by offering some eye-catching hot and cold beverages that guests can customize with their own additions. It's also important to get personal: New research from TouchBistro found that 64 percent of restaurant operators are sending personalized offers to guests, up from 55 percent last year. So even if you're already sending personalized offers to your best guests, your offer may be one of several vying for their attention. Drill down on your guests' habits and lifestyles to ensure you're offering food and drink options they will want to make part of their day.





Tech Talk

Using tech to cut back on the toughest tasks

Much as we hear about the rise of robotic workers in restaurant kitchens, far more operators are looking to tech to augment, rather than replace, human staff. That's according to the National Restaurant Association's State of the Restaurant Industry report 2024, which found that while 47 percent of operators believe automation will become more common this year, 69 percent believe that tech will be more commonly used to support existing workers rather than replace them. One area where restaurants can focus such efforts is on their most manual, physically arduous tasks. A recent Restaurant Business report quotes ZipRecruiter research that found that workers had "real aversions to jobs that involved real physical labor." Starbucks is one brand that has responded to this: Their cold drink orders, which comprise 75 percent of their sales, require a steady stream of ice that baristas once had to lug inside by heavy bucketfuls throughout the day. But new back-of-house technology has enabled the business to send ice into the kitchen via a pipeline, thereby eliminating that heavy lifting. To be sure, such changes require investment, but they can also save money on the back end by decreasing turnover. In your operation, are there tasks that get passed from one worker to another – or are frequently skipped because they require too much physical labor? These may be key areas to implement tech-driven supports that make work easier for staff.



How tech can take safety, quality and compliance concerns off your plate

If you're managing a continuous cycle of having to do more with less – like juggling more work across a smaller crew, for example, or having to conduct more onboarding training with fewer longtime staff on your roster – it can be easy for your food safety and quality to slip through the cracks. Fortunately, tech tools can help you ensure you're upholding key standards regardless of what's happening and which employees are staffed during a shift. As Restaurant Technology News reported recently, tech-driven support can include everything from prompts to wash hands during busy periods to reminders about completing compliance tasks across multiple locations. Looking at your operation, where are manual processes still in use? Where do you see your standards slipping – or see potential for that to happen? Looking externally, do all of your suppliers share your commitment to safety and have mechanisms in place to protect it, or is there room to make changes for the better? When automated tools are in place, you're able to manage business more effectively with fewer people and you also stand to make your employees' jobs a little easier, which can help with morale and retention.



#FoodSafety

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Could your staff policies be more family-friendly?

In your business, how much family support do you offer your staff? If you employ working parents, chances are that your answer to this question makes a significant difference in how they perceive their employment with you. Restaurant Hospitality reports that in 2021, Best Places for Working Parents surveyed over 850 working parents and asked what it would take to get them to rejoin the workforce after the pandemic. For 80 percent of respondents, better family support would motivate them to leave their current job for another. (Family support includes such offerings as scheduling flexibility, paid time off, financial assistance, remote work, parental leave, and childcare.) During the pandemic, challenges with scheduling flexibility and managing childcare came front and center – whether these stresses were visible on zoom calls or (in the case of the restaurant industry) prevented employees from being able to come to work altogether. Now that life and work have fallen back into more normal patterns, it can be easy for employers to overlook these issues – even though now could be a critical opportunity for restaurants to deal with them and strengthen their policies to weather future strains. That’s what motivated the Texas Restaurant Association to form the Employers for Childcare Task Force recently. The Restaurant Hospitality report said the group aims to educate employers about options at regional and federal government levels, as well as within businesses themselves. While restaurants may not be able to provide a full range of family-friendly benefits simply because of the nature of restaurant work, they may be able to offer some of them – and that may make a significant difference in their ability to hire and retain their best workers.



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