

Foodservice Updates

In This Issue

- Taking care of (existing) business | Feeling saucy? | Be aware of allergens in disguise | Prevent recontamination | Tech to manage inflation | Boost your supply chain IQ

Look at labor in a new way

To be sure, finding and keeping labor is a top challenge for most restaurant operators. But some have managed to retain staff – and turn a good profit. A recent report from The Counter shares how in June 2020, when restaurants were closing doors and worry about the pandemic was just setting in, California restaurateurs Greg and Daisy Ryan doubled down on their investment in employees. Backed by a Paycheck Protection Program loan, an Economic Injury Disaster Loan, some private funding and down-to-the-penny cost analysis with a Google spreadsheet, they increased wages to an average of \$27 an hour and added new perks, including fully paid health care coverage and 80 hours of paid time off. At the time it probably seemed crazy to many, but the plan has worked: In 2019, the restaurant was making \$1 million a year. In 2021, that figure has jumped to \$3 million and employee retention has been above 95 percent. It can be a difficult thing to focus on in a fast-moving business with dueling priorities but finding ways to invest in employee satisfaction pays off – and can protect your business for the long term. Some efforts are completely free – thanking staff for their efforts, recognizing them in team meetings, or promoting them on social media. Beyond that, take a look at the tedious tasks no one wants to do and consider how you might automate them and make an employee’s shift more enjoyable as a result. If you can’t improve insurance benefits (Oyster Sunday may be able to help you do this affordably), make sure you’re showing you care about employees’ mental and physical health by providing regular breaks and check-ins. Your training program should weave these principles into it as well. Steve McKee, co-founder of McKee Wallwork + Co., a marketing advisory firm that specializes in turning around stalled companies, prefers the term “immersion” to “onboarding” to help encourage employee retention. It should be a gradual but continuous process that goes beyond sharing policies and is more about embracing the culture and vision of the business – while also not hiding its flaws.



Tech to manage inflation

As escalating food and energy costs continue to drive inflation higher, restaurant operators are trying to run even more leanly than they have in the past two years. But as a recent Nation's Restaurant News report mentions, you can use tech to minimize the impact of inflation on your operation. Emphasize the importance of ordering directly from you through your website or app versus third-party vendors – being able to accumulate and analyze guests' data is critical to developing the menu items and promotions that will bring them back. Then try to put costly or tedious functions on autopilot. That means considering QR codes or self-order kiosks at the front of house to streamline ordering and payment while minimizing the labor required. In the back of house, consider tech tools that can make your food safety program more consistent – connected temperature sensors, digital checklists in place of paper processes, and the use of alerts to monitor cleaning and maintenance can all help you minimize waste and manage resources better at a time when they are especially tight.



Boost your supply chain IQ

What can your tech tell you about your suppliers at this very moment? Supply chains continue to be strained and food quality and safety may suffer as a result, so it's all the more important to have accurate, up-to-date safety and quality information about your suppliers at your fingertips. As a recent report from Modern Restaurant Management advises, operators should use their tech to manage supplier certification for vendors, continuously monitor the consistency and quality of their products, and store data about each supplier. This will make it easier to spot risks before they become full-blown problems, as well as help you identify suppliers with the strongest records of quality and safety.



Feeling saucy?

At a time when it's important lean into your pantry and stretch your inventory as far as it can go, what can you do to reinvent menu items on the fly? The secret's in the sauce. A new marinade or dipping sauce can create a new and different experience. As you update your menu, what items could get a new lease on life with a different sauce? From falafel to French fries to focaccia, consider trying new sauces that can upscale a dish, give it some on-trend flavor, or offer a creative twist with minimal labor and added ingredients.

Food Trends

White Truffle Garlic Aioli Fries

Ingredients:

- 5 oz crispy fries
- 2 tbsp shredded parmesan
- 1 tsp fresh rosemary leaves
- 1 pinch sea salt
- 3 fl oz Truffle Garlic Aioli (see recipe below)



Instructions:

1. Fry the fries until crispy, drain and place in cone shaped basket.
2. Top with sea salt, Truffle Garlic Aioli & rosemary leaves.
3. Sprinkle with Parmesan cheese and serve.

Truffle Garlic Aioli

Ingredients:

- 1 cup Ken's Signature Garlic Aioli (KE3191-2)
- 1 cup White truffle oil

Directions:

In a mixing bowl, whip together Ken's Garlic Aioli with the truffle oil.

Recipe and photo courtesy of Ken's



Be aware of allergens in disguise

Sesame is the ninth major allergen in the U.S. – and it’s everywhere. Menu items as varied as breads, hummus and stir fries may all contain it. But what makes sesame challenging to manage in a restaurant kitchen is that there are more than a dozen food names that imply they contain it. Benne, halvah and tahini are just a few of them, and sesame is often hiding in the spice blends or “natural flavors” mentioned on ingredient labels, according to the National Restaurant Association. As you plan menus and dish variations, be alert to the aliases of the ingredients you’re using – particularly those known to trigger serious food allergies.



#FoodSafety

Prevent recontamination

Everyone knows the importance of handwashing but not enough people actually do it, and the effects can be dramatic. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention say that in cases where food was contaminated by food workers, 89 percent of the outbreaks spread from the hands. In addition to washing hands with soap and water for 10 to 15 seconds, consider addressing sources of recontamination too—bathroom faucets and door handles can recontaminate the hands of someone who has just washed them. Have paper towels within reach of these places so they can be used to turn off faucets and open doors, and make sure these surfaces are cleaned regularly to prevent the spread of bacteria.



Foodservice Updates

Taking care of (existing) business

Winning a new customer can cost five times more than it costs to retain an existing one. What's more, even a small increase in customer retention – say 5 percent – can boost profits anywhere from 25-95 percent. Taking the best benefits of your technology and reinforcing them with strong interpersonal customer service skills can help you cement the loyalty of the guests who are already coming to you. Your guest data is your best asset, so analyze it and create opportunities to collect more of it – through your loyalty program, as well as through tech-based ordering and payment. When your Customer Relationship Management system is integrated with your POS, you're better able to address repeat customers by name, pull up their preferred dishes and table location, and elicit regular survey responses from them to identify their likes and dislikes, as well as your own opportunities for improvement. But this information is even more powerful when it is blended with more anecdotal input from staff who interact with your guests. Your team can tag a guest as a VIP, a wine connoisseur or as someone who enjoys the best of what you offer, giving you extra intelligence to make the person's visit special. Taking better care of your best customers is also likely to result in their sending their friends and family your way – so you may end up winning new customers anyway.



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