

# Foodservice Updates

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## Be clear about fees

At a time when food and labor expenses are so high, restaurant operators have to recoup costs from somewhere. Increasingly, they are leaning on check surcharges for help. These surcharges, which often total 22 percent of the bill and higher, are likely here to stay. But in the meantime, they tend to cause confusion among restaurant guests and employees alike. As a recent report from the New York Times puts it, these charges are often “tacked on with little explanation. Questions immediately swirl. Is this a tip? Does it go to the wait staff? If not, should I leave more money? Is it rude if I ask my server any of this?” It can add up to confusion, awkwardness and annoyance at the finish of a meal – not the final impression any restaurant wants to create. Part of the problem lies in calling the fee a service charge, which guests tend to conflate with a tip and consider voluntary. Some restaurants that want to eliminate tipping use the service charge to do so, while others still accept tips. What’s important is to avoid surprising people. Be transparent about your fees with both guests and your staff. That includes including language on your menu and website to explain what your service charge includes and how it helps staff, as well as showing staff on their paychecks exactly how these charges are benefiting them. If you’re using these charges to pay for health benefits for your team, for example, that is a good story to share with guests and employees alike – and something everyone could get behind.



# Tech Talk

## Geofencing can shave minutes off wait times

Consumers are used to getting what they want when they want it – and geofencing can help set guest expectations (and make you a more appealing choice for guests in a hurry). While the use of geofencing technology to increase the efficiency of food collection is nothing new, time has now proven its ability to expedite service. Last October, in an InTouch Insight study of 10 quick-service restaurants during peak dayparts, Chick-fil-A came in last for drive-thru times at eight minutes and 29 seconds on average. (KFC took first place for speed, with average drive-thru times of five minutes and two seconds.) Restaurant Dive reports that following a test of geofencing technology on its mobile app this past year, Chick-fil-A has been able to decrease its drive-thru times by between one and two minutes. Guests who enable location service on the restaurant's app will get an estimate of how long their orders will take, whether for curbside, takeaway or dine-in service. Chick-fil-A staff are alerted when customers approach the restaurant and can begin preparing orders – and estimated wait times have been 90 percent accurate.



## Use employee data to drive sales



Just like your guest data clarifies the habits and preferences of those who dine with you, your employee data can reveal truths about your team and your own training procedures that you wouldn't be likely to learn otherwise. As a recent report from Entrepreneur explains, employee data is about more than tracking your staff's working hours or sales. Perhaps your data can demonstrate that employees who receive more comprehensive training on your restaurant menu and specials tend to generate more sales – or perhaps there is less of a correlation than you expected. Wouldn't that be helpful to know when you're contemplating whether or not to invest in such training for all staff – and what aspects of training are most important to provide? Your data can also reveal who is most efficient in generating sales, so you can aim to have those employees working during your peak hours. When you review the data you have on employee performance, how much are you able to draw from it that can help you make proactive decisions to help your business?



# Trends

## Enhance the experience of your nonalcoholic beverages

A cool drink can be an even bigger draw than great food on a hot summer day – and more consumers are looking for beverage options without alcohol. Food Navigator research found that low- and no-alcohol consumption is on track to rise by one-third by 2026. What could be helpful for restaurant operators to know is that many of these beverages cost just as much on store shelves as their alcoholic counterparts do – and your menu prices can reflect that. But according to Mintel research, it's important to promote the experience of these drinks to justify the price tag. Experience-enhancing traits could include flavor combinations that are perceived to be higher-end, eye-catching colors, and ingredients that profess to improve health or mood.





## Does your staffing send the wrong message on safety?

You're hardly alone if you're short on staff right now – a majority of restaurants are. But you don't want to plant the seed with health inspectors that you are taking shortcuts with safety as a result. Does your restaurant show signs that it's operating with a skeleton crew? That could include long waiting times before being greeted or served, as well as an abundance of tables waiting to be cleaned. If so, it may be time to review any time-wasting tasks throughout your operation. What items can be delegated to others or automated with the help of technology? What tasks are non-urgent and can be set aside so you can protect safety? Taking care of those items may help you ensure a guest returns – and assure an inspector that you're not slipping up on safety.



**#FoodSafety**

# #FoodSafety

## What the scale of your menu says about you

If you're concerned that a slimmed-down menu may not provide enough options to hungry guests, fear not: Nowadays, a packed menu can send unappealing messages that you want to avoid communicating. Perhaps it says you're trying to accomplish too much with a small staff and kitchen – or that the complexity of your dishes requires you over-rely on frozen ingredients or items made out of house. Maybe your large menu makes guests doubt you'd be able to ensure the freshness of all ingredients. More isn't necessarily better. Having a menu that is in line with the scale of your kitchen and your staff makes it easier for you to attest to the freshness and quality of each item on your menu.

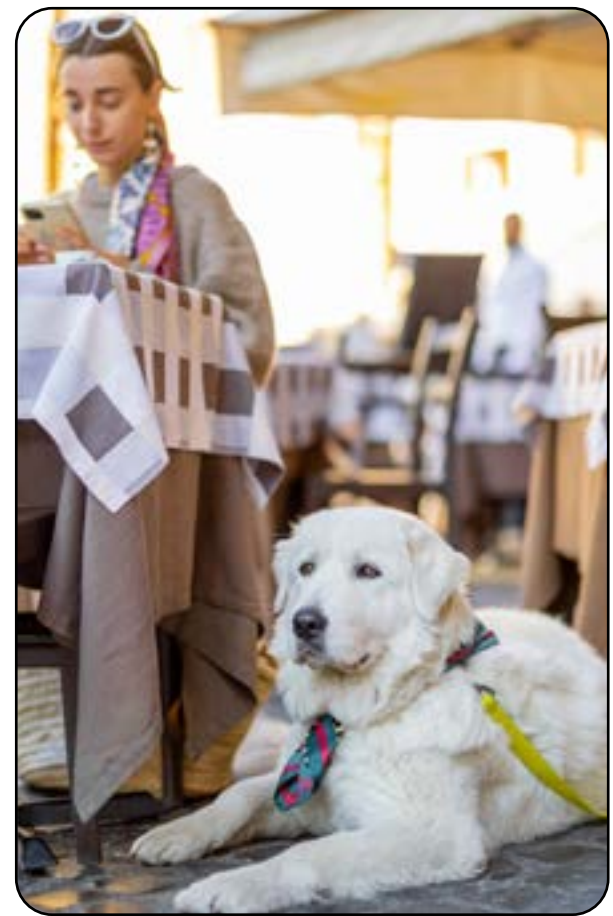




# Foodservice Updates

## Is your patio going to the dogs?

As you open your outdoor dining area to guests, your ability to cater to their canine friends can provide an extra draw (while at the same time deter other guests who aren't as fond of dining with animals nearby). While the FDA Food Code hasn't historically allowed for animals aside from service animals on restaurant premises, more than 20 states and several local jurisdictions have regulations permitting dogs – and a 2022 update to the FDA Food Code could pave the way for additional areas to allow dogs onsite. If you're considering it – and you may decide it's not for you – the National Restaurant Association advises restaurants that are allowed to have dogs on their premises to abide by several best practices in the interest of preserving safety and harmony with guests: Understand your local health regulatory agency's rules – while some agencies simply require a permit, others require more official notification of your intentions to allow dogs in your dining area. Require guests to keep dogs leashed, in control and off of chairs and tables – and ensure staff know how to respond and what cleaning and sanitizing procedures are required if those rules are broken. Use signage and language on your website and social media to make your policies clear to dog owners and others so everyone knows what to expect. Train staff to avoid handling the animals – or to ensure they wash hands immediately afterwards to avoid cross-contamination. Finally, ensure guests with dogs know where and how to manage pet waste while on your premises – and consider providing a refuse container for their use. If you're on the fence about opening your patio to dogs, you may be able to find a middle ground that pleases everyone – setting aside just one day a week for a dog-themed dinner for dogs and their human companions, for example.



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