

Foodservice Updates

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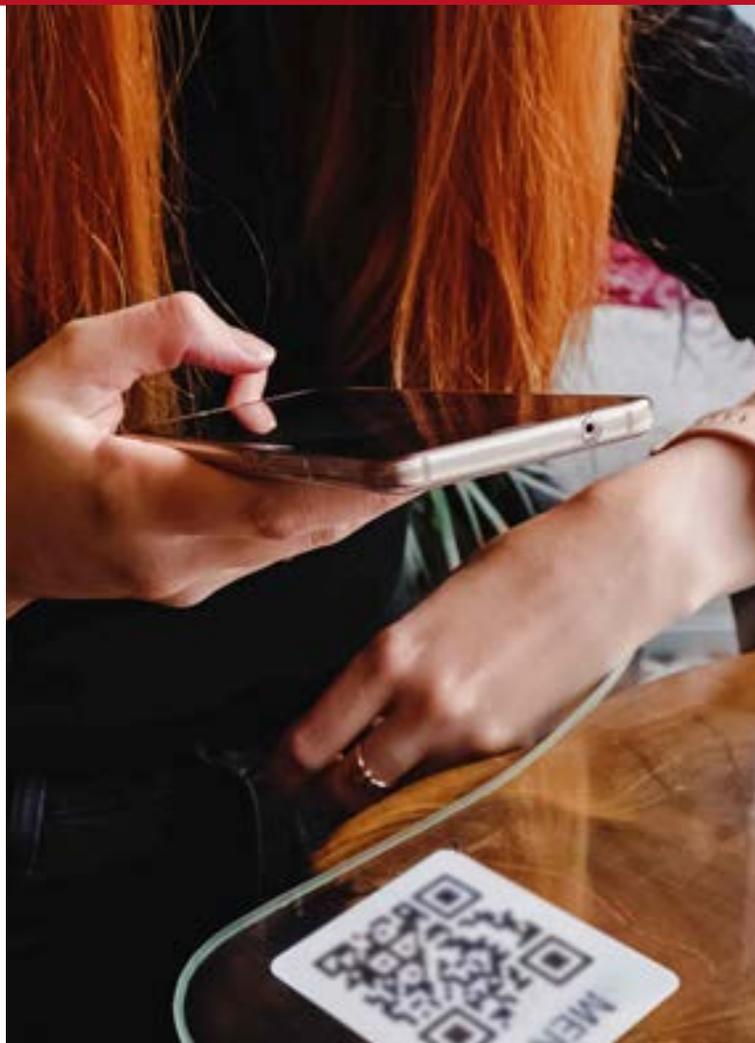
Amid high gas prices, think local

In recent weeks, gas prices have hit all-time highs in the U.S., with the average price of regular, unleaded gas reaching \$4.25 per gallon in March, according to AAA. The high prices, along with record-high inflation in general, have started to impact consumers' buying decisions. A recent Restaurant Dive report said that consumers have been driving shorter distances to go to quick-service and full-service restaurants alike – opting for those within a five-mile drive as opposed to venturing to those over 30 miles away. Gas prices aren't likely to come down soon, so it's worth zeroing in on hyper-local guests as you plan promotions. Are there upcoming events in your neighborhood that could generate traffic for you if you offered a related promotion? Does your customer relationship management system have the capability to send offers to people who happen to be within a small radius of your restaurant? If your best guests aren't located right in your neighborhood, could you explore offering your food at festivals or other venues that feature a wide mix of food options and are more apt to draw people from a distance? It's also a good time to dial into your neighborhood a bit more and partnering with local businesses and other organizations to demonstrate your commitment to your community – being front-of-mind with the consumers closest to your door could help you stabilize business during uncertain times.



Beware of QR code scams

QR codes have become ubiquitous in restaurants, helping businesses process orders and payments quickly with less labor. But as with all technology, there is risk for malicious activity that could impact your guests. Cybercriminals have begun to alter QR codes in an effort to redirect consumers to fraudulent websites and access their personal details. This can happen via stickers that are placed on top of legitimate QR codes on a restaurant menu or signage, or via fraudulent QR codes emailed to consumers. Consumers can avoid being scammed by ensuring they don't scan codes that appear to have been tampered with, never scanning an emailed QR code, checking the URL of the page that the QR code takes them to, or visiting the restaurant's website directly to place an order. It's a risk to be aware of if you're directing your guests to QR codes more often right now (and reducing staff accordingly).



Can a simple tech fix help?

Off-premise orders haven't decreased since restaurant dining rooms have reopened – and as a result, making the process of ordering and collecting food as smooth and speedy as possible has become a larger priority for restaurants. According to the Restaurant Friction Index, 37 percent of consumers would be more inclined to frequent restaurants that made it possible for them to collect orders without waiting in line, while 35 percent said they would favor restaurants that allowed them to collect drive-thru orders without waiting. While some brands are adopting advanced logistics to place the location of a customer or delivery driver so they can have an order ready on arrival, a simpler fix may help remove some friction too. One tactic that the fast-casual brand Portillo's has implemented recently is improving their wifi. Doing so has extended the radius within which workers can take drive-thru orders, Pymts.com reports, and is helping the brand maintain volumes and extend capacity.



Vietnamese pho noodle soup with tender beef

Ingredients:

9 oz. Udon noodles
2 cups beef stock
1 - 2 large fresh Jalapeno or Serrano chili pepper, cut into ¼" slices
2 - 3 Tbsp. fresh ginger, grated
2 Tbsp. lite soy sauce
1 Tbsp. fresh lime juice
1/2 tsp. chili oil
1/8 tsp. five-spice powder
6 oz. Hillshire Farm® Chuck Pot Roast w/Au Jus

and Onions, pulled into large bite-sized pieces
1/4 cup carrots, chopped
1/4 cup yellow squash, cut into small cubes or sliced
1 Tbsp. garlic, minced, fried
2 Tbsp. red bell pepper, finely diced
1 Tbsp. fresh cilantro, chopped
1 scallion, thinly sliced lengthwise
1 lime, cut into wedges

Soup's on!

Want to offer new, creative menu items while stretching your inventory? Expand your soup menu. It's an ideal place to incorporate excess produce you have on hand, test guests' response to global flavors, and provide options that transition easily from lunch to dinner. Plus, at a time when consumers are eating smaller meals throughout the day and on the go – not necessarily sitting down to a large meal at night – soup can be an ideal choice. Offer a small serving for a snack or mini meal on the go or scale it up and serve it with side dishes for bigger appetites.

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Instructions:

1. Cook noodles until al dente according to package direction; drain and reserve.
2. Heat beef stock in medium stockpot to 165°F. Stir in chili pepper, ginger, soy sauce, lime juice, chili oil and five spice powder; continue heating for 4 minutes.
3. Stir in pot roast, carrots, squash and cooked noodles; heat for 2 minutes or until pot roast is hot and vegetables are crisp-tender.
4. Just before serving, stir in garlic, red bell pepper, cilantro and scallions into broth. Place 3 oz noodles into bowls and ladle in 1/3 of broth and garnish with lime wedges.

Recipe and photo courtesy of Tyson



Be a grill PRO

Everyone loves a summer barbecue, though cooking and serving outdoors requires taking some extra precautions around food safety. The USDA advises taking the PRO approach to grilling: First, **Place** the thermometer 1.5-2 inches into the thickest part of the meat when you think the food has cooked. Then **Read** the temperature after 10-20 seconds – beef, pork and fish should reach 145°F with a three-minute rest time, ground meat should reach 160°F and poultry should reach 165°F. Finally take the food **Off** the grill and place it on a clean platter – and wash the thermometer in hot, soapy water or with sanitizing wipes between uses.



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Keep staff cool in the heat

The hot months can be uncomfortable ones for restaurant staff who are standing over hot grills or managing busy serving shifts outdoors in the heat. At a time when it's extra important to keep staff safe and content, take some steps to protect their safety on the job during the summer – it will have the added benefit of protecting your food. For example, make sure air conditioning units and fans are in good working order indoors, particularly if your staff is wearing gloves or other protective gear that can be uncomfortable to wear (and tempting to remove) in the heat. Schedule regular rotations of staff who are serving guests outdoors in hot weather and encourage everyone to take a quick water break every 20 minutes or so to stay hydrated.



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Responsive crisis control

It's easy to get canceled these days. For a restaurant, a critical online review going viral, a negative story about a key supplier appearing in the news, or a food safety crisis can do it. Even the public's perception of a restaurant's connection to the war happening on the other side of the world (whether that connection actually exists or not) can have consequences that temporarily derail a restaurant business. While you can't control how people react to your business, you can take steps to manage a crisis in a way that turns down the heat instead of making the problem worse. Make it a priority to monitor and manage your online profile. When you receive a positive written review, thank the reviewer for the post. When the inevitable negative review happens, respond promptly and stay professional about finding a solution. If you feel you can do something to make the situation right, encourage the person to call you directly or invite them back – showing everyone how you handle an upset guest constructively may even win you some fans. If a larger crisis comes about, use your Google Business Profile and prominent space on your website to pose and answer commonly asked questions in an open, transparent way. While no restaurant is looking for crises, they can generate some opportunities to elevate your reputation with the public if managed thoughtfully and promptly.



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