

Foodservice Updates

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Buckling up for a wild ride

If you thought last year was a rollercoaster, this year might be another – with a few more ups and downs instead of a long, gradual drop. As we emerge from the pandemic, the great news is that consumers are excited to support restaurants in a big way: A recent survey of 5,000 consumers by the marketing company Constant Contact found that 44 percent of respondents said restaurants were among the first businesses they plan to return to. Some restaurants, particularly those that have incorporated technology into the day-to-day management of their business, have already experienced record-breaking customer demand (and therefore sales) this year. Of course, we're not completely in the clear just yet, and a premature return to indoor gatherings could lead to a fourth wave of the virus. How can restaurants manage being in the position of having to rapidly ramp up inventory and staff like never before, navigate potential supply chain shortages, and then have to scale business back down in the event of an uptick in infections? First, be nimble: As you adopt new technology and systems for your business, prioritize those that allow you to make decisions minute to minute. Can your system help you adjust your menu, ordering and staff scheduling if a key ingredient suddenly climbs in price or becomes scarce, if your state reports a spike in infections, or if the weekend forecast is likely to bring crowds to your restaurant? Then keep your back-up plans handy: That means knowing what ingredients can be substituted for others in a pinch, creating multiple points of interest on your menu so people have many reasons to order from you, and knowing which companies can provide temporary workers on short notice for certain roles if you're faced with sudden spikes in business.



Smart outdoor dining

The pandemic has sparked innovation across every corner of restaurants – and outdoor dining areas, having become a critical part of the restaurant ecosystem in the past year, are no exception. Restaurant Technology News reports that smart pergolas, awnings and screens that can be controlled with the touch of a button are now helping restaurant operators manage everything from shifting sunlight to inclement weather to insects. Having a fast, low-touch means of adjusting your outdoor dining area to accommodate the elements may make sense as business builds back up again – and if your outdoor dining area has become a year-round (or near-year-round) part of your restaurant.



Paving the way for more digital sales

Digital restaurant sales still have room to climb. According to new data from market research firm Incisiv, digital sales will comprise 54 percent of all limited-service and quick-service restaurant sales by 2025 – a 70 percent increase over pre-pandemic estimates. Forbes reports that as restaurants look to position themselves to accommodate more digital sales, new partnerships between tech companies and large restaurant brands are focusing on such aspects of the customer journey as using artificial intelligence in marketing, accepting customer orders via social media and messaging platforms, and enabling autonomous driving as a means of making delivery financially feasible.





Boozy Cherries Jubilee

Ingredients:

- 9 Portions #05433 Chef Pierre® Cherry Cobbler
- 9 Scoops Vanilla ice cream
- 1/4 lb Unsalted butter
- 1 Lemon, zested into strips and juiced Golden rum
- 2/3 cup Powdered sugar, as needed



Dazzling dining rooms

As much as people are eager to gather again and celebrate with food and drink, the transition back to bustling restaurant dining rooms packed with patrons could take some more time. This could be an especially creative time for operators and chefs, who can make their menu more of a spectacle than before – something that is best appreciated in a restaurant dining room and is impossible to replicate in a take-away bag. As you welcome guests back, consider assembling, cooking or adding finishing touches to dishes tableside to create fresh, exciting dining room experiences that will entice people to come back with friends.

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Instructions:

1. Preheat convection oven with tray on middle rack to 350° F.
2. Unwrap cobbler, discard cover and bake for 70 minutes until filling boils and top crust is golden.
3. Let cool at least 1 hour; remove top crust and reserve.
4. Portion ice cream into medium-sized bowls and store in freezer. This can be done ahead.
5. Portion nine 1-cup servings of cobbler, including some of the bottom crust, into a large sauté pan.
6. Over medium-high heat, bring to simmer with unsalted butter, stirring often.
7. Add lemon zest and lemon juice. Stir well.
8. Add rum and using a long match, ignite the rum and let burn for 8-10 seconds. Stir to incorporate.
9. Portion cobbler mixture over ice cream and garnish with reserved cobbler crust and powdered sugar.

Recipe and photo courtesy of Sara Lee Bakery



Remember barriers to harmful bacteria

The past year has sharpened our focus on the spread of viruses. As we come through the pandemic, take care to maintain simple practices that go far in preventing the spread of bacteria. According to the CDC, bare-hand contact with ready-to-eat foods causes about 30 percent of restaurant foodborne illness outbreaks each year. Beyond all-important frequent handwashing, StateFoodSafety.com advises using gloves, deli tissue or tongs to provide a barrier between hands and ready-to-eat foods, and carrying plates, glasses and utensils in a way that avoids the touching of eating or drinking surfaces.



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Can you require staff to be vaccinated?

You are likely hiring more staff as we emerge from the pandemic – and you may feel that having vaccinated employees may make patrons more comfortable about dining with you. So can you require vaccination of new hires? In general, yes, according to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). For example, as a recent Q&A from the [National Law Review](#) indicates, an employer can ask if a candidate has been vaccinated and require proof of that vaccination. What could pose difficulty under the Americans with Disabilities act is asking an unvaccinated person why he or she hasn't been vaccinated, which could elicit information about a disability.



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Getting back to basics

In the past year in particular, it has often seemed like restaurant operators have been asked to accomplish the impossible: Simplify the ingredients you use but accommodate everyone from carnivores to vegans to customers with allergies. Increase wages for employees but avoid noticeable pricing spikes on your menu. Make your menu feel special and unique, but it should not be complex or time-consuming to prepare.

The list goes on and on. And as consumers venture back into restaurant dining rooms and order delivery in the months ahead, expectations will continue to climb. It's a good time for you to take a look at your business and decide what you value – and just as important, what you don't care about as much – so you can do your best with the people and resources you have and then filter out the noise. What are your core values? What impression do you want your customers to have of your business? In which aspects of your business are you not willing to compromise or accept

a substitute? Assess each area of your business and identify things that are out of your control and can't be negotiated – like managing food safety requirements and government-imposed business restrictions. Where you do have some control, where are your biggest pain points? Where are things going especially well – and how can you apply those positives to other areas of your business?



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