

Foodservice Updates

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How transparent are you about costs?

No doubt, restaurants are feeling squeezed with the ongoing pressures of inflation, a tight labor market and even rising transaction fees from credit card companies – and the costs are too high for operators to absorb. As a result, many restaurants are finding creative ways to pass their extra expenses on to consumers. According to a recent article in the Wall Street Journal, fees with such names as “fuel surcharge,” “noncash adjustment” and “kitchen appreciation” have been appearing regularly on restaurant checks in recent weeks. How – and when – you present such costs can have a significant impact on your guests’ response to them. For instance, presenting a surprise list of incidental costs tacked onto a bill can make a guest feel nickel-and-dimed – or worse, that you’re not being honest with them. It’s better to present any added charges under a single umbrella and make guests aware of them at the outset – verbally from the server, in a note on the menu, or both. In a report from Inc., Zachary Weiner, CEO and founder of Finance Hire, an outsourced financial controller for small businesses, said that even though people are well aware of inflation, being transparent about any extra fees and where they are coming from can go a long way in helping guests understand why they are needed.



Friction-free tech

At a time when restaurants are feeling plenty of friction from labor challenges, inflation and the supply chain, operators should be leaning on technology to remove as much of the remaining friction as possible. An impactful place to focus is on customer ordering and payment for both on- and off-premise meals. OneDine is one company that is enabling streamlined ordering and payment in both areas. When your guests place an off-premise order, can they easily input information about an allergy or dietary preference? Can they split the bill with a friend? Consumers are eager to share meals with friends again. Restaurants that can accommodate their different needs and preferences with a user-friendly interface, while also easing the stress of paying the bill, are in a strong position to attract guests looking to gather over restaurant food.



Make way for the robots

If there was one predominant theme to emerge from this year's National Restaurant Association show, it might be that robots' time has finally arrived. The labor crunch has made the need for new solutions all the more pressing and the recent show presented solutions including robots that can complete such tasks as bartending, cleaning and even climbing stairs to deliver orders. In the months leading up to the show, robots have taken on more of the monotonous, repetitive or dangerous tasks in restaurants, such as serving as fry cooks, with increasing frequency. Servi, a server robot that is being leased by a growing number of independent and national brands in recent months, costs approximately \$1,000 per month. For many operators struggling to find staff, being able to count on an extra set of hands to complete tasks has been worth the cost.





Sustainable seafood

Seafood is central to summer vacation for many people – and at its most craveable during this time of year. If you're featuring seafood on your menu this summer, look for ways to serve it sustainably and with minimal waste. To help, look beyond offering seafood as the main attraction of a dish. Finding strong supporting roles for seafood in a range of dishes including soups, stews, pastas, tacos and stir fries can help improve your utilization, nose to tail.

Food Trends

Boom Boom Crispy Fish Tacos

Ingredients:

- 1 oz Napa cabbage chopped
- 1 oz Cucumber chopped
- 1 oz Red pepper small chop
- 3 Flour tortillas
- 3 Panko breaded fish filets
- 3 tbsp Boom Boom Sauce
- 2 fl oz Pico de gallo
- 1 Lemon wedge



Instructions:

1. Mix chopped Napa cabbage, cucumber, and red pepper together to make a slaw. Set aside
2. Place fish in deep fryer until golden brown with an internal temperature of 145°F and drain.
3. Place flour tortillas on flat top grill for 30 seconds on each side and remove to service plate.
4. Fill each tortilla with 1 piece of fish, drizzle with 1 tablespoon of Boom Boom Sauce and top with 1 ounce of the freshly made slaw.
5. Serve with a side of pico de gallo and a fresh lemon wedge.

Recipe and photo courtesy of Ken's



Make sure your refrigerator can take the heat

The hot months can strain your appliances and also make you ever more reliant on them functioning properly. When it comes to your walk-in refrigerator, having staff coming in and out at regular intervals can not only pose food safety risks but also strain your condenser, which has to work that much harder to function as it should. Consider having your refrigerator serviced before there is a problem that takes it out of commission. It also helps to reinforce with staff (with reminders or even physical obstacles like hanging flaps at the door) the need to minimize trips in and out of the cooler.



#FoodSafety

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Do your distributors pass the freshness test?

Food freshness and safety go hand in hand. As many operators are leaning on smaller, local suppliers to shrink the supply chain, it's still important to ask questions of these companies that can make the difference between receiving produce shortly after it is picked, or many hours later. A recent report from US Foods cited a key question that Michael Navarrette, executive chef at Café Luxembourg in New York, always asks any prospective vendor: Where am I on your delivery route? If produce is sitting on a truck in the heat of summer, it's vulnerable to the spread of germs that subsequent washing may miss. Knowing how large the window is between the picking of the produce and its arrival at your door can make a difference in your food quality, safety and waste.



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Reinvention time

Resuming “business as usual” has been impossible for many restaurants in the current economic environment. As brands have increased prices in recent months – typically multiple times – many are needing to take new approaches to close the profitability gap. A recent Restaurant Business report described how Chili’s, which has increased prices six times in the first nine months of its fiscal year, is now overhauling its service model and menu to drive not only better efficiency now, but also better adaptability down the line. Wyman Roberts, CEO of Chili’s parent company Brinker International, said the brand’s new menu, which will be more costly, will reduce operational complexity, restructure their value proposition for better margins and provide pricing flexibility in the future. The company is also aiming to operate more efficiently through a service model that uses handheld devices and more food runners (including robotic food runners in some locations) to help reduce the labor they need. Even if you’re not already planning to overhaul your business in a similar way right now, the efforts restaurants are making to eke out profits will change the competitive landscape for everyone – and could force changes on others. As you look at your operation, it’s more important than ever to address pain points and friction wherever you experience them – and consider approaches that may make your restaurant look a lot different than it has in the past. Your service model, menu, labor strategy, foundational technology and marketing strategy should all be on the table as you consider how to prepare your business to succeed now and adjust as needed in the future.



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