

Trends & Predictions for 2022

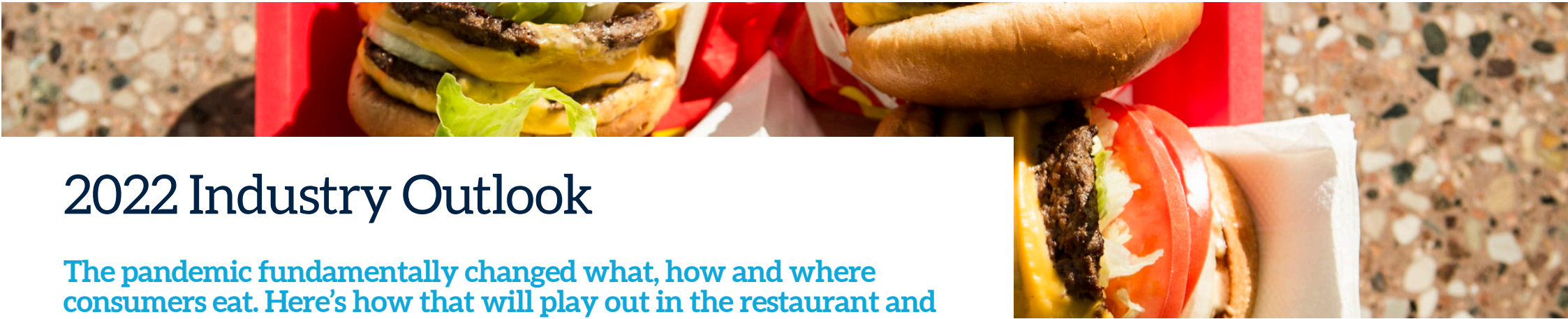
73 expert predictions for the foodservice and grocery industries





2022 Industry Outlook

The pandemic fundamentally changed what, how and where consumers eat.



2022 Industry Outlook

The pandemic fundamentally changed what, how and where consumers eat. Here's how that will play out in the restaurant and food retail markets this year.

The last two years brought radical change to the foodservice and food retail markets. Simply put: The pandemic fundamentally changed what, how and where consumers eat. New tech tools that put the consumer in the driver's seat have opened up new revenue streams, but also brought with them some operational hiccups. Office and school closures altered once dependable spending habits. And more recently, pricing and supply chain challenges have forced businesses to rethink how they keep customers happy without sacrificing profitability.

All of these factors are poised to continue shaping the restaurant, grocery and noncommercial foodservice markets for the year ahead.

To outline the challenges — and opportunities — that lie ahead, the editors at Nation's Restaurant News, Restaurant Hospitality, Supermarket News and Food Management have compiled a list of 73 trends to expect in 2022. They drew upon data, input from industry watchers and their own deep industry knowledge to identify the biggest shifts to expect in operations, tech, labor, menus, marketing and more. Read on and learn what to watch for in the months ahead.

Click the buttons below to jump to predictions for each market:

[Restaurant & Foodservice](#)

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A photograph of two men sitting at an outdoor table at a restaurant. The man on the left is wearing a white button-down shirt and a blue watch, laughing as he eats a piece of food. The man on the right is wearing a maroon polo shirt and is also laughing while holding a piece of food. In front of them is a red and white checkered paper basket filled with food and a small container of sauce. The background shows an outdoor dining area with green umbrellas and a building.

Restaurant & Foodservice

Convenience-obsessed consumers and rapidly evolving tech tools spur major changes for restaurants



An era of innovation

The pace of change in the foodservice industry is faster than ever before. Here's what's new in restaurants for the year ahead.

Virtual restaurant brands. Tech-enabled locker pick-ups. Low-touch tableside ordering.

A few years ago, these things barely registered as restaurant trends to watch. Today, however, they're becoming commonplace across the restaurant industry thanks to the whiplash-inducing switch to digital-first operations spurred on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

What other trends are taking hold across foodservice (thanks to COVID-19 or not)? To answer that question, Nation's Restaurant News' editors pulled together the trends most likely to shape restaurant menus, tech, operations, customer experience this year. Here's what to expect in 2022.

MENU TRENDS

Bold flavors. Global influences. New cooking techniques. Here's what to expect on menus this year.

Bold flavored drinks

Beverage-development company Flavorman says subtly flavored seltzers are reaching the saturation point.

"We are now seeing more clients ask for loud and proud, single-note flavors," said chief flavorist Tom Gibson. That especially includes easily recognizable flavors that strike a nostalgic chord, like watermelon, strawberry, cherry, apple and grape.

Flavorman said there could be a pandemic-related reason for this. A prominent symptom of COVID-19 is loss of taste and smell. Robust flavors could provide reassurance that to people they still have, or have recovered, those senses.

Return to low-alcohol beverages

Alcohol consumption surged at the start of the pandemic, but as people start going out more, consumers are turning once again to drinks with low ABV (alcohol by volume), or spirit-free beverages, according to international food and restaurant consultants Baum & Whiteman. Factors affecting this trend include "more mindful eating and drinking, snazzier packaging and marketing, improved products that taste

more like the real thing and restoring physical fitness that went downhill during Covid," the company said in its annual trend predictions report.

Extreme hummus variations

Baum & Whiteman mentioned that phrase as one of the trends to look for in 2022, and indeed many of them are already in restaurants, such as the Citrus Beet Hummus — made with red beets and orange mixed into the garbanzo bean paste — and Kalamata Olive Hummus — a blend of olives and garbanzo beans — at Garbanzo Mediterranean Fresh. There's also the Fall Seasonal Hummus available on the all-you-can-eat Market Table at Fogo de Chão, which is



hummus topped with roasted mushrooms, parsley, extra virgin olive oil and garlic chips. Yalla Mediterranean also has a hummus with beets added to it, another for which the chickpeas are flavored with the North African spice blend Chermoula and a third with another North African spice blend, harissa.

Plant-based chicken

Plant-based chicken Baum & Whiteman expects the next popular plant-based meat substitute to be chicken analogs. Impossible Foods rolled out its version in 2021, and rival company Beyond Meat, which first introduced a bird-free chicken more than a decade ago, has also launched a new version. Those and other chicken substitutes have been tested at Burger King, A&W, Panda Express, KFC and other large chains. Meanwhile, &pizza just introduced Daring brand chicken substitute systemwide in November.

Thicker beer

Sister consulting firms AF&Co and Carbonate expect to see beer with fruit purées added after the first fermentation. They report that

this is an offshoot of the sour beer trend, with the purées often added to tart brews. Sometimes they have ingredients besides fruit added, too, such as in the PB&J Slushy beer from 450 North Brewing Company in Columbus, Ind., made with blackberry, banana, grape, peanut butter and marshmallow.

Singaporean Cuisine

Singapore, the city-state on an island at the tip of the Malay Peninsula in Southeast Asia, has a distinctive cuisine that reflects the Chinese, Malay and Indian heritages of most of its citizens, and it is striking a chord with Americans, according to AF&Co. and Carbonate. The firms note that many people might have become acquainted with the country from seeing the 2018 film “Crazy Rich Asians.” The two firms declared the Singaporean curry noodle dish laksa to be the “hottest dish of the year.”

Dry-aged fish

AF&Co and Carbonate also predict more dry-aged fish in American restaurants. A practice long applied in Japan to oily fish to concentrate



their flavors, similar to the way beef is dry-aged for American steakhouses, the sister consulting firms expect the practice to spread in the U.S. as consumers delve more deeply into the cuisines of Japan. As an example, they point to Lucky Robot Japanese Kitchen in Austin, Texas, which has offered tastings of dry-aged bluefin and big eye tuna.

Caribbean Cuisine

AF& Co and Carbonate called the food of the region extending from the West Indies to Belize and Guyana the “cuisine of the year.” Encompassing many cultures and cooking styles — from conch fritters and barracuda steaks to goat stew, whole roasted hog, mofongo and callaloo — the foods of the region are becoming increasingly popular, particularly as Black chefs in the U.S. explore their own culinary roots.



Expert Take

Bret Thorn, Nation's Restaurant News senior food and beverage editor, on the cuisines and foods he'll be watching in the year ahead.

Agave spirits

Tequila suppliers reported just under \$4 billion in revenue in 2020, according to the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States, up from \$962 million in 2003, an increase of more than 310%. In 2020 alone, revenue was up by 17.4%, and that was before the launch of numerous tequilas by celebrities in 2021. Meanwhile, mezcal sales grew by 17.7% in 2020 to surpass \$124.1 billion. In recent years interest has also grown in lesser known agave spirits, including raicilla and bacanora, as well as sotol, which is



made from a different type of cactus than agave. Distinctive enough to be interesting, but palate-friendly enough to be used in many cocktails, you can expect to see growing interest in, and purchase of, this growing family of liquors.

West African Cuisines

The cuisines of the region stretching from Mauritania to Cameroon are continuing to gain traction, both as chefs such as Kwame Onwuachi — born in New York City but with Nigerian roots — Nigerian chef Simileoluwa Adebajo, Senegalese chef Pierre Thiam and others further share their foods with American audiences, and as other Black chefs explore the more distant heritage of the African diaspora. Expect to see charismatic dishes such as the grilled meat called suya and the jollof rice that is probably an ancestor of jambalaya to appear on more menus, as well as stews made with egusi (melon seeds), on more menus.

Nixtamalizing fruit and vegetables

It is well known that Mexicans and Central Americans have been heating corn in water mixed with basic compounds (as opposed to acidic ones) such as lime or potash for millennia to improve its nutrition and make it easier to work with. But they also treat high-pectin fruit and vegetables (particularly squash) similarly. The result is a firmer skin and softer flesh that chefs in the U.S. are slowly catching on to (it turns out that french fries treated similarly are more crisp, too). You can expect more experimentation with this process in the years to come.

Wagyu

This breed of cattle, whose name means “Japanese beef,” is prized for its rich marbling and fetches a premium price tag, particularly the ultra-marbled meat imported from Japan. But with conventional beef also causing sticker shock, the path is open for both foreign and domestic wagyu — the latter often cross-bred with other breeds such as Angus. If you’re going to splurge on steak, why not go all the way?

And price pressures don’t appear to be as strong for Japanese wagyu.

“While there may be shortages of luxury goods from other parts of the world, one thing there’s plenty of right now is Japanese Wagyu,” said Ayaka Matsui, representing the House of Japanese Wagyu Campaign by JFOODO, a trade organization that oversees the production and export of the Japanese beef. Matsui said exports of Japanese beef rose by 307.8 percent in 2021. The Japanese agriculture ministry said it plans to nearly triple the export of wagyu by 2025 compared to 2019.

For more trends & predictions, [follow Bret Thorn on Twitter.](#)

TECHNOLOGY TRENDS

Delivery and takeout get an upgrade. Robots come to the rescue. And will the ghost kitchen bubble burst?

Robots as labor solutions

We've been talking about robotic kitchen employees and delivery vehicles for several years now, but they still have not become mainstream yet. Both AF&Co restaurant marketing company and Baum & Whiteman restaurant consultants believe that the days of robots becoming a mainstay in kitchens are nearly upon us. AF&Co points to robotic bartenders as the next big AI foodservice investment, particularly at large events like festivals and sporting events. Baum & Whiteman believes that with labor challenges still plaguing the industry, bots like Flippy the Robot from Miso Robotics could be a go-to solution, with other international robotics companies like SavorEats' robot that 3D prints and cooks plant-based burgers.

The ghost kitchen space gets crowded

Ghost kitchens were (and still are) one of the buzziest restaurant industry trends, but with nearly every single major restaurant chain (and newer virtual restaurant companies like C3) rushing to invest in virtual restaurants, will the bubble pop? Baum & Whiteman predicts that the ghost kitchen space is about to get quite competitive, and there could be a point of oversaturation, which the firm compares to the dot-com boom of the '90s. Baum & Whiteman predicts consolidations and mergers over the next two years between the major ghost kitchen players because eventually the virtual whitespace will be gobbled up.





Expert Take

Joanna Fantozzi, Nation's Restaurant News senior editor, on how new tech tools are changing how consumers get their food — and how tasty it is when they do.

Technology-enabled pickup solutions

This past year we've seen Starbucks launch a new pickup order board for its new pickup store in New York City in collaboration with Amazon Go, which will eliminate some congestion and confusion when a long line of customers come in to grab their pre-ordered morning latte. Taco Bell also launched pickup cubbies for its new flagship store in New York City. We predict more cubbies and pickup

order boards, but with temperature controls to keep food fresh.

Quality control technology for off-premises food

Swedish company Dometic launched a temperature-controlled delivery box that keeps hot food hot and cold food cold as food is in route for delivery. With complaints growing over soggy food, cold meals and food of variant temperatures being placed near each other, expect packaging technology to be prioritized to keep the growing percentage of restaurant delivery customers satisfied and not dealing with cold, mushy french fries.



EMERGING CONCEPT TRENDS

Fresh ideas are popping up at new and emerging brands.

Drop in high-end dining

Bo Peabody, former CEO of Union Square Hospitality Group and founder of the app Seated, is predicting a drop in high-end restaurants. High-end dining has not only fallen out of favor among consumers, but also, emerging restaurateurs aren't as invested in that category as they are more casual concepts.

Restaurants changing service models

Many restaurants are changing their formatting from table service to counter service — or to a tech-powered hybrid model — according to both Peabody and Nextbite cofounder Paul

Allen. The shift allows for more kitchen and less front-of-house space, along with fewer wait staff, thereby allowing for fewer workers per shift and more room in the back to prep to-go and virtual orders.

Improved off-premises packaging

The boom in off-premises business has increased the need for better to-go packaging. The National Restaurant Association predicts that restaurants are looking to maintain the quality, look and temperature of the food as they attempt to re-create the dining experience at-home with new packaging.

Increase in digital channels

Allen also predicts that there will be an increase in the already booming digital channels for virtual brands and off-premises delivery. Like the shrinking front-of-house space, this is paving the way for more virtual brands operating out of the same kitchen and a higher off-premises business.

Social media apps are blending

There is no one app to reach a specific customer base anymore, Allen said. Snapchat, Facebook, Instagram and TikTok are all important when marketing any brand, but the differences among each audience are not as clear as they used to be. And as customers of all ages use social media and apps to order food, restaurants will increasingly need to

invest in a presence on all platforms where there are potential guests.

Cuisine variety

With the introduction of more kitchen space and the rise of the digital marketplace comes the potential for multiple cuisines served in one order, Allen said. That could lead to restaurants diversifying their menus to serve multiple cravings — and it could allow operators to get more adventurous with their R&D, offering, for example, global foods in a more meat-and-potatoes part of the country.

Robots are coming

Robots won't just be in the back of house; they're also going to take to the streets, Allen



predicted. With cities around the country beginning to use driverless cars for public transit, expect to see more restaurants and delivery companies using autonomous vehicles or robots for deliveries without the labor cost.



Expert Take

Holly Petre, Nation's Restaurant News digital editor, on over-the-top branding and the influence of Instagram.

Smaller eating spaces that are designed with style

As restaurants dive into the off-premises mindset, they must compete with more orders. This means that kitchens are getting bigger

while eating areas are getting smaller. But the smaller spaces will be decorated to the nines with Instagrammable moments and ways for brands to get social media attention with very little effort, making the most use of the smaller space.

Innovative food offerings

There's no playing it safe anymore. Like the design of the restaurant, consumers want food that excites them. Think of Velvet Taco's WTF weekly taco feature that uses all sorts of strange ingredients to make a taco. It's perfect for social media and it makes consumers want to try the "next best thing." At the end of the day, making consumers want what you're cooking because it's pretty to look at or has some weird ingredient (like alligator) will attract guests.

OPERATIONS TRENDS

From sustainability to off-premises business, here's how the restaurant operation is likely to change.

New approaches to catering

Catering is starting to come back, but it's going to look different than it used to. Larger parties and events have not come back, but there are opportunities with individualized boxes for events, said Alex Canter, CEO of Nextbite.

Many companies are committed to hybrid or remote work, so they're looking for ways to offer foodservice to those workers, Canter said. "We're getting orders for 500 individually wrapped bags going to different destinations, or orders for one-pound boxes of chocolate rugelach to be sent around the country as a holiday gift for executives. I think we'll see restaurants expanding these types of offerings."

Restaurants will flip the layout

Canter said the need for large seating capacity is becoming a thing of the past. "We're going into a future where there might be more delivery drivers walking into a restaurant than customers," he said. "The percentage of square footage devoted to back of the house will likely be larger than the front of the house going forward."

Short-term labor fixes become a long-term strategy

The competition for employees from other industries is not going away, and neither are the calls for a higher minimum wage, said Victor Fernandez, vice president of insights at Black Box Intelligence. Restaurants have been rapidly catching up in terms of their wage gaps versus

other industries, and Black Box Intelligence research shows offerings like paid leave, sick days, wellness programs and variable pay offerings have been increasing as well. But successful employers know that this is not just about solving for the current staffing crisis; it's also an ongoing effort to create an engaged and inspired workplace.

"Employees may have starting pay as their primary objective when looking for a new job, but what will keep them employed is much more than that," said Fernandez.



Fine dining will be less fussy

High-end dining isn't going away, but restaurants will focus less on the song-and-dance of formality that once was required to obtain those game-changing Michelin stars, said Bo Peabody, cofounder of restaurant discovery and rewards platform Seated and co-owner of Mezza Restaurant in Williamstown, Mass.

Fine dining will become "less fussy" and "more hip," appealing to a younger diner and those who want quality with a more relaxed approach to service, ambiance and style of menu, Peabody predicted. Blame the need to cut back on labor costs, but also the consumer embrace of outdoor dining, where experiences tend to be more casual.

"Even 10 years ago, there used to be 20 restaurants in New York that require dinner jackets. Now I think there's only one," he said.

M&A activity will slow

Nick Cole, head of restaurant finance at Mitsubishi UF Financial Group, said restaurant

companies have seen their margins erode as costs increase and as challenges such as labor put a squeeze on the business. Those lower margins will slow the pace of M&A in the first quarter of 2022, he predicted.

"The M&A market depends on a well-capitalized banking system flush with liquidity, which we currently have," he said. "But cash flow — and the price acquirers are willing to pay for that liquidity — are the primary drivers that attract buyers, so unless we see an improvement in margins, we expect the pullback to be significant."



Expert Take

Lisa Jennings, Nation's Restaurant News executive editor, on three sustainability movements that are gaining real traction.

The reusable packaging movement takes off

Now more than ever, restaurants are under pressure by consumers to find a more sustainable solution for to-go packaging. The shipping backup has made it difficult for many restaurants to get the disposable packaging they need. Compostables aren't the answer, as most composting facilities won't accept foodservice packaging. The common-sense solution is to consider a switch to reusable containers, clamshells and cups that can be

returned, washed and sanitized, then used again. While there are still kinks to work out in how it all works, legislation restricting single-use cup, containers and straws will only increase.

Reducing emissions gets real

Consumers are getting tired of the “blah blah” of greenwashing and they want to see businesses show how they are reducing their impact on the environment. We’ll see more restaurants tie sustainability goals to executive compensation and become more transparent about measurable metrics. Chipotle, for

example, has pledged to cut carbon emissions in half, not only from its restaurants but also from its supply chain. The brand is following the United Nations-backed Science Based Target Initiative, or SBTi, which establishes standards and best practices, but it also includes third-party verification and annual progress reports.

Cutlery gets the boot

Los Angeles in November became one of the largest cities to phase in new rules that make disposable cutlery available only by request. Rather than adding cutlery and napkins to

takeout orders automatically, restaurants may only provide them when customers ask. The goal is to reduce waste — if customers are eating at home, they have cutlery and napkins. It also reduces the cost to restaurants, who are struggling with rising packaging inflation.



CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE TRENDS

Consumers want convenience, safety and control. Here's what restaurant operators will be doing this year to win them over.

Intentional consumer

Eric Dzwonczyk, global co-leader of the restaurants, hospitality and leisure practice at management consulting firm AlixPartners, said the pandemic has permanently changed the habits of more than a third of Americans, according to his firm's data. "That doesn't necessarily mean they will be spending less on

restaurants, but it does mean [they are] being more selective and having heightened expectations on how they want to engage with restaurants, including more trading down and, in some cases, more trading up and in-store," he said.

Off-premises sales continue

Black Box Intelligence, the Dallas-based restaurant analytics firm, predicted the off-premises sales mix will remain elevated as consumers stick with their new dining habits.

"There has been little change in the share of all restaurant sales that went through off-premises channels in Q2 and Q3 of 2021," the firm reported. "Even though restrictions were mostly lifted and consumers were much more

comfortable going out, both limited-service and full-service restaurants continue to see a much larger share of off-premises sales than they did pre-COVID."

More dining via online – but on weekdays

Consumers can expect to access their favorite eateries online, according to BentoBox. A big change, however, is when they do it. The online ordering business that serves 7,500 restaurants globally said it has seen the percentage increase but, most interestingly, shift to weekdays.

"Weekends have long been the main days for online ordering," the company said in its annual predictions. "That's still the case, but the gap between weekends and weekdays shrunk considerably in 2021. Online ordering has become a routine part of peoples' lives rather than a 'treat' saved for weekends."

Customers as control freaks

Marketing intelligence agency Mintel reported that consumers crave a sense of control over



their lives, particularly in times of uncertainty — and restaurants can support that need so that guests “feel like they’re in the driver’s seat.”

Dana Macke, Mintel’s director of trends for the Americas, said consumers near clarity, transparency, flexibility and options to make decisions that suit their individual needs and circumstances. “Brands will need to work harder to deliver reliable information and balance censorship and authenticity,” she said. “The race for the fastest delivery will evolve to focus on being more flexible, giving consumers more control over when products arrive to fit around their schedules or to match their other specific needs. Consumers’ desire to know potential outcomes will manifest in the development of predictive technologies that can anticipate adverse events. ... Technology will evolve to grant consumers the power to plan with peace of mind.”

Christine Barone, CEO of the 39-unit True Food Kitchen, said that casual-dining brand expects to meet the consumer where they want to be met, be it a menu in the restaurant,

a quick-response or QR code that allows them to access the menu on their smartphone or online.

Creative and playful experiences

Mintel’s research found consumers want “enjoyment everywhere” after the anxiety and stress of pandemic lockdowns. Macke said brands are “recognizing the importance of uplifting people by giving them permission to feel happiness once again.”

Texas Roadhouse Inc., for example, found a way to maintain its barrels of peanuts experience during the pandemic by offering pre-packaged nuts. Those were also included in to-go off-premises orders to complete the experience in the home or wherever the food was consumed. That sense of playfulness and creativity will continue to be appreciated by customers, Macke said.

More ethics checks

While many brands have made their voices heard on controversial topics, consumers want to see measurable progress against their



goals, Mintel said in its annual look at the year ahead. For example, major brands have made commitments to sustainability in the face of global warming and to diversity amid the race-based protests of the past two years.

“Consumer demand for, and expectations of, brands’ ethical commitments are evolving,” Macke said. “They have moved beyond simply wanting brands to ‘be ethical’ and are demanding to see measurable, transparent and consistent actions from those they choose to support. Consumers will look beyond a brand’s achievements and strengths; businesses will need to be transparent about their weaknesses, too, where and why they fail

and how they plan to address these issues in future.”



Expert Take

Ron Ruggless, Nation's Restaurant News senior editor, on how consumer expectations around convenience and safety are changing restaurant service models.

A rush to the drive-thru

Real estate that accommodates a drive-thru, already golden during the pandemic, will become even more lucrative. Already, brands from Burger King to Taco Bell to Portillo's are designing prototypes with three and four drive-thru lanes, accommodating both wheeled

customers as well as the boom in third-party delivery couriers. That is spreading into fast casual with Chipotle and others. Even Applebee's, a casual-dining brand, has tested a drive-thru lane. Expect to see more.

No-touch everything

While experts say the coronavirus doesn't spread well through surfaces, consumers have adjusted to touching as few surfaces as possible. Expect restroom faucets with no handles, doors that open automatically and fewer dispensing stations. Even Coke Freestyle, which early on laid claim to its touchy-feely interface, has gone to a smartphone-based website dispenser that allows customers to operate the machines from their own — probably germ laden — smartphone.

Pay-at-the-table tech

European restaurants have been years ahead of their U.S. counterparts in allowing pay-at-the-table, with the chipped credit card never leaving the sight of the owner. BJ's Restaurants and other brands already are sampling pay-on-the-phone technologies that will expand in

casual dining, giving patrons the flexibility to customize their experiences and not be dependent on a waiter.

The great outdoors

Patios are with us for a long time. While the pandemic sent many customers and operators to use their outdoor spaces, that trend will remain as customers cautiously go back to dining at restaurants. It's a breath of fresh air, really.

Grocery & Food Retail

2022 holds big growth opportunity for supermarkets, if they can create the the fast, frictionless experiences shoppers demand





10 Grocery/Food Retail Predictions

More online ordering, more food at home and yes, more Amazon on tap

The grocery industry has witnessed more change in the past two years than perhaps the entire previous decade. COVID has upended how consumers live and shop, and retailers have responded with amazing speed and efficiency to keep up with all of the changes.

But there's no rest for the weary. There's more evolution to come in the year ahead. What can we expect to see in 2022? Supermarket News senior editor Russ Redman and executive editor Michael Browne have some predictions for the year ahead.

Digital sales growth

Online will represent more than 15% of grocery retail sales in 2022, up from around 10% at the end 2021.

Spending shifts

Food-at-home spending will increase through the first half of 2022, as COVID concerns, inflation and high restaurant prices push consumers to grocery stores.

Amazon Fresh expansion

To drive omnichannel synergies in grocery, Amazon will more than double the number of

Amazon Fresh supermarkets in 2022 (there were 22 in six states and D.C. as of Dec. 7, 2021).

Faster, frictionless checkout

Shoppers will expect skipping the checkout line — via frictionless payment solutions like scan-and-go, smart shopping carts and technologies like Amazon's Just Walk Out — to become a daily option at large chain grocery stores.

Private-label push

Private-label market share will increase in 2022 as grocers boost exposure of own brands on their digital properties.

Automation to meet rising demand

Grocery retailers and distributors will accelerate the rollout of automated micro-fulfillment centers (and similar facilities) to support elevated online demand and achieve e-commerce profitability.

Designing for convenience

The first omnichannel grocery store prototypes — incorporating features like automated picking areas, expanded perimeter and reduced center-store spaces, customer pickup counters, self-serve order collection, ordering kiosks and more drive-up options — will debut in major markets.

More meal options

As grocers gain “share of stomach” from restaurants, supermarkets will see big growth in prepared meal services, both in-store and online “order ahead” offerings.

A need for speed

The plethora of online-only grocers offering ultra-fast delivery (10 to 15 minutes) will thin

out in the latter part of 2022 as major brick-and-mortar grocers expand their rapid delivery services and build out omnichannel ecosystems in major metro markets.

New product categories

Big grocers will increasingly add popular retail and consumer brands — in such categories as apparel/accessories, electronics, home/office supplies, housewares, health/fitness, beauty and baby care — via digital marketplaces and store-with-a-store departments.



Russell Redman, Senior Editor, Supermarket News



Onsite/ Noncommercial Foodservice

Creative labor moves and new tech tools will help offset pricing and supply chain challenges





Top 10 trends shaping onsite dining in 2022

Expect to see constant innovation — new revenue streams and increased automation — on the slow road back to “normal.”

In a few weeks, we'll see the two-year anniversary of the start of the most transformative event in recent history, superseding even 9-11 and the 2008 stock market crash in the impact it has had, and will continue to have, on onsite dining programs, not to mention just about everything else. That event of course is the emergence of the COVID-19 coronavirus in March 2020, which forced shutdowns and social restrictions that continue in some form to this day.

For the various markets that constitute the onsite dining universe, the impacts of COVID were devastating, forcing some such as sports/recreation concessions and conference/convention center catering to come to a complete halt while most others saw steep declines in business. The advent of vaccines early last year has allowed a mitigation of restrictions, though new virus variants may threaten that easing. Nevertheless, most observers seem to anticipate a continued crawl back to some

semblance of “normal” in the coming year and it is on that assumption that the editors of Food Management have based the following predictions.

The ever-evolving pandemic continues

The past year has seen a gradual easing of lockdowns and mandates but don't be fooled. With the parade of COVID variants that have been emerging combined with concerns about



vaccines' effectiveness to combat them and lingering societal anxieties about personal safety, any full return to pre-pandemic "normal" is not likely in 2022, though neither is a return to full lockdown mode...

But restrictions will continue to ease

That being said, a slow return to pre-pandemic practices such as self-serve bars and full occupancy dining rooms can be expected, something that is already occurring in some parts of the country to varying extents.

Labor usage will evolve

Pandemic-related concerns and various demographic/social factors will continue to

Photo Credit: HHS



constrict the labor pool in 2022, meaning that operators will have to become more efficient with how and where they allocate the labor they have, even as that labor will have more leverage in deciding working conditions, hours and compensation.

Customer counts will be down

This is already happening in B&I, where the prospect of full-scale office returns remains an open question, but the phenomenon also extends to the college and K-12 markets, where demographic decreases combined with home schooling/remote learning alternatives are reducing the overall in-person student pool, and in healthcare, where growing telehealth options erode the number of onsite visits to facilities, in turn reducing the potential customer base for the retail dining program.

Automated service points will proliferate

As labor remains scarce—and becomes more expensive when it is available—operators are likely to turn increasingly to emerging technologies like smart fridges, automated



Photo Credit: Delaware North

retail outlets, high-tech vending units and robotic food stations to provide foodservice, especially at times and in places where manned outlets are economic non-starters.

Photo Credit: Prince William Schools





Photo Credit: Fresh Ideas Foodservice

Alternate business niches such as off-premise open up

During the height of the pandemic, operators found ways to reach remote customers, most prominently with K-12 programs developing curbside pickup and even home delivery to reach remote learners. Meanwhile, some B&I operators also dabbled with take-home meals and even off-premise delivery to reach client employees working from home, while healthcare facilities have begun exploring the provision of meals to discharged patients and even sports concessionaires developed meal

kits that allow fans watching events at home to enjoy ballpark/stadium favorites. As onsite customer counts lag, look for more operations to explore alternative business niches where extra revenue might be generated.

Remote order and ghost kitchens are here to stay

Remote ordering exploded during the pandemic as the preferred method of contact with foodservice providers in both the commercial and onsite markets, and there's no reason to think it will regress even if the pandemic comes to a full halt, as the apps providing this service are now in place and customers are increasingly comfortable with them. Ghost kitchens—foodservice operations that serve exclusively as production and pickup outlets for remote orders—are a natural extension of the remote order culture and can be expected to proliferate accordingly.

More robots!

It seems like every week brings news of one more college campus rolling out meal delivery robots, but that's just the tip of the spear of



Photo Credit: Sodexo

automated delivery as major restaurant and retail operators experiment not only with robots but full-size unmanned vehicles and even airborne drones. This is an area of technology that can be expected to evolve rapidly in response to strong market pressures.

Photo Credit: C&S Wholesale Grocers



Supply chain issues will recede

Markets usually find a way around obstacles if the self-interest—read, profits—is strong enough, and the betting here is that that is what will happen with the current supply chain snags. Yes, truckers are in short supply, ships are stacked up off the California coast and manufacturers are having a hell of a time getting the ingredients and the workers they need to keep up with demand, but none of this is insurmountable. Look for increased innovation in the products manufacturers produce, the ways distributors evolve scheduling and the ways operators place orders and receive shipments. By the way, one positive that has come out of the supply chain crisis is a growing appreciation of local suppliers whose products are more readily at hand.

Food price increases will continue

A combination of pent-up demand, escalating fuel prices that impact delivery costs and increased labor, ingredient and production costs at the supplier end all mean a likely continuance and even escalation of food prices across the board through 2022.



**Written by Mike
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10 food trends shaping onsite dining menus

Here's a preview of what will be hot in the culinary world.

Biting into something new is an experience we're chasing as we anticipate the culinary trends predicted to make those bites something to remember. All in all, dining is about that experience, and this year, that'll get amped up. Matt Faul, CEO of Wolverine Management says diners are totally looking for that special something. "I predict more unique flavor experiences," he says.

"Diners are now able to experience explosions of unique flavors and ingredients unlike ever before," Faul adds. "The rise of social media and influences, who like to treat food as a flavorful journey, creates a demand for restaurants and culinary experts to find the next trend or flavor wave that can create an impact. Diners want to

bite into something or sip a cocktail with a flavor journey that has a beginning, middle and end."

Pasta is back, baby!

After years of getting pushed into a corner by the low-carb craze, pasta is back and better than ever. Lots of global flavor profiles work



beautifully with pasta, too (think nori-topped noodles). Take inspiration from a twist on pasta primavera, featuring chicken-lentil meatballs, by UMass with Barilla Foodservice.

Caribbean cuisine

According to the National Restaurant Association's annual "What's Hot" report, Caribbean food will heat up big time.

Hibiscus is here

Sweet-yet-tart hibiscus has been infusing cocktails and showing up in flavored waters and ciders, according to Mara Weinraub, groceries editor at Kitchn. She predicts hibiscus will also be appearing more in yogurts and spreads.

Plant-based "meats"

As the food technology for meatless proteins just keeps getting better, the results are surprisingly realistic. Expect to see more meatless proteins this year, particularly plant-based chicken.

Hyper-regional faves

A couple years ago, Detroit pizza took the food

world by storm. Now, other specifically regional items are stepping into the spotlight, too, like this Cincinnati chili by Chartwells at Northern Kentucky University.

Queso on everything

Take a cue from chefs like Rick Bayless who has celebrated the use of the melty cheese sauce on burgers on social media. Expect more chefs to think beyond chips and dip to use queso throughout the menu.

Getting un-processed

Clean eating and eating for health are gaining real momentum. Watch for more simply-prepared vegetables and grains to make their way onto menus.

Chia pudding

Move over açai bowls. Chia pudding is the cool new kid on the block. The protein-packed chia seeds can sit overnight in oat milk, for example, to become a healthfu, fun breakfast.

Retro cocktails/mocktails

Ever tried a Pink Squirrel? How about an Old

Fashioned? Retro cocktails—with or without alcohol—are just the drink for changing times.

Loaded fries

The National Restaurant Association predicts spicy, globally inspired fries are going to be a big appetizer this year. At the University of Houston, for example, you can find thick steak fries topped with tender brisket.



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Trends & Predictions for 2022

