

ConvenienceStore NEWS

Mindful Dining to Be Overarching Trend for 2015

CHICAGO — Along with expecting good food, attentive service and value for their dollar when they dine out, today's consumers are more likely to choose restaurants that treat their employees well and support the community, according to a new study by research and trend forecasting firm Culinary Visions Panel.

"Mindful dining" is a way of life for an increasing number of health- and environmentally-conscious consumers who scrutinize the restaurants they visit, as well as the menu items they offer, according to the study. The prevalence of organic foods, natural products and locally sourced ingredients reflect this shift.



More than 1,200 consumers participated in the study and shared their perspectives on the ethical choices that impact their decisions when they dine out or purchase food away from home.

Key insights include:

Convenience Is King

Expectations for food taste and quality are still growing, but the convenience factor has become just as important. Consumers say they are most likely to seek out quick-service restaurants more frequently than casual or quick-casual restaurants.

Clean Eating

Healthful living is a lifestyle for a growing number of customers who make an effort to eat nutritious meals and minimize their impact on the environment. Diners are more likely to select dishes designated as fresh, locally-sourced food, items containing whole grain and anything all-natural. Additionally, a majority of consumers avoid GMO foods and products that contain high-fructose corn syrup, hormones and antibiotics. The appeal of humanely-raised meats and sustainably caught/raised seafood is also increasing.

Positive Positioning

More restaurants are taking steps to become a bigger part of their community and better connect with residents by sponsoring area events, donating to charities and supporting local businesses. This contributes to a positive profile in their neighborhood. Becoming a fixture in the community can also bring in business, as most diners cite friends and family as their main trustworthy sources regarding a restaurant's reputation. They also turn to online reviews and websites for insights.

Cost vs. Service

Affordability remains a primary factor when consumers choose a restaurant. Accordingly, the perception of value plays a primary role in the decision-making process, with many saying the biggest challenge when ordering is finding food items that are worth the price. Despite this, the majority of those who eat out are unwilling to cut corners when it comes to service. Meanwhile, only 3 percent of consumers prefer to order food online and take it to go, while 4 percent are likely to order food online for delivery.

Dining Decadence

Dining in restaurants is about indulgence, and consumers are more likely to forego their diets and calorie counting when eating out. While many diners continue to order their favorite dishes, a growing number of adventurous diners are exploring new foods and flavors.

Environmentally Sound

As consumers become more educated about the source of their meat and produce, including how and where it is grown or raised, more of them are advocating for responsibly produced food by seeking out restaurants that share these ideals.

Culinary Visions Panel expects the mindful dining movement to continue growing in 2015 as consumers seek out restaurants that share their values and meet their high standards. Value and convenience will continue to dictate diner decisions, along with a menu that includes high-quality, responsibly produced food items and exemplary customer service.

Other highlights of the study include:

- 83 percent of consumers like to patronize restaurants known for treating their employees well.
- 73 percent of respondents choose to patronize restaurants that support their local community or causes they believe in.
- At restaurants that promote positive business practices and responsibly sourced ingredients, 52 percent of consumers expect fresher food, 48 percent expect healthier food, 45 percent expect the food to taste better, and 33 percent expect the food to cost a bit more but be worth it.
- The top menu claims that influence consumers' menu choices are: fresh (86 percent); local (73 percent); whole grain (68 percent); all natural (66 percent); and no high-fructose corn syrup (62 percent).
- Other menu claims that influence ordering include: grass fed/pasture raised (59 percent); hormone free (57 percent); antibiotic free protein (56 percent); free range/free roaming (55 percent); non GMO (55 percent); sustainably caught/raised (54 percent); fair trade (54 percent); heirloom fruits and vegetables (52 percent); cage free (52 percent); and organic (50 percent).