

Foodservice Updates

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Transform your restaurant's roles

The National Restaurant Association estimates that the average restaurant loses \$150,000 annually in staff turnover. Further, 70 percent of operators are struggling to hire new staff, so it's crucial for operators to improve employee recruitment and retention – and to find ways to do it that look different from what they have tried before. Research shared during a recent webinar from Nation's Restaurant News indicated that restaurant operators are making a number of labor-specific investments in technology in a direct effort to boost retention by making restaurant jobs feel more like careers. By and large, these changes are not designed to reduce headcount; rather, they are about automating parts of the job that employees aren't as good at, find tedious, or both. Restaurants can reap significant benefits if they find ways to think long term about transforming restaurant service in ways that maximize the parts of it that staff enjoy most (and make the tougher parts of the job more accessible). According to a report from The Takeout, staff tend to find the relationship-building parts of the job most fulfilling: getting to know repeat customers as friends, discovering what they appreciate about the business, and bonding with them over the ingredients and techniques used across the menu. Do you know what aspects of the job led your staff to you? If it's simply the chance to earn a paycheck, how can you make the job about more than that? If you can't delegate any of your most tedious tasks to tech, can you reform your training to make those tasks easier? Where possible, take steps in the right direction – even if you don't have the budget to invest in tech right now.



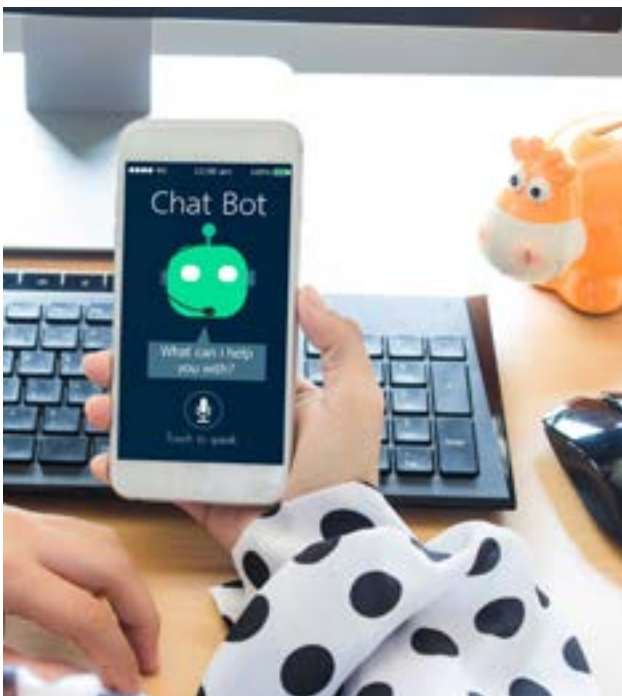
Tech Talk

Worried about AI? Don't be.

The fast-evolving developments in generative artificial intelligence have triggered both excitement and anxiety for businesses in recent months. Survey research from Nation's Restaurant News found that among restaurant operators, there is an appetite for AI but also a knowledge gap when it comes to putting the technology into practice: 41 percent of operators are not using AI but want to, while 27 percent aren't using AI and don't plan to. What's important to realize is that using AI may not even be a choice you have to make. It is already baked into many kinds of software we rely on each day. We are likely using AI without realizing it – and the new technologies and tools we come to depend on to manage all aspects of the restaurant business will evolve to include it as well. Using AI may be as simple as pulling comprehensive forecasts from your POS. Your use of AI may not feel futuristic or flashy, but that doesn't mean it won't be powerful for your business.



Finding the line between welcome and annoying



At a time when technology improvements are happening quickly and so many restaurants are operating with skeleton crews, being able to delegate orders to a chatbot who can work 24 hours a day and try to upsell every single order is tempting. But the evolution of restaurant chatbots hasn't been the smoothest, and while the technology will continue to improve, restaurant operators sitting on the fence about the technology may be okay waiting a bit longer for the kinks to be ironed out (or for consumers to simply get used to using it). Case in point: A recent report from the Wall Street Journal detailed the guest response to White Castle's new "Julia" chatbot. While Julia is easing the burden on staff and enabling speedier service, some guests are chafing at her folksy language patterns and persistence in encouraging add-ons to orders every single time. When testing this kind of technology, it's worth examining the nuances of guest interactions with it – the larger orders it generates may not tell the whole story.

Trends

There's money in sustainability

As more businesses adopt environmental goals as part of their corporate practices, restaurants and related vendors are doubling down on waste management too. Chipotle recently announced that it is expanding composting across its more than 3,200 stores – and CNBC reports that waste management is one of the goals that the restaurant's executive compensation bonuses are based on. For their part, Uber Eats is also offering restaurants grants worth \$10,000 to switch to sustainable packaging as part of its plan to remove all unnecessary plastic waste from deliveries this year. How do sustainable practices factor into your operations this year?



Safer salad days?

As food safety has played a larger role in consumers' view of hospitality in recent years, salad bars and other foods served buffet-style have felt the impact. We've all seen salad tongs drift into the ingredients they are meant to serve, carrying bacteria with them – and this is more apt to disturb consumers now than it did before Covid. Making salad serving areas feel safe requires vigilance from staff – a difficult task if you have a smaller-than-ideal team right now. But as with so many other parts of the restaurant experience, there are options coming to market that are automating self-service and delivering potential benefits for food safety. One example: touchless self-service salad bars that store ingredients in clear, refrigerated compartments and dispense a set amount of ingredients. No germ-y tongs or sneeze guards required – and restaurants can manage portion control at the same time.

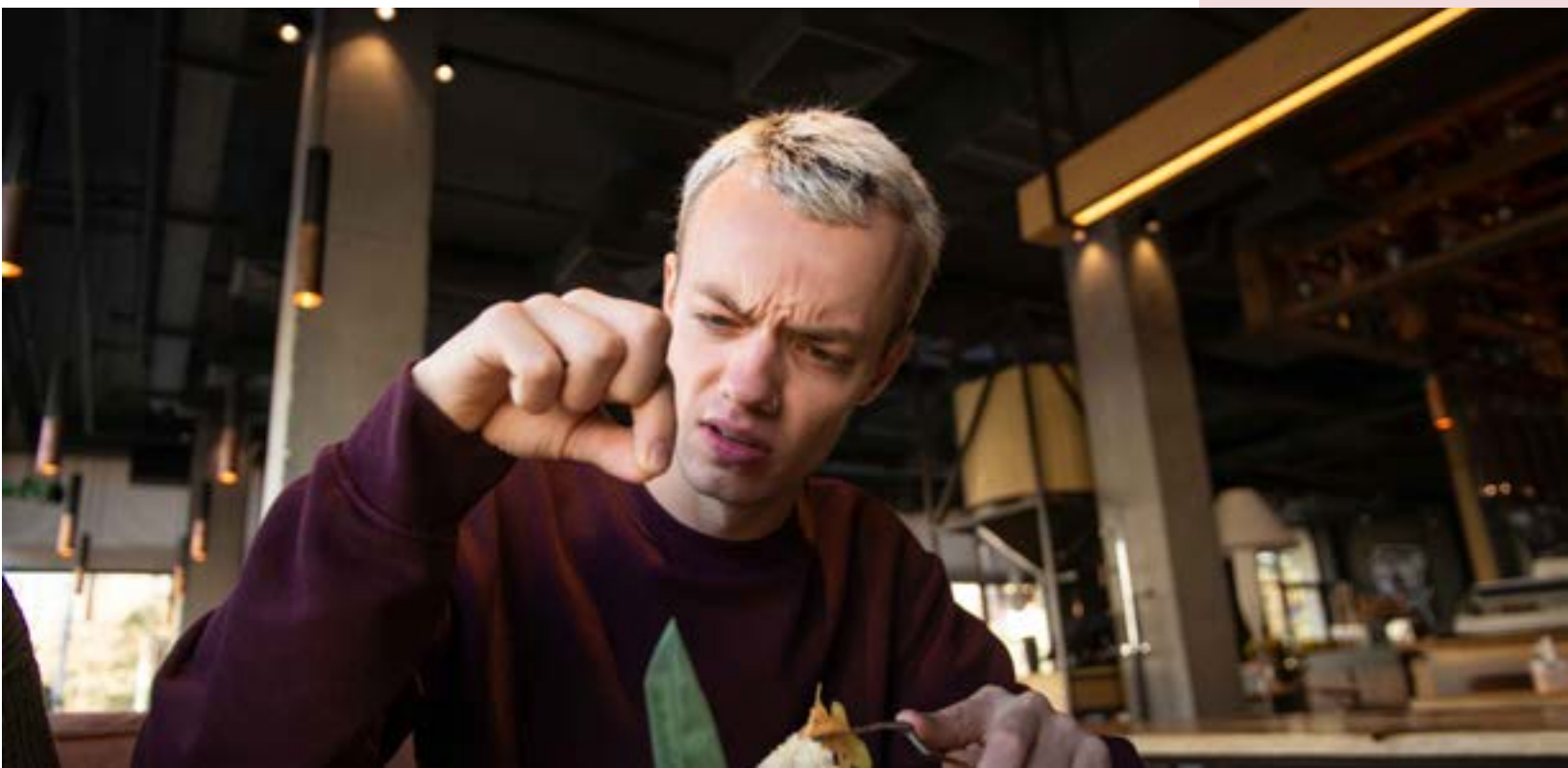
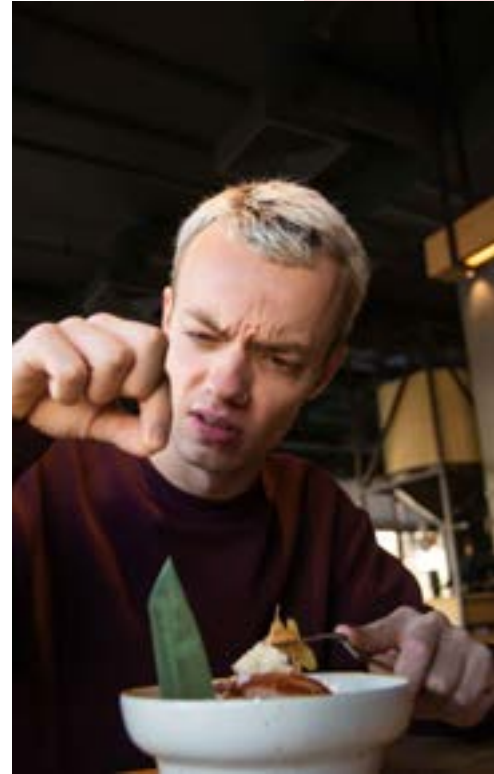


#FoodSafety

#FoodSafety

Transform a negative food safety review

Have your guests shared a food safety concern about your restaurant in an online review? Your response – or lack thereof – can send a loud message to guests about the quality of your food and your commitment to food safety. If you leave several negative reviews unanswered, you may send the message that you don't care about improving, that you hear this kind of thing so often that it isn't alarming anymore, or that you're not interested in making the effort to make things right for your guests. Your negative reviews have power for the bad and for the good. Make sure that you use yours to strengthen guest relationships by showing concern for making a situation better.



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Tap into the power of the text

For better or worse, we're all tethered to our phones. So why not use this to your advantage? According to research from the Local Project, text is the most commonly used form of communication for American adults under 50. The online marketer 99Firms found that the open rate for text messages is 99 percent, as compared to 17-28 percent for emails. Texts get attention, yet according to the communications firm MessageDesk, only 60 percent of marketers use them to interact with guests and build stronger connections with them. Consider the potential uses of text in your business. The Rail suggests using text to share discounts and specials, personalized promotions, loyalty rewards updates, and survey requests. You could also harness text to manage communications about reservations, send guests updates about the availability of their table, or to streamline curb-side pickup. At a time when restaurant operators are concerned about cutting costs where possible, texting is a cost-effective way of reaching guests at scale and targeting them with segmented messages. They are also easy to automate, so you're setting yourself up to connect with guests on auto pilot. Just make sure you're not bombarding your recipients with messages and that the ones you send contain information that's actionable and valuable.



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