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The events of the pandemic have caused a fundamental reset in human behavior and as the hospitality and catering sector know well, new food and beverage requirements have been shaped for the long term.

From the rise in takeaways and collection services, through to eco-conscious consuming and ensuring a positive food safety culture, Kirstie Jones discusses five food trends that we can expect to see a lot more of.

As eager as businesses are to get back to work, it is important for them to keep in mind the changes that these industries are currently facing. It isn't simply a case of improved hygiene standards, though this is crucial, too.

Now, much more comes into play and businesses should be seeking to utilize the rise of these five food trends in order to catapult themselves to greater success and deliver a service that the consumer demands.

1. **A positive food safety culture**

Food safety culture is the way in which an organization values its food safety, and it is vital that these values are shared by both management and employees.

A business with a strong and positive food safety culture demonstrates to its customers that safe food is essential and a commitment.

Poor food safety culture can result in food hygiene violations, which can lead to serious repercussions, for both the business and its customers.

Particularly with doors of restaurants opening once again for outdoor eating on April 12, it is crucial for businesses to create a positive food safety culture. Businesses must actively consider presenting accreditations such as a Covid19 certification which will help customers to feel safer when returning to an establishment.

1. **Takeaway packaging**

With restaurants and sit-down eateries closed for the majority of the last 12 months, businesses have needed to find new ways to continue working in a way that meets government guidelines without actually welcoming guests indoors.

In order to remain open, many food businesses have adapted, and the industry has seen a huge influx in the number of takeaway and collection services.

Whilst it may seem relatively simple, this doesn't quite follow the same rules and regulations as sit-down restaurants.

Takeaway packaging must ensure it has clear allergen labels. Each container must state the exact name of the dish and its contents and should be clear and readable. Although this is particularly important when serving consumers with allergies, this must be done at all times.

As of October 2021, the [UK Food Information Amendment](link) will come into force, whereby data labeling is key. Pre-packed for direct sale products must be labeled with a description of the item, detailing the full ingredients listing. As such, any of the 14 key allergens must also be highlighted and be clear to see.

Clear allergen labeling also provides consumers with confidence as well as traceability and transparency when it comes to the business selling the item.

As well as this, to aid hygiene and cleanliness, all food should be decanted into strong and sturdy lidded containers that will not spill during transportation. Not only will this prevent mess, but it also reduces the possibility of contamination between foods.

Although takeaway services appear much more casual, businesses and their employees must work to the same standard as they would in a restaurant. Regular hand washing and limited contact between foods, food containers and staff, will prevent the spread of viruses, infection, and cross-contamination.

With the coronavirus, it has been bought to the attention of everyone that viruses can remain on surfaces for up to 72 hours, proving the importance of regular cleaning and disinfecting.

Public Health England has also recently announced the [introduction of calorie and salt reduction targets](link) for takeaway and eating out businesses, which will see a further need for

clear labeling.

1. **Connected consumers and online ordering and booking**

If businesses are utilizing online ordering services, all allergy information must be available to all customers at the point of selection. Whilst having this readily available would be beneficial, businesses may also provide this information verbally, although it is essential that the information given is accurate.

Having allergy information available allows customers to make informed choices when deciding on their meal. To support this, customizable menus or the ability to order online via an app can improve accuracy, efficiency and speed.

As expected, following the coronavirus pandemic, businesses are now offering a contact-free service and are utilizing the rise in digitization with the use of online menus and the ability to order via an app.

1. **Eco-conscious consuming via veganism and vegetarianism**

With the number of people adopting vegan and vegetarian diets and lifestyles, this is an important trend to consider, not just for 2021, but for the future, too.

Whilst this may not seem a cause for concern in terms of hygiene, it can pose a greater risk of cross-contamination. Each dish should not be cooked in the same oils for instance or ingredients stored in the same area of the fridge.

To reduce and prevent this from happening, and to ensure there are no mix-ups, all meat, vegan, and vegetarian dishes should be separated within each order.

Ideally, any allergen, vegan or vegetarian dishes should be delivered completely individually. However, where this isn't possible, these orders should be placed on top and must be double wrapped, with all other orders underneath.

1. **Sustainability**

Going digital not only speeds things up for all involved, but it also positively impacts the environment.

With more customers and businesses focusing on making sustainable changes to their lives, reducing paper usage and single-use plastic is almost essential.

Following the need to digitize and automate the kitchen, paper-based safety trails are no longer needed, nor relevant. The average restaurant spends approximately £20 per month, per site, on paperwork printing costs alone.

Embracing sustainable and digital processes would not just benefit the business by reducing costs, but it would also remove unnecessary paper and thus, waste for both the business and the consumer.

Businesses should look to invest in innovative digital hardware and software that can record all data in a cloud-based system, eliminating the need for paperwork entirely.

An integrated digital system allows businesses to monitor food safety effectively with watertight traceability and accountability, resulting in a reduction in food waste.

It isn't just about materials and going digital, though. Food businesses, in particular, need to work hard to ensure less food is being wasted. To do so may mean minimizing menus as they work to reopen as well as encouraging consumers to recycle packaging properly and effectively if it is a takeaway service.

A look to the future

Although those are five trends that are prominent right now, I am sure that we will begin to see many more come to the forefront of the industry.

When Covid-19 has been and gone, the impact it has had on the world will be around for the foreseeable, so it is important for brands to adapt and meet the newfound needs of consumers.