

Foodservice Updates

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Digging for opportunities in the dayparts

Over the years, how much happy hour business (or other after-work business) has your restaurant generated? If this part of the day once provided a steady stream of traffic for you on several evenings a week, chances are times have changed -- due to factors such as the increase in hybrid work schedules post-pandemic, people's desire to keep their professional and personal lives separate, and a decline in alcohol consumption. Research from Fox Business found that happy hour traffic has dropped by 49 percent in recent years. If this has impacted your business in any way, it could be a good time to gather your team and identify some new potential business streams -- or simply shift your approach to the after-work crowd by offering some different options. While people may not be looking to stop in for appetizers after work, maybe they'd go for a pre-workout smoothie, meal kit or easy weeknight takeout. Maybe you can approach the offices that once gave you more after-work business and make them aware that you can cater their in-house lunches and meetings so they can make their employees' less-frequent in-person connections feel more worthwhile. Or perhaps, now that the warm weather is coming, you can come up with a limited-time offer that will draw people to your outdoor dining area. Your data provides clues as to what your guests crave and when. What adjustments can you make that will help your business be as nimble as possible in the face of shifting traffic patterns?



Tech Talk

Testing and upgrading your digital experience

Are you making the most of your digital orders? Recently, the National Restaurant Association assessed data from Circana/CREST, which found that digital orders comprised 15 percent of all foodservice orders last year. That's more than triple the rate of digital orders before the pandemic. Digital orders often result in higher bill amounts and improved guest data, so making your app's user experience smooth and easy is worthwhile. Now is a good time to make sure your app is ready for your customers – or is at least not holding you back from connecting with them. A Nation's Restaurant News Report suggests using A/B testing – comparing two versions of a prospective change – to ensure you maximize the performance of a new feature or menu item. You (or, if applicable, the company developing your app) can try this with a range of updates to your app, including the sign-in options you offer, the images you use to promote your menu, copy styles or color options, search functionality and payment flow. You may not know what could be improved about your digital ordering experience until you have users respond to different versions of it, then make incremental changes in response to their input.



Enhance your food safety culture to manage risk

If your business is struggling with hiring and retaining staff, it may also be struggling to carry out food safety training – or to review any processes that don't directly support your compliance with local and state regulations. But unfortunately, a restaurant may suffer for this in the long term if employees are injured on the job or if the business faces a steep insurance claim that could have been prevented by having a strong safety culture. Your restaurant's commitment to safety should be so woven through its fabric that senior leaders talk about it regularly and every new hire is aware of your approach before they even start their job. To make it easier to share safety knowledge and encourage retention, automate what you can – through the use of video training, gamification and digital tools that guide staff through preparation tasks that protect safety. Then take steps to broaden the knowledge of your team through regular cross-training to help fill gaps. Give your more senior staff mentoring roles with newer staff. Above all, explain the why behind why you perform certain safety practices so that tasks are less likely to fall through the cracks as you manage the other demands of your business.



#FoodSafety

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Focus on your managers

Labor is a perennial challenge for restaurant operators, but it can be made a bit more manageable when a business can retain its managers. One-third of restaurant managers quit in their first year on the job, according to research from TDn2K, and the consequences are especially difficult on a restaurant's finances and culture. Replacing managers – particularly general managers – tends to cost restaurants far more in lost productivity than it does to replace other roles. What's more, their absence has a domino effect on the remaining team members, who may lack the direction and structure the manager provided to help run the business. You can take steps to slow the revolving door when it comes to these key members of your team. Toast suggests screening manager candidates carefully to find the best match for your culture and team for the long term, not being tempted to fill a position quickly with someone who you haven't considered carefully through interviews and reference checks. You might even split the role into two roles to improve your chances of retaining institutional knowledge if one person were to leave. Then take steps to invest in their success. A recent global survey of middle managers conducted by McKinsey & Company found that only 20 percent of middle managers feel that their organizations let them be successful people managers, while 42 percent either don't receive any support or are uncertain if they do. How does your turnover rate for your managers compare to that of other staff? Providing fair compensation is important to helping managers feel supported, though just as critical are noticing signs of burnout, providing sufficient time off, and giving them space to share feedback and concerns openly.



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