

Foodservice Updates

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Are your guests feeling gift card guilt?

Throughout the pandemic, restaurant gift cards have taken on extra significance – in good ways and bad. Early on, gift card purchases were perceived as a means for the public to keep their favorite restaurants afloat when the businesses couldn't open their dining rooms or, in some cases, operate at all. Regional and industry efforts to sell gift cards endeavored to support the restaurant industry too. Yet when dining rooms began to reopen, some reports advised consumers against redeeming their gift cards – at least at the beginning while operators were still getting their footing. Even now, while restaurants may be serving a steadier stream of customers, the times don't exactly feel normal. A recent report from Eater entitled "Am I a Jerk if I Cash in My Restaurant Gift Cards?" fielded a question from a reader who was feeling guilty about redeeming stored cards. So where do you stand on them? First, it may help to understand gift cards' potential: A recent study from First Data found that 74 percent of consumers said when they redeem a gift card, they typically spend about \$54 over the face value of the card – and 34 percent said having gift cards encouraged them to visit businesses they normally wouldn't. With that in mind and with the potential for gift card purchases to increase over the coming holidays, it may help to adapt your strategy – both in how you market the cards and account for them. Assess how gift cards have worked for you in the past. Is there opportunity for you to partner with complementary businesses on shared gift cards? If you genuinely want your guests to use their gift cards now, tell them (in person, on social media, in your email newsletter and on your website) that you welcome them – and perhaps take the opportunity to ask them to remember to compensate their server well with their gratuity. Depending on how well funded your business is at the moment, you may also want to adjust to how you treat gift card sales. The Eater report mentions that Wayfare Tavern considers gift card purchases as deposits on future sales – and they don't process the actual sale until the card is redeemed.



Could a robot increase your top-line revenue?

The pandemic has forced restaurant operators to consider new revenue streams. Robots may help open some doors. Salad bars and buffets may not be operating as they were, for example, but could a robot offer a similar product – and operate in a context removed from a sit-down restaurant? Candace MacDonald, cofounder and managing director of hospitality consultancy Carbonate, told Modern Restaurant Management that companies like Salad Station are using robotic vending to serve up salads in new locations – and at the same time, are likely reaching new customers. Could you envision offering menu items through robotic vending via a grocery store or hospital cafeteria?



Use tech to streamline reservations and seating

As strange as these times have been for restaurants, they're also strange for restaurant guests – and helping the public understand and follow your updated procedures takes some work. A recent webinar from Winsight and SevenRooms pointed out how tech can help hold the restaurant guest's hand through the changes and make them feel not just more informed but also more cared for while COVID-19 persists. Tech management of reservations and communications around seating can be especially helpful in preparing a guest for their visit before they enter the restaurant. Instead of gathering at the host's stand in the front of the restaurant to inquire about wait times, for example, guests can wait outside or in their car and receive an alert. When their table is ready, they can receive another text alert asking them to enter the restaurant. Operators can use tech to set guest expectations too. By specifying the location of available tables and pointing out a reservation end time, restaurants can help guests plan accordingly – and also get some assurance they will have a table available for other guests at a certain point.





Cellentani with Butternut Squash Mac and Cheese

Ingredients:

- 1 ¼ Pkg, Barilla Cellentani
- 2 ½ Cups, diced Butternut squash (1/2 for puree ½ for roasting)
- 5 Tbsp, Butter
- 2 clove, Garlic, chopped
- 5 Tbsp, Flour
- 5 Cups, 2 % milk
- ¾ Lb., Cheddar Cheese, shredded
- ½ Cup, Smoked Gouda Cheese, Shredded
- Salt and white pepper to taste

Fall for the produce of the season



Fall vegetables aren't only healthy additions to your menu: Their density and texture make them filling substitutes for everything from pasta to meat. Offer spaghetti squash as a low-carb pasta alternative this season or butternut squash to add meaty consistency to a vegetarian chili. Capitalize on pumpkin spice mania by adding pumpkin to pancakes and granola at breakfast or to hummus and curry dishes later in the day.

Food Trends

Instructions:

1. In a small pot boil ½ the butternut squash until fully cooked, let cool, then process in a blender with enough cooking liquid to make a puree.
 2. In a pre-heated 425°F oven roast the remaining butternut squash with olive oil until golden brown and fully cooked.
 3. Meanwhile, in a small sauce pot saute garlic in butter until slightly yellow in color. Add flour and make a roux, cook for about 3 minutes on medium heat. Add warm milk and bring to a simmer, let simmer for 5 minutes. Season with salt and pepper.
 4. Add butternut squash puree then remove from heat and add cheddar and smoked gouda slowly to incorporate.
 5. Cook the pasta according to package directions, drain 1 minute under required cooking time and toss with the sauce.
 6. Top with warm roasted squash before serving
- Recipe and photo courtesy of Barilla



Preserve food safety, from cooking to collection

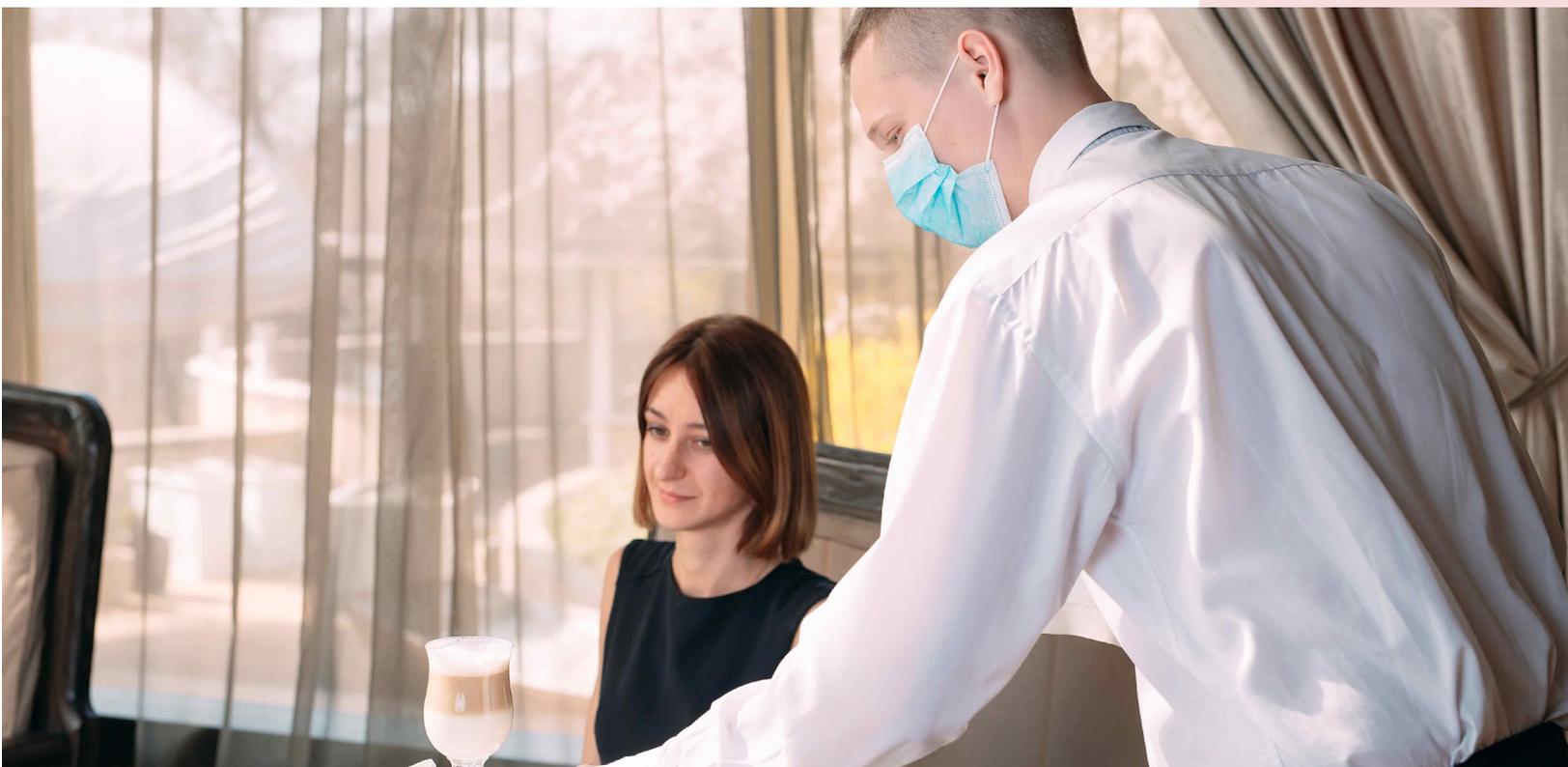
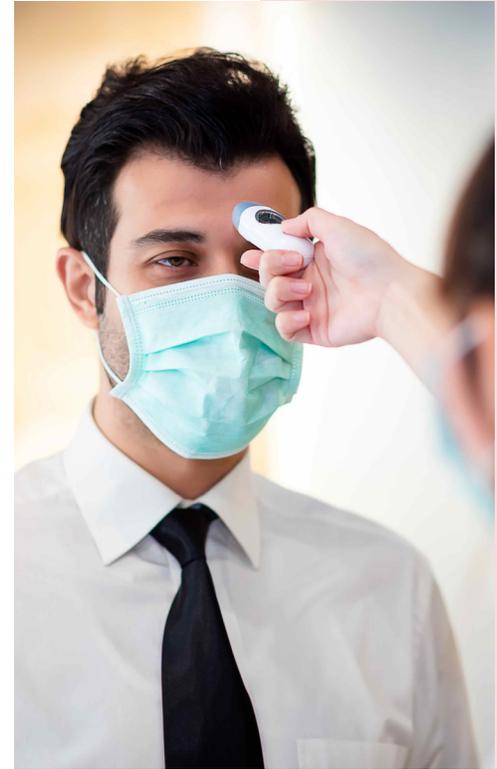
Let's face it: Even if you keep your coolers and cooking equipment sparkling clean, a sloppy handoff of food to a customer can negate any special care you're taking behind the scenes. Make sure your updated health and safety procedures carry through to when you pass food to customers who are collecting takeout or receiving deliveries. For takeout orders, [Statefoodsafety.com](https://www.statefoodsafety.com) advises taking extra care to wash hands regularly, keep food preparation areas clean, avoid cross-contamination of items and, if needed, keep food awaiting pickup in either hot- or cold-storage equipment until a customer collects it. Delivery drivers should arrive in a clean vehicle, have a means of cleaning their hands regularly, avoid touching potentially contaminated surfaces before touching food or food containers, and have storage that keeps foods at the proper temperature at delivery.



#FoodSafety

Have policies that anticipate COVID pushback

To be sure, it's not an easy time to work in restaurants. Your staff may be feeling anxious about becoming ill or facing guests who don't follow the restaurant's guidelines for mask wearing and social distancing. Before the added challenge of flu season hits, make sure your policies about employee health and safety are clear – and that your staff are well aware of their own responsibilities when it comes to monitoring and reporting their symptoms, as well as how and where to get tested for the coronavirus if and when the need arises. As much as possible, prepare a backup plan for when you cannot be fully staffed. This report from the Washington Post (<https://wapo.st/353BFT1>) provides some precautionary accounts of the employee relations challenges some operators are facing right now.



Foodservice Updates

Lots of room for delivery to improve

Delivery has become a must for many restaurants, particularly in the past several months, but offering the service is just the beginning. According to a new survey of 2,000 consumers from First Orion, there are a wide range of delivery problems that still need to be worked out. Operators who can find a way to address even some of those problems effectively stand to benefit. The survey found that the vast majority of people have had problems when ordering restaurant delivery: More than 70 percent of people had experienced a problem that required customer service and 50 percent had a problem with late delivery. Incorrect orders, improper food temperature, driver directions and behavior, and the non-delivery of food altogether also posed problems for large percentages of respondents. Fine-tuning your performance in any or all of these areas can help. First, perfect your menu. It should be clear, simple, easy to understand and provide a space for a customer to customize or modify an order. Make your menu easy to find (an Order Here button helps) and read with minimal clicks and scrolling. Use technology to accept orders, confirm customer address and contact information, inform customer of wait time, track an order's preparation and delivery, and direct a driver to the customer's location. Take care with not only the quality of your packaging but also with the storage of those packages – your delivery driver shouldn't be storing cold and hot foods side by side in the same container. Finally, set guidelines about how to best respond to customer complaints online – but if you have a solid handle on the other aspects of delivery, those (hopefully) shouldn't happen too often.



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