

Foodservice Updates

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Making sales when food costs remain high

High food costs continue to impact restaurant operators' bottom lines. Even though overall inflation has been easing and foods purchased in grocery stores have been costing less than those offered at restaurants, restaurant costs (and many operator expenses) remain high. As a result, consumers may be giving menu prices some extra scrutiny right now — or skipping restaurant meals altogether. In fact, a recent report from AlixPartners found that instead of trading down on restaurant food, consumers have been cutting it out in an effort to protect their budgets. So it's important to ensure you're reaping the most benefit from the items you offer. There are a number of actions you can take. You may already be reducing portions and shrinking your overall menu size, and while this is helpful for waste reduction and cost savings, it also leaves room for guests to add to their dish. Play on their desire for customization by offering a selection of ingredient add-ons and side dishes that guests can add to their meal that incrementally increase the price of a dish without giving people sticker shock. Make the most of the sales you get by engineering your menu so its layout naturally leads the guest's eye to items that generate the most profit for you (and cost your menu so you are well aware of what those menu items are). Finally, lean on other streams of income. Retail items and licensing opportunities may help you generate sales in the background and allow you to smooth out dips in your sales of menu items.



Tech Talk

Use tech to make sure you don't miss out on a good hire

When a job candidate submits an application to work at your restaurant, how quickly do you respond? Chances are this person is looking at a range of open positions at a variety of businesses. The first company to respond to them stands a great chance of hiring them, assuming the interviewing process goes well. If a slow response time is making you miss out on good candidates, there are tech tools you can harness to automate the process of making the initial connection with potential staff and selling them on your culture. Workstream, for one, created a ChatGPT-powered chatbot that ushers job candidates through the various stages of the recruitment process and helps match them with potential jobs. Consider what tools might help you fill gaps in your communication with potential hires.



Understand your tech foundation



Restaurants need to invest in technology in order to compete, but the options can be dizzying – and available funds limited. Still, it's important to regularly assess where your business could benefit from tech if and when you are able to invest in systems to help you scale. Start with your POS system. It's the brain of your restaurant and needs to be able to connect seamlessly with all of your added tech for functions across your business to run smoothly. Are you using its full functionality? From there, look to your biggest pain points and labor burdens. Automated tools that help you manage your inventory, order streams and food prep are logical next places to build up from a solid POS.

Trends

Make room for mushrooms

They've become the secret weapon for kitchens serving up vegetarian dishes. Mushrooms have the ability to give meaty texture and umami flavor to a vegetarian burger or bolognese sauce, while weaving in plant-based nutrition. As closely as manufactured animal protein replacements have come to replicating the taste and mouth feel of their traditional counterparts, your guests may want their plant-based foods to be less processed. Mushrooms can help (and they're environmentally friendly to produce too). Try them across day parts and menu segments — both in disguise within dishes or out front with their flavors on display.



Make Food Safety Education Month a reason to celebrate

September is Food Safety Education Month. Use the occasion to reinforce key messages in your food safety training, bring some additional focus to areas you need to improve, and use quizzes, contests and rewards to make this month's training something that staff will remember and enjoy. It's chance for you to reset your connection with your team: Research published by QSR Magazine found that nearly 70 percent of restaurant employees feel like they don't receive enough hands-on training from their managers. This, in turn, can make it difficult for staff to develop skills needed to perform tasks correctly and safely, which often leads to a loss of interest in their roles. Try providing some extra safety training over the course of the month and watch for any resulting changes in employee engagement.

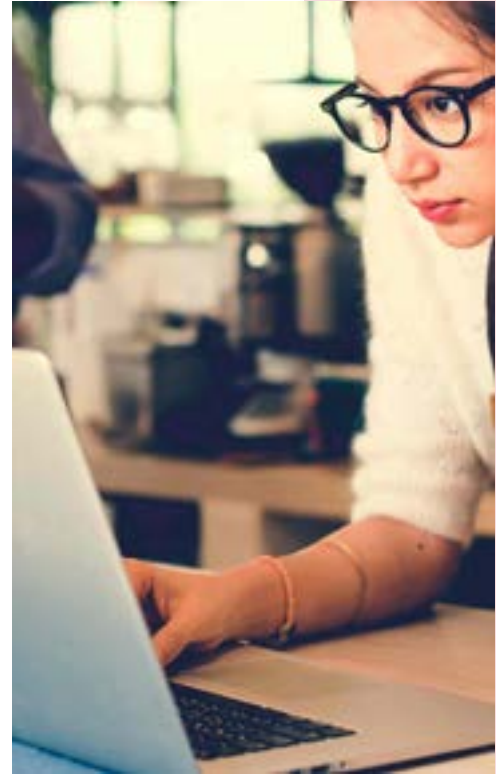


#FoodSafety

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Put a face on food safety

Making your food safety training sink in with your employees is as much about the “how” of your lessons as their “what.” In other words, your staff is more apt to engage with your training and remember it if you focus on the people impacted by the lessons you’re teaching – not just the nuts and bolts of safe food handling. Use case studies to reinforce the messages you’re trying to deliver. The Stop Foodborne Illness Toolkit provides a case study of a baby who contracted Salmonella, along with some discussion guides aimed at various parts of a foodservice organization. It may help you see how different groups perceive their food safety roles differently and where you may have to fill gaps in training and knowledge.



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Retaining flexibility as market conditions shift

Just a few years ago, virtual restaurants were on the rise and considered by many in the industry to be a sensible, flexible means of getting restaurant-quality food to consumers while cutting back on the high real estate and operational costs that traditional brick-and-mortar restaurants generate. Now, while there are still successful examples of virtual brands, much of the enthusiasm for the trend has dampened. Granted, the market has become confusing to consumers and has eroded trust, with many redundant, misleading listings and poorly rated operations mixed in among the stronger ones. (Uber Eats recently wiped several thousand virtual brands off of its site for this reason.) Consumers have also expressed a preference for knowing their food was prepared in a traditional restaurant kitchen. To be sure, restaurants still need the ability to operate flexibly and find ways to promote their brand in ways that feel genuine and build trust. So what's the best way to approach that in the current environment? In addition to finding ways to reduce the costs of running a brick-and-mortar restaurant — such as optimizing your use of real estate to ensure every square foot you pay for is paying you back and meeting the needs of various categories of customers — using your tech stack can provide some added flexibility without diluting your brand. For example, it can help you manage traffic coming from different order streams, allowing you to give your curbside pickup business a boost in promotion on a night when your dining room is full. Looking at your business and the various traffic streams it generates, is there an opportunity to recalibrate those streams based on what's happening in your business on a given day? Doing so could help you gain flexibility and also capitalize on the different ways you're able to get food to people.



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