

Foodservice Updates

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Reopening with an entrepreneurial mindset

The pandemic has forced even well-established restaurant operators across the industry to think and act like scrappy, new entrepreneurs: flexing to new challenges, doing as much as possible with few resources, keeping overhead low, being willing to reinvent when the circumstances call for it, and even flexing work around other commitments at home. As a result, we've seen a rise in ghost kitchens, as well as more home-grown, chef-driven meal-delivery concepts springing up on Instagram. Much like how many employees who have spent the past year telecommuting from home are now resistant to working from an office building full-time, the restaurant industry may emerge differently from the pandemic too. Dining rooms may take time to fill and it may be even more difficult to keep people on staff than it was before. Can you find ways to take the best lessons learned in the past year and apply them in the new environment? At your foundation, minimize the resources you need, including ingredients, real estate and staff. Harness technology to monitor waste in areas as diverse as your inventory, ordering, energy use and labor. Take another look at your pre-pandemic service model and assess whether that is realistic now. Embrace multiple revenue streams and look for new ones that could help you adapt more easily to challenges going forward. Finally, think about how you can continue to act at a grassroots level to keep customers engaged with your menu and brand – from creating rotating dinner subscriptions that you promote on social media to offering meal bundles for delivery to different neighborhoods.



Friction-free ordering

As the restaurant industry has embraced technologies to smooth out the ordering process, artificial intelligence has grabbed headlines, most recently in the form of a text-to-order tool from the software company HungerRush that promises not only faster ordering without the help of a restaurant app but also the near-elimination of order errors. The use of AI for ordering is in its early stages – existing applications focus more on its use in dynamic menus, inventory integration and consumer marketing – but it may represent where ordering is headed and what areas of improvement operators should focus on. As you analyze the data you collect from sales, how does your speed of processing orders now compare with what it looked like last month and last year? Are there common order errors that occur? Can you identify ways to minimize the amount of time your staff must spend processing orders while still ensuring they come out fast and error-free?



The snowball effect of back-of-house data collection

Automating and remotely monitoring problems and processes in your kitchen – whether it's a malfunctioning appliance, a cooler door left open or equipment using too much energy – isn't just about saving time and staff resources. This monitoring of different devices online, also known as the Internet of Things, has ripple effects across your business and allows you to make incremental, cost-saving improvements in indirect ways. Consider your use of cooking oil. If you received real-time updates about how much you're using, you could be alerted of spikes that are damaging food quality and leading to poor reviews, identify equipment problems early before they become larger expenses, and fine-tune your inventory management so you're only ordering (and paying for) the amount of oil you need when you need it. As we emerge from the pandemic, your ability to harness technology will enable your business to flex with challenges down the line. Where are the biggest inefficiencies in your kitchen?



Whole Grain Spaghetti with Blistered Grape Tomatoes and Baby Arugula

Ingredients:

- 1 Box, Barilla Whole Grain Spaghetti
- 4 Tbsp, Extra virgin olive oil
- 2 Clove, Garlic, pressed
- 4Cups, baby arugula
- 1 Pint, Multi color Cherry Tomatoes, whole
- ½ Cup, Parmigiano Cheese, shredded
- ½ cup, fresh dill
- Black pepper to taste

Go with the grain



Instructions:

1. Bring a large pot of water to a boil. Meanwhile in a large skillet sauté the pressed garlic and pepper with olive oil for 1-2 minutes or until slightly yellow in color.
2. Add the cherry tomatoes and let them blister, about 2-3 minutes, remove the garlic cloves. Season the sauce pepper then set aside.
3. Cook the pasta according to the directions, drain the pasta 1 minute less than required cooking time, but save ½ cup of the cooking water.
4. Add the water and pasta to your sauce and bring to a simmer, cook for 1 minute.
5. Remove the skillet from the heat and fold in half the cheese and all the arugula and dill. Finally before serving top with remaining cheese.

Recipe and photo courtesy of Barilla

As consumers take more steps to protect their health, they're likely incorporating more whole grains into their diets. The protein, fiber, B vitamins and other nutrients in whole grains can promote weight loss and reduce the risk of diseases. Whole grains also make for a more satisfying dish. In your menu options, skew towards including whole grain ingredients such as brown rice, bulgur and whole grain pasta in your salads, soups and entrées – or at least offering them as a substitute for refined starches.

Food Trends



Protecting safety amid evolving mandates

As of this writing, states were starting to announce changes to mask mandates and updated policies regarding how fully to open businesses. Stark differences were emerging in different regions, which may put restaurants in an awkward position in the months ahead – particularly those serving customers across state lines. Now, perhaps more than earlier in the pandemic, it's important to scrutinize your stance on mask wearing, maintaining social distancing and other pandemic-related protocols. If your state is easing restrictions, how do you plan to manage resistance from staff and guests who are anxious about getting life back to normal? If your state is sustaining or doubling down on restrictions, how can you manage resistance from people with pandemic fatigue, knowing that your business could make news for the wrong reasons if you ease precautions prematurely? Anticipate what lines your business is unwilling to cross and how you can communicate about them in a constructive way to guests and staff alike.



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Reinforce the science behind your safety measures

The pandemic has changed the game for the long term when it comes to safety at restaurants. Protocols to keep people safe are no longer just in the purview of health inspectors but are also of greater interest to your customers and the general public – and an extension of the service you offer. It's more important than ever to be able to respond knowledgeably and professionally to scrutiny and misinformation about your food safety when you are questioned about it by customers or online reviews. Support your staff by creating quizzes and contests that arm them with scientific facts they should have at their fingertips, then reward compliance. Incorporate everything from pandemic-related safety measures related to how the virus spreads, to longstanding safety measures related to handwashing, allergen safety and contamination prevention.



Foodservice Updates

Ready to make a plant-forward pledge?

Plant-based foods continue to make their mark on both the restaurant menu and the corporate boardroom. This has been especially evident at the quick-service and fast-casual restaurant brands that have best weathered the challenges of the pandemic – and will likely have an amplified presence in the industry as we emerge from it. Burger King recently pledged that half of its menu would be plant-based within nine years, a number of national brands have begun offering new plant-based breakfast sandwiches, and at brands including Chipotle, executive compensation is now tied to success in achieving companywide environmental sustainability goals, among other social responsibility measures. In the months and years ahead, customers will come to expect more plant-forward menu options and environment-forward company policies. Is your operation on course to provide those things? If there is room for improvement, start by fine-tuning your environmental policy so it includes specific, measurable and achievable environmental goals related to your team, customers, suppliers and the public overall. It should include details about how you monitor and reduce waste and emissions related to your food supply, how you plan to comply with environmental legislation and train staff to support it, and how you will manage, improve and hold people accountable for your ongoing environmental performance. Bringing more plant-forward options onto the menu naturally feeds into these goals. Look beyond salads and identify creative ways to enhance your entrée menu with filling plant-based or plant-forward burgers, pasta dishes and sandwiches you can offer right alongside your meatier options.



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