

Foodservice Updates

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Making sense of delivery's growing pains

While restaurant delivery surged during the worst parts of the pandemic, momentum has slowed as consumers have returned to in-person dining and takeout orders. In fact, a recent study from Paytronix found that takeout now accounts for a majority of all digital orders. In the background, restaurant tech companies have been stumbling amid layoffs and profitability challenges. This has led some to question the long-term viability of delivery, which was difficult for restaurants to make work financially even in more stable economic times. On the surface, a rise in takeout business sounds like good news. But it may be just a blip before tech-driven delivery rebounds, according to a new book, *Delivering the Digital Restaurant* by Meredith Sandland and Carl Orsbourn. They say restaurant tech is still in its infancy and it can be difficult to imagine different way of operating, but “there are places in the world where delivered food is actually cheaper than eating at a restaurant, even without drones and sidewalk robots and automated food trucks cooking en route.” Delivered food at a lower cost is possible, they say. However, front-of-house staff, dedicated dine-in space, prime real estate, and a third-party companies making deliveries aren't part of the picture in those cases. As much as restaurant businesses have winnowed down their operating models, there is likely much more change to come. If delivery is a critical pillar to your business, how might you further transform your model to make it work?



Unified commerce may improve large operators' view of business

As restaurants have acclimated to pandemic demands for low-touch ordering and pickup, many brands have tech stacks that need to catch up – with tacked-on updates, a range of software suited for specific tasks and bulky equipment that needs integration. Streamlining this setup will continue to be important to restaurant brands struggling to operate efficiently amid inflation, as well as supply and labor shortages. As a recent Forbes report indicates, adopting unified commerce may help multi-unit brands connect disparate pieces of their business, winnowing down their tech vendors and giving them a single view of what's happening with their customers, staff and marketing. Does your tech give you an uncluttered, unified view of what's happening in your business so you can make the right decisions?



Managing labor inflation through tech

Restaurants that use robotic chefs to prepare food and AI to take orders tend to generate breathless headlines, but as recent news from McDonald's implies, operators may best handle the strains of labor inflation with mundane restaurant tech for the time being. McDonald's CEO Chris Kempczinski acknowledged recently that automation wouldn't be a "silver bullet" to solve the brand's problems with labor inflation. (Restaurant Dive reported that its tests of drive-thru voice ordering were only 80 percent accurate, falling short of the 95 percent accuracy it sought.) Instead, the brand is focusing on customer data to make staffing decisions and reduce labor demand in its stores – something well within the reach of brands far smaller than the likes of McDonald's. If you're struggling with the challenges of labor inflation, harnessing your data may reveal some low-tech changes you can make to ensure you have the optimal number of staff at a time, as well as the ones who provide the highest levels of guest satisfaction.



Bourbon Bacon Deviled Egg

Ingredients:

- 3 Eggs hard boiled, shells removed, cut in half
- 1 tsp Extra Heavy Mayonnaise
- 1 fl oz Sweet Red Chili Wing Sauce & Glaze
- 2 slices Bacon
- 1 fl oz Kickin Bourbon Wing Sauce & Glaze
- 1 tsp Fresh chives chopped

Make room for bacon

Bacon is so easy to love, isn't it? It has woven its way into sweet and savory food and drink, driving sales growth over the course of the past few years. There are prized places for it in every menu category and daypart, so consider how you might use it to elevate your guests' experience and reflect your brand values. There are a range of new bacon varieties coming to market, including premium options, sweet and savory combinations, plant-based varieties and more natural, minimally processed options that claim to be better for both consumers and the environment. How might you enhance them with complementary flavors on your menu?

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Instructions:

1. Remove yolks from egg whites and mix in a bowl with Extra Heavy Mayonnaise, chives and Sweet Red Chili Wing Sauce & Glaze until smooth.
2. Cook bacon slices half way, then glaze with Kickin Bourbon Wing Sauce & Glaze
3. Continue cooking bacon until candied. Finely chop bacon for garnish.
4. Using a pastry bag, pipe the egg yolk mix into the egg white shells.
5. Plate and garnish with candied bacon and chives.

Recipe and photo courtesy of Ken's

Resist the urge to make sweeping food safety changes

It almost sounds counterintuitive in light of how food safety has grown in visibility and importance over the past few years: When it comes to making changes to your food safety program, incremental adjustments are best. In a webinar presented by the National Restaurant Association, Chris Boyles, vice president of food safety at Steritech, said it's critical to be able to track changes over time to demonstrate how well a restaurant is performing. Each time an operator makes a major change to their food safety program, it's that much more difficult to track progress over time. Consider quarterly reviews as well as annual verification that the program aligns with business goals. When adjustments are needed, make them individually, on a cyclical basis, and in order of priority so your efforts are easier to track.



#FoodSafety

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Don't underestimate the middle performers

At a time when resources are scarce at restaurants, investing in food safety may not feel like a key priority. But the costs of letting it slip can be substantial: According to a study from Johns Hopkins University, the cost of a single foodborne illness outbreak at a quick-service restaurant ranges from \$4000-\$1.9 million and escalates to between \$8,300 and \$2.6 million for a fine-dining restaurant. To make sure you apply your resources in ways that make the biggest difference to your business, Steritech advises restaurants use a bell-curve model across their locations, with the high-risk, repeatedly low-performing stores and the low-risk, repeatedly top-performing locations receiving fewer resources than the middle section. While these mid performers may be underestimated, this group is often where operators can identify changes that result in significant, scalable solutions that have a big impact across stores.



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Is your menu sending the right message?

According to Datassential, 60 percent of restaurant menus have gotten smaller in recent years. As menus have slimmed down and inventories have had to stretch farther, the language you use to present your menu items becomes that much more important. Your menu is also one of the first things a potential guest sees from your restaurant if they order online, so it needs to create the right first impression about your brand.

That's something that may need some attention at your restaurant as you update the language you use on your menus to accommodate a newly streamlined selection or a shifting supply of ingredients. As Guillermo Ramirez, creative director of the Miami marketing agency Gluttonomy Inc. told Eater recently, "The menu is just like a business card." It needs to encapsulate your business and accurately reflect its brand and values, in addition to what you're serving, while leaving some room for surprise. At the same time, you want to hold guests' attention and make every word count.



In your menu descriptions, consider including the names of key ingredients, along with brief, vivid descriptive words that engage the senses, as well as a word or two on how the dish is prepared. Highlight any premium ingredients you're using, along with local suppliers that guests may know. Eliminate jargon to ensure you communicate clearly and avoid creating the wrong kind of surprise about what they are ordering.

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