

Foodservice Updates

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Foods that make restaurant life easier

The challenges of 2020 are some for the history books. So when food products are available that can make running a restaurant a little bit easier, why not jump on them? Ingredients that are convenient and versatile in the kitchen are in high demand right now: According to recent research from Datassential, 38 percent of food-service operators say they need more speed-scratch ingredients that remove some steps from the preparation process. They also want the products they buy to be versatile and flexible. In other words, they should have broad applications on the menu and – in case COVID-19 restrictions need to tighten down the line – be easy to store for a later date. There are important labor-related benefits to these foods as well, since they can be prepared (more quickly and with less stress) by a smaller, potentially less-experienced team. So what specific foods might help lighten the load in your kitchen? Datassential says more operators are using more pre-cut vegetables, opting for canned or frozen products in place for fresh, and cutting back on the variety of ingredients they buy. Other products to consider on your menu: ready-made hummus, sauces and marinades, pre-cooked meats, and brown stock reductions that can serve as a base for a range of soups and sauces, as well as add flavor to grain bowls.



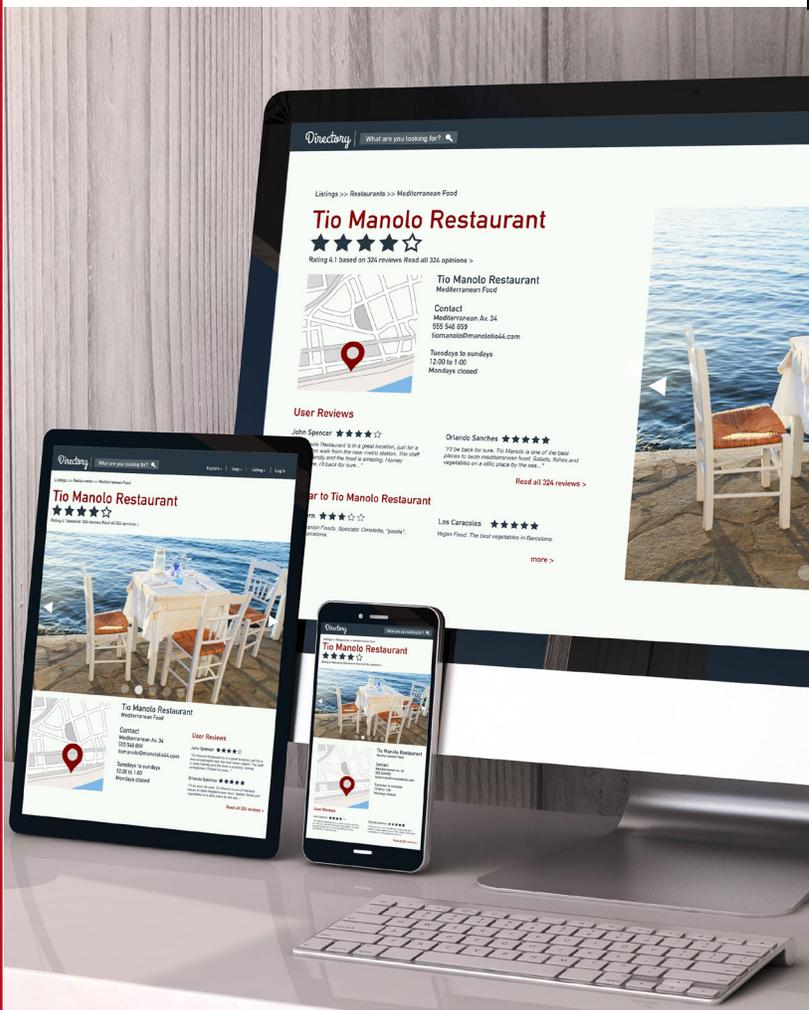
Is it time for a culture reboot?

Even restaurant operators with the best of intentions struggle when it comes to building and maintaining a healthy, supportive employee culture. Will COVID-19 change that? While it may seem like an impossible time for restaurants to invest in better pay and benefits for staff, some believe the current climate will create a bigger opportunity for operators who already have the building blocks of a strong team culture in place – and create yet another obstacle for those who don't. For instance, restaurants with a strong existing employee culture have not had difficulty rehiring staff – even at a time when many workers are not seeing the benefit of coming off of unemployment. In a Forbes report, owner of the Cincinnati restaurant MashedRoots said, “I think it has become apparent that the way the industry is structured does not create healthy, stable work environments that are able to absorb disruptions and quickly adapt to changes.” As a result, he is changing the way he runs his business and develops staff. Has the pandemic brought to light any aspects of your restaurant culture that, with some adjustments, could fortify your business to survive challenges in the long term?



Make the right impression online

It's not the eye-catching ambience on display through your front windows that is drawing people to your restaurant right now – your website is more likely the place responsible for making a good first impression and enticing people to support your restaurant. Are you making it as easy as possible for people to find you, be assured of the hours you will be open, access your menu and place an order? First, review and update your information on GoogleMyBusiness to manage your presence across both search and map functions. Beyond that, make sure your hours, phone number, webpage link and physical location are up to date, and that your website (with minimal clicks) allows people to access your menu and new safety and hygiene practices. On your website, consider a pop-up invitation to join your email list – and preview the benefits of joining it. Your online information – including what is viewable on a search engine or your site itself – should be just as easy to read on a phone as on a computer or tablet screen.





Cowboy Beans

Ingredients:

- 2 cups Dry pinto beans
- 2 cup SBR Hickory Brown Sugar barbecue sauce
- 2 cups Sweet onions, small dice
- 1 cup Brewed coffee
- 1 lb. Chopped barbecue brisket
- 4 tbsp Chili powder
- 2 tbsp Ground cumin
- 2 tbsp Red pepper flakes
- Kosher salt, to taste

Bring on the beans



Beans are a crowd pleaser in salads, plant-forward burgers and sides. Aside from being a flavorful, satisfying addition to a dish, they have plenty of health and environmental benefits to tout too: High in protein, fiber and B vitamins, they may help reduce blood sugar and cholesterol. They're helpful to the planet and your pantry as well, since they can store well for long periods during supply chain shortages of other ingredients.

Instructions:

1. Soak the pinto beans overnight in cold water.
2. Strain the beans and place in a 6-quart saucepan. Cover the beans with water and bring to a simmer over medium heat. Cook uncovered, stirring occasionally, until just tender, about 1 hour.
3. Drain the beans and return to the saucepan.
4. Add the barbecue sauce, onions, coffee, chopped brisket, chili powder, cumin, and red pepper flakes.
5. Simmer for 30 minutes.
6. Season to taste with salt and serve.

Recipe and photo courtesy of Ken's

Food Trends



Let's clear the air

While the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has addressed the need for good ventilation in its guidance about keeping indoor spaces safe from the corona-virus, overhauling ventilation systems isn't typically at the top of the list of actions restaurant operators are taking to make their facilities safer right now.

There are likely good reasons for that: For one, the challenging economic climate makes it difficult to fathom making a significant investment in an HVAC update. But what if there were more cost-effective ways to improve the air quality in your restaurant? Regular system inspections and maintenance, attention to cleaning products and protocols, and the reconfiguring of your kitchen and dining room can all help. This report from Modern Restaurant Management offers additional guidance (<https://bit.ly/2DCTjSa>).



#FoodSafety

What's next in touch-free tech

It seems like just a short time ago that ordering via a touchscreen at your table – or scrolling through a wine list or viewing other menu-related content on a communal tablet at a fine dining restaurant – was considered futuristic. Now that contactless is king and shared touchscreens are tools consumers may aim to avoid (unless they have hand sanitizer nearby), where are we likely to see tableside innovation? On a recent Foodable podcast, Shaun Shankel, CEO of FreshTechnology and ToGoTechnologies, expressed optimism in QR codes as mobile payment vehicles. Already in use to help guests at some restaurants view menus during the pandemic, QR codes are likely to gain momentum as a tool that enables a touch-free experience at a restaurant. They're another reason to ensure all content you create for customers – whether it's your menu, your background story, or behind-the-scenes videos you produce – is easy to view, interact with, and (where applicable) pay for via a customer's personal device.



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What new revenue streams can you create?

Just like an investor diversifying a portfolio to protect against risk, restaurant operators would be wise to identify inventive new revenue streams right now – particularly those that have potential to generate sales and loyalty if business from more traditional channels lags in the months ahead. In addition to the obvious benefit of sustaining business, new revenue streams are also an opportunity to reinforce your brand values and, in turn, build loyalty. Chipotle, for one, recently announced it is launching a Chipotle Goods line, which includes not just the usual branded t-shirts but also leggings, baby clothes, jackets, cell phone cases, water bottles, socks, tote bags and even luggage, Nation's Restaurant News reports. As part of this effort, Chipotle is upcycling 300 million avocado pits it uses each year to create a plant-based dye that is used in some of the products – then donating proceeds to organizations that make fashion or farming more sustainable. When you consider your restaurant's values, what are you hoping your guests take away from their experience with you? If you take a step back, can you identify how your most loyal guests might be interested in supporting new branches of your business – simply because they make it possible to experience the best of your brand?



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