

Foodservice Updates

Week of:
July 15, 2024

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Crafting your ideal LTOs

Limited-time offers can revive guest excitement about your restaurant: According to the director of menu research and insights at Technomic, 52 percent of consumers say the availability of an appealing LTO is important to them when they are deciding which restaurant to visit. Restaurants have responded, with LTOs spiking 46 percent at both quick-service and full-service restaurants. But LTOs aren't necessarily easy to execute. The quality of the planning behind them can help ensure you're offering not only the kinds of options that your guests will crave, but also ones that help you minimize pain points and maximize opportunities in your business. Here are some questions to ask as you develop new potential concepts: How can you connect this offer to the time of year, or to what's happening in the world? How can you make it feel exclusive, so guests know they won't find this offer elsewhere? What about this LTO will pique someone's interest when they see it on a social media post? What time frame and marketing approach will best motivate people to buy from you right now? How can you use more of the ingredients you would most like to include – and avoid those you don't? What pain points – e.g., complicated prep – do you want to avoid? How can you use your guest data to craft offers that speak to them? (Technomic found that younger consumers tend to be more willing to try new LTOs, for example, while older consumers tend to lean toward nostalgic tastes.) Finally, how can you mine your guest data to make sure your offer is getting traction – and apply those lessons when developing future offers?





Tech Talk

Precision forecasting through AI

Several years into managing ingredient inflation, supply chain snags and other strains on your bottom line, you may feel like you have raised menu prices to their limit – or that you’re running out of ways to cut costs. But AI automation is helping operators identify new ways to optimize operations at the front and back of the house, saving resources in the process. In a recent webinar from QSRweb, “When Raising Prices Isn’t Cutting It...How AI Automation Cuts Costs & Customer Complaints,” panelists discussed how AI can accomplish this through precision forecasting on multiple levels at once. For example, it can forecast how the weather next week is likely to impact your guests’ food preferences, guest traffic, and therefore your inventory and labor needs. It can ensure you have the right ingredients on hand at the right time, so your team isn’t scrambling to refill a key ingredient on the line just as people are lining up out your door during the lunch rush. It can help operators manage around particular scenarios – like if Joe doesn’t make it to work today, how will we manage his tasks effectively and safely? It can prevent the unfortunate ripple effect that can lead to mistakes, safety problems, and inconsistency – all issues that can impact guest experience, as well as staff morale and turnover. This frees managers up to deliver better guest experiences, which AI can also enhance by delivering personalized information about the people coming through your doors. Looking at your current operation, where are the bottlenecks, or areas where you feel you could use staff more effectively or deliver a better experience for guests? Could precision forecasting help?



To protect guests with food allergies, lean on your tech

Food allergies affect nearly 11 percent of adults and 8 percent of children, sending 200,000 people to the hospital in the U.S. each year. As a result, chances are good that every day, you're having to respond to guest questions and concerns about allergens in your menu items. Being able to do this during busy shifts, smoothly and without creating bottlenecks, requires tools that allow your staff to have access to allergen information at their fingertips so they can steer guests toward foods that are safer for them. As a recent report from Modern Restaurant Management explains, restaurants can accomplish this with an up-to-date POS that is connected with their kitchen and can show real-time information about food allergens based on the menu items being offered in that moment. Combine this with payment technologies that allow the guest to input information about their allergies up front, thereby immediately omitting any menu items that could be problematic for them, and restaurants can significantly reduce their potential "points of failure" around food allergies. Doing so isn't just the right thing to do – it's also good for business, considering that food allergy sufferers are a loyal group. When you can provide a meal that is safe and enjoyable for a guest, they are apt to favor your restaurant in the future and recommend it to others who struggle with allergies as well.



#FoodSafety

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Becoming a winning brand

In the restaurant industry, it can sometimes seem like a very fine line separates the winners from the losers. Restaurant businesses with strong management can, and do, fail. But look a bit more closely and several themes often carry through the winning brands – and there are many brands across restaurant categories that are thriving right now, all while serving consumers who demand a lot from their restaurant experience. A recent episode of the Restaurant Business podcast “A Deeper Dive” delved into some of the themes of thriving brands. At their foundations, they offer great food, strong customer service, and a price point that the guest views as a good value for their visit. In addition to caring about the experience they offer guests, they focus on delivering a good quality of life for staff (to include pay, flexibility, and tech that makes their jobs easier). Importantly, they don’t focus on who their customer isn’t – they invest in enhancing the experience of the people who are already coming to their restaurant. This may seem like a simple premise, yet many brands do the opposite by focusing more attention on fixing what they do poorly than on fine-tuning what they already do well. Obviously certain problems demand focus, but those efforts will reap greater benefits if they support your goal of serving core guests better as opposed to trying to reach new people. Finally, thriving brands have some built-in financial flexibility to weather unexpected down periods. This was an issue for Red Lobster, whose sale-leaseback deal a decade ago gave it far less room to maneuver when times got tough across the economy.



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