

# Foodservice Updates

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## Accommodating shifts in eating schedules

Just a few years ago, the 7 p.m. dinner slot was the most coveted for people looking to dine out. But the pandemic shifted the dinner hour earlier to between 5 and 6 p.m., and it has largely stayed there since. That's according to a recent Associated Press interview with OpenTable CEO Debby Soo. She supposes that with many people continuing to work from home, consumers may be looking to take a break in the early evening to get out of the house and enjoy a meal. The shift in timing may also change people's appetites for food and drink, potentially creating more of a gray area between happy hour and dinner. What does your guest data say about people's preferences right now? Are there more people coming in at 5 p.m.? If so, are they more apt to order bar snacks, share a pizza with friends, get shareable entrees suitable for a family, or order individual entrees? Are they in a happy-hour mood and more likely to order drinks? Could you adjust your food and beverage menus to accommodate those preferences? If you're not seeing clear patterns in ordering behavior, you might test some limited-time offers and then track how guests respond.



# Tech Talk

## Anticipating AI's integration with restaurant jobs

Right now and into the foreseeable future, artificial intelligence-powered technology is being used to augment human skills by taking on tedious tasks and serving as an assistant to human workers. For example, as a recent Nation's Restaurant News article indicates, a restaurant using AI-powered tech to track human employees packing orders can alert a staff member in real time when they should put fries in a bag to ensure they don't get cold waiting to be collected. That said, tasks that are already handled by assistants now — scheduling staff, ordering food and other administrative tasks, for example — may soon be handled by AI with oversight from a restaurant's general manager. As a result, assistant general manager roles could be reframed in the future. There is potential there to free up resources that can be reapplied in other areas.



## Shopping for a new POS? Insist on these factors.



Investing in a POS that integrates with your business and supports its growth is a great place to start building a tech foundation for your restaurant. Just make sure any new system you're considering meets some key criteria. As a recent article from [pizzamarketplace.com](http://pizzamarketplace.com) advises, your technology provider must be a real partner, providing anytime support, development customized to your restaurant, and onsite training, for example. Get confirmation, not just lip service, that it can integrate seamlessly with all parts of your operation. It needs to be user-friendly, easy to learn and easy to fix if problems arise. It must also prioritize cybersecurity, take steps to protect your stored data and provide you with guidance on what to do when concerns arise. Finally, consider what you're trying to achieve through the new system — and if (and when) it will deliver the return on investment you envision.

# Trends

## Raise your brunch game

New data from Square has shown that more than 10 percent of all dining dollars are spent from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Saturdays. So Saturday brunch has replaced Friday lunch as the top period for restaurant visits. As a result, there is opportunity in brunch. More restaurant operators are expanding their offerings or even launching a brunch menu for the first time. If you're looking to draw more brunch traffic, consider expanding your beverage menu with some light, colorful beverages (boozy and non), as well as some shareable food boards and other options that appeal to groups and could give people a good reason to gather with friends.



## Conduct a hazard audit of your facility

As seasonal illnesses return and threaten to keep you from being fully staffed, don't let preventable hazards around your facility contribute to staff absence. According to Markel Insurance, the most common injuries for restaurant employees include injuries from objects; slips, trips and falls; burns; injuries due to overexertion; chemicals and cleaners; electrical problems; and cold temperatures. It could be a good time to do an audit of these hazards in your restaurant and plan some training around how to avoid them, particularly if you have had employee injuries and insurance claims related to these problems before.



**#FoodSafety**

# #FoodSafety

## Does your staff know the power of touch?

When it comes to protecting your guests from pathogens, maintaining proper hand hygiene is the most important thing your staff can do. The most common cause of foodborne illness is spreading pathogens through touch and food can become contaminated quickly if those preparing and serving your food don't maintain adequate hygiene or use personal protective equipment incorrectly. Hand washing, in combination with protective gear like food-grade gloves, are your best defenses. According to the CDC, thorough hand washing requires wetting hands with clean running water; applying soap; lathering both sides of the hands, between fingers and under fingernails; scrubbing hands for at least 20 seconds; rinsing hands under clean running water; and drying them with a clean towel or air dryer. Does your staff do a thorough enough job?



## Getting tech-driven marketing investments right the first time

The recent launch of Threads, Meta's answer to Twitter, came with much fanfare. But in the weeks since, the response has been more about the disillusionment of users who thought they would be getting a useful new way to connect but were disappointed by what it actually delivered. A recent Restaurant Business article compared the Threads launch to what's happening in restaurant tech. In the technology space, it's common to launch a minimally viable product to test the waters and gain traction, but it's a far more difficult task when you're launching a product designed to compete with an established tool. It needs to wow people from the start to gain adopters — not just be a mildly better alternative. Yet this happens routinely in the digital loyalty space in restaurants, with large, established brands running sophisticated, targeted promotions and many other brands being satisfied with, say, some adoption of the restaurant's app and redemption of general offers. To keep people engaged once they have downloaded your app and joined your loyalty program, you need to be able to offer competitive features and understand what features will hold people's attention and offer some "wow" factor. It's important to invest in the early stages in the testing needed to get a program right — otherwise you may be spending the money later on, when your audience will likely be more difficult to re-engage.



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