

Foodservice Updates

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It's not about lower prices

To be sure, rising inflation and fears of impending recession are making many consumers want to pull back on spending. But the picture may not be as gloomy as it seems for restaurant operators. As a recent CNBC report indicates, while people are feeling less optimistic about their finances, they are still showing willingness to spend money on experiences – including travel, concerts, movies and drinks – that could easily fall into the “discretionary spending” category. So how can restaurant operators keep this going and ward off a slowdown in traffic as we slide toward a possible recession? NPD Group advises focusing on providing value – and that’s not a euphemism for a lower-priced experience but rather one that justifies the price charged. It’s about carefully tracking how people respond to your prices and promotions so you understand at what point your guests will pull back on buying. NPD Group advises not lowering prices if guests remain willing to pay more, for example, and to adjust pricing as levels of various items in your inventory rebound. Give guests reasons to make impulse purchases. Offering memorable experiences of various kinds can do the trick, particularly as ongoing pandemic fatigue gives people a good excuse to make time to be with friends and family. Finally, continue to monitor excess costs and look for ways to trim them so you can make the most of what you do spend.



When your historical data falls short, tech can fill the gaps

Running the most efficient operation you can is hinged on your data. It can tell you everything from how much of an item to order to how much staff to have on hand during a shift, thereby minimizing wasteful spending. But your ability to make informed predictions of your needs relies on the quality of your historical data – your record of recent weeks, months and years. What if your historical data has gaping holes in it? While the pandemic has spurred the adoption of restaurant technology across the industry, the quality of historical data about a restaurant may still need time to improve. Increasingly, restaurant tech stacks are enabling operators to not only adjust their forecasts based on factors such as weather and local events; they are also allowing brands to factor in historical data from similar brands across the industry. Ingest, for one, is allowing restaurants to benchmark against the performance of similar brands to help them get a more complete picture when their own historical data isn't up to the task.



AI as a tool to support employee performance

Artificial Intelligence has been carving out a space in restaurants as a means of delegating tasks and saving labor costs. Though AI-supported ordering is still a work in progress (as McDonald's has discovered with recent tests), AI is also serving as a kitchen assistant that can nudge employees to catch errors early – before they get the attention of an annoyed customer. One company in this space, Agot AI, places cameras over the food preparation line to watch how orders are being prepared. It connects with in-store, online and drive-thru orders appearing on the kitchen display system and will alert an employee in the line if an order is missing, say, the extra packets of ketchup the customer requested. In the process, the information the technology gathers can help a restaurant flag repeat problems in the line and adjust training to better manage them, and even create a rewards system to recognize employees who successfully move orders through the line with accuracy and speed.





Tuscan pot roast

Ingredients:

- 5 lbs. Hillshire Farm® Chuck Pot Roast w/Au Jus and Onions, cleaned and au jus reserved
- 6 Tbsp, divided extra virgin olive oil
- 2 cups onion, coarsely chopped
- 16 oz. fresh mushrooms, sliced
- 3 Tbsp. garlic, chopped
- 3/4 cup Chianti wine
- 1 cup marinara sauce
- 1/2 cup tomato paste
- 1/3 cup balsamic vinegar
- 4 oz. sun-dried tomatoes in oil, drained, julienne cut
- 3 Tbsp. Italian seasoning
- 2 Tbsp. sea salt (optional)
- 1 Tbsp. cracked black pepper
- 1 tsp. crushed red pepper flakes (optional)

Serve comfort food with a function

Earlier this year, a survey from The Food Group found that while consumers continue to enjoy comfort foods, they are clearly looking to incorporate more ingredients with health benefits into their diets. The survey of 200 adults aged 21 to 40 in the U.S. found that almost half plan to buy more plant-based products. This was the case even though the majority of respondents identified as carnivores or flexitarians. More than half of those surveyed – nearly 60 percent – said they are looking to increase their purchases of functional foods including fruits, vegetables and seafood, while doing the same with beverages including coffee, tea and kombucha. When you serve up a comforting entrée or appetizer, look for ways to boost its functionality (and overall appeal) by weaving these ingredients into the recipe, its accompanying sauces and sides.

Food Trends



Instructions:

1. Remove and discard extra fat and connective tissue from pot roast; reserve au jus in a separate container.
2. Heat 2 tablespoon olive oil in large sauté pan over medium-high heat; add onions and cook, stirring frequently until onions are tender.
3. Add remaining olive oil and mushrooms; sauté until mushrooms are tender, about 3-5 minutes. Stir in garlic and sauté for 2 minutes longer.
4. Stir in reserved au jus and all remaining ingredients (except pot roast); cook over medium heat until mixture is hot. Add pot roast and heat.
5. Serve on ciabatta bread with sliced mozzarella cheese, or as an entrée over pasta or creamy polenta

Recipe and photo courtesy of Tyson



How does your food safety program score?

Your food safety program can't be static. Evolving health risks, new staff and changing employee roles all make it important for restaurants to regularly track their adherence to – and communication of – their food safety procedures. Having an understanding of how you're performing between inspections can help you adjust your training practices and even give you an opportunity to improve employee engagement by rewarding those who uphold your best practices (not simply penalizing those responsible after a food safety incident occurs). Steritech developed a quiz to help operators get a snapshot of how they are performing when it comes to food safety. It may serve as an extra tool to help you monitor what you do well and where you have room to improve.



#FoodSafety

Reduce your susceptibility to food fraud

Supply chain strains and the war in Ukraine have challenged food security around the globe and, in the process, increased the likelihood for food fraud. Seafood, which is regularly traded, is especially susceptible to it, but grains, meat and legumes have also been impacted by food fraud in recent years. Chris Elliott, food safety expert and founder of the Institute for Global Food Security at Queen's University in Belfast, Northern Ireland, told *New Food* magazine recently that one of the biggest consumer risks from food fraud is the fraudulent introduction of allergens into food products, which threaten the health of a restaurant's customers. That risk is followed by the emergence of new proteins that may come from unsustainable sources. Restaurants can best protect themselves from the rising risk of food fraud by sourcing items locally, which simplifies and clarifies the supply chain; closely monitoring the path an ingredient must take to reach their business; assessing any vulnerabilities that may exist with staff, technology, inventory procedures and suppliers; and being transparent with both staff and customers about sourcing – it will naturally help increase an operation's awareness of fraud when it occurs.



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The struggles of going ghost

As restaurant operators have tried to accommodate off-premise guests in recent years, the ghost kitchen quickly emerged as an appealing solution – giving operators a low-overhead option for starting a new food-service concept or keeping an existing one humming while dining rooms were closed. But growing pains have begun to emerge for the industry. A recent Restaurant Business report indicated that operators were struggling with the high cost of delivery from their ghost kitchens, as well as attracting and paying staff and marketing locations that were designed to be invisible to the public. But since ghost kitchens were initially promoted as operator-friendly entry points into the industry, some say their difficulties may be more rooted in the experience of the operators themselves. John Meyer, CEO of Ghost Financial, which provides loans, insurance, payroll and other financial products to ghost kitchen operators, told Restaurant Dive that ghost kitchens have been attracting operators who lack industry-specific skills in digital advertising, targeted advertising and integration with delivery apps. But as we have learned from the pandemic, every challenge creates an opportunity: To help ghost kitchen operators get up to speed, Meyer developed GhostU, an online educational program designed to help restaurateurs build, scale and run a profitable ghost kitchen. Restaurant Dive reports that the program provides a minimum of 12 videos, along with step-by-step worksheets and three months of access to Ghost Financial's Ghost Kitchen Community, where ghost kitchen owners can share their experiences and access interactive workshops and Q&A sessions.



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