

# Foodservice Updates

## In This Issue

• [What experiential enhancements can you make? | Serving climatarians](#) | [Take care of this food safety red flag](#) | [The difficulty of being safe with sesame](#) | [Tapping into tech to retain staff](#) | [Technology is making some old favorites new again](#)

## Automation is starting to look different

When we think of restaurant automation, images of robotic fry cooks tend to spring to mind. But as the recent National Restaurant Association Show revealed, advances in artificial intelligence and automation are beginning to transform restaurant roles well beyond the fryer. For example, when the restaurant group Boqueria Kitchen transitioned from a manual system for tipping out and managing payroll to an automated one, it saved about 3,000 labor hours – or the equivalent of 1.5 full-time managers, according to a report from Restaurant Dive. Such automated systems are also helping restaurants improve their compliance accuracy, which in turn allows managers to spend more time making sure guests get great service. Beyond day-to-day restaurant management, more operators are leaning on automated communication tools like ChatGPT to help with employee screening and onboarding in an effort to retain staff. As a Restaurant Business report about ChatGPT indicates, that has involved using a bot for such tasks as drafting business-wide announcements about menu changes or training tasks, as well as checking in on employees to see how they are doing if they have been absent or are looking to switch a shift. To be sure, this technology still requires human oversight. In workplaces ranging from courtrooms to nonprofits, AI communication technology has shown itself capable of making embarrassing errors – and businesses using it for applicant screening must ensure the technology can assess candidates without discrimination. But these early uses of automated communication could be important indicators of how restaurant labor – as well as its management – could evolve.



# Tech Talk

## Tapping into tech to retain staff

While it's true that more restaurant operators are automating front- and back-of-house processes right now, they are also focusing more on how they can make the most of their staff – and keep the people they have. According to Nation's Restaurant News Intelligence, this is the top priority for operators. It ranks higher for them than reducing labor costs, as well as streamlining both back- and front-of-house operations. The labor shortage of the past few years has required operators to adopt technology that supports employee retention efforts. That includes taking such steps as digitizing the onboarding and training process, automating scheduling, and adopting labor-enhancing tools to help them deliver quality service (as opposed to bringing in technology designed to replace human labor). This is a beneficial talking point for operators managing staff. Regularly collecting feedback from staff about their pain points can help you identify where technology might help lighten their load and enable them to focus on guest-facing work. It may even help you keep them from moving on to a different job.



## Technology is making some old favorites new again



Tech isn't simply about transforming your business for a modern age. It can also be about taking old ideas, then re-framing and improving upon them using new tools. The automat is one example. Automats were the original quick-service restaurants, serving up simple food and drink in vending machines at the turn of the 20th century in the U.S. Customers would order a meal, then insert coins and open a window to collect it. While the original automat concept fizzled out, recent improvements in technology and restaurants' labor challenges have reset the conditions for the reinvention of this service model. As Fast Casual reported recently, New York's Brooklyn Dumpling Shop is using a reimagined automat to serve up its dumplings and spring rolls. Ordering and collection are contactless: Customers simply order from their phone within a few miles of the restaurant, select a pickup time and receive a barcode. Each prepared order is left in a temperature-controlled locker that a customer can unlock simply with a wave of their phone.

# Trends

## Serving climatarians

There is a growing subset of guests who are concerned less with how many calories they consume and more with the processes required for that food to reach them. They want to eat foods with a low carbon footprint and for their food packaging to reflect that ethos too. Industry research indicates a growing number of restaurants across categories offering climatarian menus that measure and share a menu item's carbon footprint. Whether or not your restaurant offers such an option, climate impact is a topic likely to be on the minds of more guests – as well as existing and potential staff.



## Take care of this food safety red flag

The first stop for your safety inspector is often the place you don't want associated with your kitchen in any way: your bathroom. Dirty, littered bathrooms are a major red flag for inspectors – and guests too. If you're not taking care to tidy these visible areas, why should people trust that you're adhering to safety and hygiene standards in your kitchen? Indeed, in an interview with Mashed, Angela Anandappa, the founding executive director of the nonprofit Alliance for Advanced Sanitation, advises guests to check out a restaurant's restrooms before they sit down to their meal – and make an educated guess about its food safety based on that experience. If you're slipping in this area, ensure that your staff check and clean your restrooms at more frequent intervals. Digital tools can help you stay on schedule and identify when problems tend to arise during shifts.



**#FoodSafety**

## The difficulty of being safe with sesame

Sesame, which officially became the ninth major allergen this year, has been causing some unexpected trouble in businesses across the food industry – with difficult consequences for consumers and restaurants alike. The new law around managing sesame requires careful cleaning to prevent cross-contact of foods with and without sesame. But because it can be difficult for restaurants to guarantee the removal of such contamination through this cleaning, many food suppliers have added small amounts of sesame flour to products that did not previously include the allergen. Their aim was to help guests avoid guesswork about the foods they can't eat, but the result has been more people unwittingly consuming sesame in foods they had previously been able to eat safely. While some restaurant brands have stated that they have removed sesame from products (Jimmy John's) and not added sesame to products that didn't already contain it (McDonald's), many restaurants are finding the new law on sesame difficult to follow – and are leaving allergic consumers confused and frustrated as a result. While we wait for a solution, the restaurants that can manage to navigate the new law without introducing sesame in places where it didn't exist previously stand to gain some loyal guests: There are currently more than 1.5 million Americans with a sesame allergy.



# Foodservice Updates

## What experiential enhancements can you make?

Inflation has made restaurant meals a tougher sell for consumers, so the experience of your restaurant carries more weight. In a recent webinar from Datassential, speakers referenced some very different examples that illustrate how restaurants are approaching this. For example, at the Mini Chef restaurant at the Lego House in Denmark, each guest is given a packet of 16 Legos. Each piece in the packet corresponds to a customizable ingredient listed on a simple menu. To submit their order, a guest must “build” their desired combination with their Lego pieces and submit it into a machine at their table that confirms their preferred ingredients. The novelty of the ordering system becomes entertainment – and as much of a focus as the food. But boosting your experience doesn’t require an operational overhaul. Consider one low-tech approach by a restaurant across from a children’s hospital: Guests can buy a beer for a parent or carer of a patient at the hospital and their purchase is marked with a sticker on a sign posted in the restaurant. The free beer can give recipients a brief respite from the stress of a hospital stay and help those buying it feel like they are doing a good deed for someone who needs a lift. When you take approaches like this that are special to your brand, you can get guests in the door. If you then combine them with guest personalization – by collecting data about what a guest has ordered in the past, what they like and dislike, and then making targeted recommendations they are more likely to enjoy – you have a formula to keep those guests coming back. Considering your own community, guests and brand, how might you adjust the experience you offer in ways that have a big impact?



Team Four/Value 4 provides customized Supply Chain Solutions and Business Consultancy to the foodservice owners and operators throughout the United States. To find out how we can help your business save money contact us at:

1-888-891-3103 or visit our web site at [www.teamfourfoods.com](http://www.teamfourfoods.com) and [www.valuefour.com](http://www.valuefour.com)