

7

Key Trends for 2019

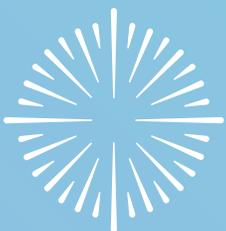
By Aimee Harvey, Managing Editor

It seems that every shift to the restaurant landscape brings with it a whole host of new questions: What is the next hot flavor trend to watch? Which segment truly owns convenience? What is today's definition of health? What type of technology is up and coming next?

As consumer preferences cycle forward at a furious pace, restaurant operators and their partners are working to meet next-level expectations for everything from food and flavors to brand transparency.

Technomic looked into our crystal ball at a set of wide-ranging factors affecting the restaurant industry and compiled seven key trends that are sure to gain traction over the next year and beyond. "These industry trends are converging at a time of great disruption and opportunity for restaurant chains," said Joe Pawlak, managing principal, advisory group, Technomic. "From the menu to service amenities, consumer demands are intensifying. From our perspective, companies that invest in meeting these needs are in the best position to reap rewards in 2019."

Let's take a closer look at the trends that we predict will have a lasting impact on restaurant menus, service strategies and best practices in 2019.



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2. NATURAL ENHANCEMENTS

Functional foods are the “it” health trend today. The first wave of the trend is in full form: Operators are promoting natural remedies such as turmeric as ingredients that fix something in the body that’s lacking in some way. 2019 will see a blossoming of the second wave of the functional trend: natural enhancements, meaning ingredients that enhance something in the body, even facets that don’t necessarily need fixing, such as brain function, beauty and mental health. Expect to see more innovative uses of ingredients such as collagen for beauty, cannabis for relaxation and karkade for stress relief, and operators calling out these specific benefits directly.

Below: Turmeric Root



1. LEVITATING LEVANTINE CUISINE

Growing interest in Israeli cuisine over the past few years has led to increased flavor innovation from Israel’s surrounding countries. Specialties from Lebanon, Syria and Turkey are especially finding momentum in trendy independent restaurants. Sauces such as s’chug, pomegranate molasses, toum, labneh and tahini are finding new and innovative applications, in addition to ingredients including urfa, lavash and even schmaltz. But once exploration throughout the Levantine matures, what’s next? A likely winner, by way of Turkey as a bridge, is the Balkans.

Above: labneh with pomegranate seeds
Below: Udon with bonito flakes and pour-over broth



3. SENSORY THRILLS BEYOND A SNAPSHOT

Over the past few years, Instagram and other photo-sharing apps have revolutionized the food industry. Restaurants have even created food and beverage with social media in mind. But now, Instagram stories, Facebook Live and YouTube have extended the trend beyond what works in a single snapshot to what plays well through videos. Audio enhancements such as popping candies or items that move or alter in time such as color-changing cocktails, glitter beer and bonito-topped foods wow diners, especially young ones. Because social media is evolving so quickly, expect menu trends to adapt in funky ways.

4. THE NEXT WAVE FOR THIRD-PARTY PLAYERS

Off-premise dining is booming, and third-party food delivery companies are stepping up to feed an on-demand culture. But between top players like Grubhub and Uber Eats, and startup companies eager to get into the game, the third-party field is crowded and companies are hustling to differentiate. Subscription models that eliminate per-delivery fees in favor of a flat-rate subscription will emerge to present a clearer value proposition for consumers. For third-party delivery services on pace to win the “last mile” with consumers, subscription programs may be the next incentive to provide a true competitive edge.

5. MEAT-FREE TO THE EXTREME?

Plant-based dining now means more than just swapping meats for veggies; it represents a strategy that includes zero waste policies and a wider focus on sustainability. Restaurant companies are banning plastic straws in an eco-friendly push to eliminate waste and pollution, and operators are making compostable, plant-based food packaging a priority. Can a full-on ban of meat be next? We're already seeing companies outside the industry put policies in place to ban meat consumption on-site and to incentivize employees not to order meat when they dine out.



Top left: Are beef and bacon about to pull a disappearing act?
Bottom left: A drone delivery mid-flight



6. TECH TAKING OVER THE EXPERIENCE

Technology amenities, from drone delivery to app-based checkout services, are redefining convenience and putting “frictionless” foodservice front and center. The game-changing rollout of Amazon Go into new markets is exposing more consumers to next-generation grab-and-go. But if the future is indeed frictionless, what lasting impact will it have on customer experiences and person-to-person interaction? Are brands poised to suffer in an environment where staff may no longer be the communicator of its identity? Restaurant companies committed to both tech-enabled convenience and the personal touch will be working to strike a balance between the two.

7. A NEW, MULTIFACETED TRANSPARENCY

Mention transparency in years past and consumers would likely connect it to a product story around sourcing, food origins and growing and processing methods. But tomorrow's foodservice consumer increasingly will demand a more well-rounded transparency message and, in response, manufacturers and operators will craft a multifaceted approach. This means brands being fully transparent on several fronts, including pricing, revealing true net costs and unbundled costs; corporate performance, emphasizing fair trade, diversity, living wages and executive compensation; and the planet, publicizing its real environmental impact, conservation initiatives and progressive stance on animal welfare.

IN CONCLUSION: WHAT'S NEXT?

The next year will continue to reveal the power of disruption. Multiple channels beyond restaurants—from retail foodservice and noncommercial segments to third-party companies—will galvanize behind what consumers want and drive efforts to meet their needs. In an era of consumer hyperchoice, restaurants will have to do more to stand out and execute seamlessly in terms of exceptional service, food quality and integrity, transparency and sustainability.

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