Foodservice Updates

Make sure your guests get the message

Text messages have become the digital communication vehicle of choice for many restaurants and it's easy to see why: According to Gartner research, text open and response rates are as high as 98 percent and 45 percent, respectively – compared to 20 percent and 6 percent for email. The text medium can be a useful vehicle for alerting waiting guests that their table is ready, sending online menus, or making people aware of just-in-time offers or updates about their loyalty program status. But while email has become easier to ignore and more businesses are relying on text to reach consumers in the moment, this text-heavy environment makes it that much easier for the recipient of a text to choose to block the sender. So making your texts targeted, worthwhile and as distinct from spam as possible will help you maintain a high level of access to the people you want to reach. As a recent report from Modern Restaurant Management advises, make sure you're sending texts to the appropriate audience (if you have locations in multiple cities, you obviously need to separate your distribution lists for those regions, but try to segment even further). Try to make your messages personal and specific, using the person's name and the name of your restaurant so your message isn't readily overlooked. If you're sending a link, such as the link to your menu, you'll come across more credibly if you include the full, identifiable link and not a shortened version. Finally, include in each text an option allowing recipients to opt out. It may seem counterintuitive to make it easy for people to unsubscribe, but you're only going to be able to get through to people who are open to hearing from you.

Tech **T**alk

Tech makes tips more transparent to IRS

If you rely on a POS system that suggests tip amounts at the end of a transaction, the IRS will increasingly be leaning on the data trail from these systems to keep employers and employees honest. As reported recently by Forbes, the IRS says in its Tax Gap Studies that it collects 99 percent of what it is due on regular wages – where taxes are withheld and reported to the IRS and to the taxpayer via a W-2 – as opposed to just 55 percent of what it is owed in tips. It's something to keep in mind as the IRS steps up its auditing efforts. When tips were largely collected in cash, earnings were easier to disguise – but tech is changing that by acting as an automated auditor.

Perfect the human element of tech-enabled service

You're likely leaning on your mobile app or website for more orders these days – and ensuring your service is seamless through these channels is key to bringing customers back. But this requires staying on top of the lower-tech side of managing this service. Specifically, your staff needs to be conversant in both how you interact with guests in person and through digital tools. That includes knowing how your online and in-dining room menus differ, having some baseline knowledge about how your ordering and payment systems work for those using them, and having some ability to troubleshoot the common problems that arise with these tools.

Try a tasting menu

At a time when guests are looking for a memorable experience that feels like a good value, all while restaurant operators are looking for ways to manage supply chain fluctuations and waste, tasting menus can be every-one's friend. They give operators more control over food waste and overhead costs, since they can generally be offered with fewer staff. At the same time, when guests know they are experiencing something fleeting, the meal becomes special and gives them a reason to return again the next time you offer something new. Finally, tasting menus can give chefs an opportunity to get creative with ingredients again, particularly if they have been leaning on more speed-scratch items in the kitchen. How can you incorporate more of the plentiful ingredients on hand this season into appealing tasting menus?

Protecting plant-based food safety

As the sales of plant-based foods continue to take off, there is still some uncertainty about how to store and prepare these products to ensure they are safe to consume. Although these items are often swapped in for animal-based counterparts, their components and processing methods have far different impacts on their safety for consumption than animal proteins do. According to Global Food Safety Resource, many ingredients used in finished plant-based products are allergenic and have the potential to cause serious reactions. Further, the combination of ingredients including proteins, sugars and fats impacts the microbial load of plant-based products, which can lead to an increased likelihood for survival and growth of pathogenic microorganisms. Finally, the processing of the plant-based food – including the environmental conditions present, raw material used and the handling of the finished product – can all impact its safety. In addition to trusting your suppliers of these products, it's important to ensure your team is well-versed in the proper food safety protocols for these foods so what you're serving is safe.
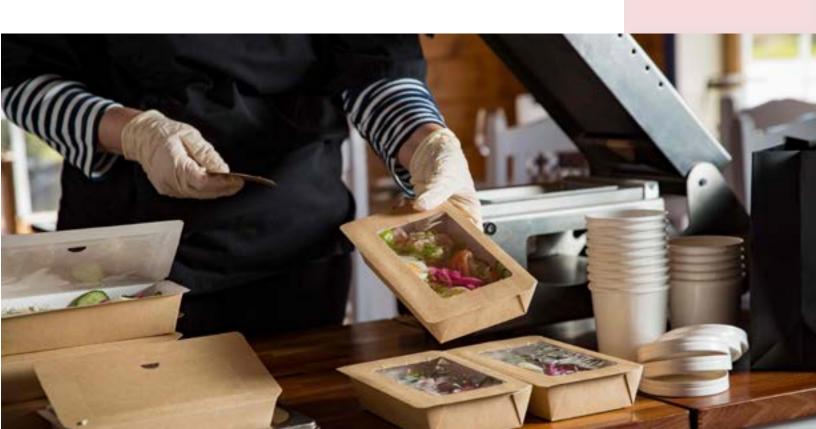
#FoodSafety

Does your to-go packaging go the distance on safety?

Your to-go packaging can say a lot about your restaurant's values when it comes to the environment – but it can also leave your food less protected in a couple of ways. Your packaging must be robust enough to keep food safe in transit and protected from external sources of contamination. On top of that, it needs to be made from food-safe components that don't impact the taste of the food you're transporting or break down when exposed to hot or cold – potentially affecting the safety of the food and its security in transport. It's worth testing your packaging after delivery to see if it impacts the experience of your food – and talking to suppliers about your best options.

Energy-wise renovation

Developing and renovating restaurants with an eye toward using energy wisely has been a growing trend in recent months – whether it be the installation of electric vehicle charging stations at select Subway sandwich shops or Chipotle's recent announcement about developing all-electric restaurants that run on renewable energy only. In the latter example, the company is making such changes as installing solar panels, heat pump water heaters and shading built into the façades of their restaurants to reduce the need for air conditioning, as well as cooking with electricity instead of gas – a big departure for a lot of restaurants. These sorts of changes can attract positive attention from guests and investors alike – particularly as companies are having to make commitments about their Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) standards. But while changes like those mentioned above generate media attention and positive public interest, slashing energy costs and having a positive story to tell about your efforts doesn't require a massive investment or sweeping changes that are immediately recognized by guests. It calls for understanding the biggest draws on your energy and identifying adaptations, big or small. Even in the case of Chipotle, the restaurants will be generating the biggest reductions in their carbon footprint as a result of newly designed exhaust hoods over their grills – not the most exciting change among others they are making, but still an effective one. Where are your restaurant's biggest energy draws?