

Foodservice Updates

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When it comes to recruitment and retention, automate the mundane

Recruiting and retaining staff is challenging enough on its own right now – but it becomes all the more difficult if you’re still using manual processes to manage it. Are there manual processes you could stand to weed out of your operation? A recent webinar from SmartBrief about workforce engagement tools for the hospitality industry described the benefits of a tech-based alternative. Consider this: A person who is already passionate about your brand comes in to pick up an order. They see an in-store (or perhaps an in-app) sign advertising open positions. With the scan of a QR code, they access an application, which is streamed differently depending on the responsibilities of their desired position. They apply quickly, with a minimum of scanning and scrolling. After a successful interview, they complete all necessary forms online on their own time – and avoid wasting time in the restaurant prior to starting work or having to distract the manager on duty with questions. On the person’s first day of work, your restaurant’s app sends them a message explaining what it’s like to work in your organization. Over the next few months, it continues to check in to ask about training and point out ways to easily get information, swap shifts or ask for time off, and connect with other people. It can send out pulse surveys to get an ongoing read on how the person is doing and where concerns could be lurking. If the person clocks in late a few times in a row, your app can alert a busy manager, who can then make an effort to understand where there might be a problem and offer support. Down the line, it can send out messages or little rewards on birthdays and work anniversaries. Could this help you? Consider the snags in your recruitment and retention processes. Are you mired in any time-consuming paperwork? Is it difficult for your managers to monitor every employee’s performance and anticipate who is struggling? Do you know which staff are disengaged? There are tools to help you smooth out these bumps – and they may help you not only reach good potential staff, but also stand a better chance of holding on to them for longer.



Tech Talk

Ease into automation

New research from Deloitte suggests that many diners are open to eating in restaurants that use labor-saving devices or other technological automation – with 58 percent of consumers aged 18-38 saying they'd return to restaurants that use automation, compared to 42 percent of customers over the age of 39. Keep in mind that automation need not mean bringing in robotic cooks or servers, or even making eye-watering financial investments. Restaurants are approaching automation in a wide range of ways – in the back and front of house, both food-facing and not. A recent podcast from The Spoon shared the story of how pizza restaurant owner Andrew Simmons began adopting automation in a piecemeal way to sustain his brand when the pandemic hit – and how he now plans to launch a 100-unit restaurant chain built using off-the-shelf restaurant technology. Consider what your guests value most about your brand – and how automating even small tasks might help you elevate what you do best and minimize the things that can stand in your way.



Entice customers to order direct



The fees charged by third-party delivery providers can take a painful bite out of already-slim restaurant profits. But your tech can make it easier and more appealing for customers to come straight to you. A recent report from QSR Magazine points to how the hotel industry has successfully done a similar thing over the years. Consider some value-added offerings that don't cost you much but lift the experience you give to guests who order food directly from you. That could be offering a free drink with orders placed via your website or app – or subsidizing all or part of the delivery fee. Lean on your loyalty program to hook your customers. They have little reason to go elsewhere if they know you're prompting them with targeted offers that are likely to appeal to them based on their past orders. Attract customers to your restaurant by providing enough appealing menu items on third-party delivery sites to entice them, but save a good number of options for the menu you use for your direct customers – and promote the benefits of coming to you directly. No one likes missing out.

Trends

Embrace the rotation

Once upon a time, a person could return to a restaurant year after year and see the same assortment of menu items. Inflation and supply challenges have turned that idea on its head, making rotating menus a more common experience. But even if the macroeconomic environment stabilizes, there are big benefits to keeping dynamic menus around. They spark ongoing interest from guests. What better reason to visit a restaurant more often than to discover the latest changes to the menu? They allow you to flow with the seasons and offer ingredients more apt to be local and plentiful. New menus naturally offer you content to promote online – you can entice people to come in before your menu options change and again when you're unveiling new items. Finally, they keep your operation nimble. You're able to respond more creatively, flexibly and cost-consciously when there is a shortage. A restaurant with a regularly changing menu can't be shouldering a lot of waste.



Serve a clean, cold drink this summer

Your soft drinks may be in even greater demand than your food options on hot summer days. But a less-than-clean soda fountain can be an immediate turn-off for guests (not to mention a safety hazard). It's easy for mildew to collect around soda fountain spouts that aren't cleaned regularly. What's more, if you're allowing guests to serve drinks themselves in an effort to save labor, your staff will need to take care to inspect and clean these machines more often. Do your safety checks ensure that your machines are cleaned in the appropriate ways – and at the right intervals – so they're serving up a clean pour?



#FoodSafety

Does your sickness policy stand up?

Your restaurant could seemingly be doing all the right things when it comes to protecting food – storing it safely, keeping it at the proper temperatures, being mindful of cross-contamination. But those precautions won't go far enough if you're lax about having sick employees work. According to health officials, food workers who came to work sick or contagious have contributed to about 40 percent of restaurant food poisoning outbreaks in recent years, with norovirus and salmonella being the most common causes of illness. Even if you have a policy that, on its face, restricts staff from working while sick, it may not be doing enough. An ABC news report about the findings said while 85 percent of restaurants said their policies restrict staff from working while sick, only 16 percent of the policies were detailed enough to require workers to alert managers and remain home if they had certain symptoms of illness, including vomiting, diarrhea, and sore throat with fever.



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Capitalize on user-generated content this summer

For a large number of consumers, summer is prime time for eating out. Statista research found that 48 percent of consumers say they dine out more in the summer than in any other season. So before the season wraps up, make the most of the opportunities it can provide to elevate your restaurant online for the public in the months ahead. There's no promotion better than an authentic testimonial from a guest, so consider where you can accumulate user-generated content – to include photos, video and audio created by guests based on their experiences with your restaurant. Are your guests already posting about your restaurant on social media? Modern Restaurant Management advises restaurants put a mechanism in place to gather what guests post in one place so it can build some momentum around your brand. Develop a contest or other promotion and create a branded hashtag that you ask your guests to use when sharing content about your restaurant. Launch a food photography contest or name-the-new-cocktail contest and give the winner a free appetizer or drink, along with promotion on your social media channels and other marketing outlets. Your loyal guests are your restaurant's best ambassadors. How can you channel their enthusiasm for your restaurant into promotions that can bring other guests back after the season has ended?



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