



Limited-Service, Unlimited Possibilities

10 Trends for 2013

The menu items, promotional tools, and business strategies that will affect quick serves this year.



What would the start of another year be without predictions? Whether analyzing politics, the silver screen, or stock markets, experts try to offer a peek at the trends we can expect in the coming year.

The restaurant industry is no different. Throughout 2012's fourth quarter, various consultants, chefs, and operators gazed into their crystal balls and forecasted the hot restaurant ideas and issues of 2013.

The following 10 trends, according to those experts, seem most likely to impact quick-service and fast-casual restaurants this year.

1. Going local

Despite disagreement about what local really means, there is little doubt that consumers increasingly see it as a positive

attribute. Locally grown or sourced ingredients fill three of the 10 spots in the National Restaurant Association's (NRA) annual "View from the Top" survey.

Local sourcing is a key trend, says Sharon Olson, executive director of the NRA's Culinary Visions panel.

Some regional chains, like the Los Angeles salad chain, are buying produce locally.

"It remains to be seen if this is a long-term eating habit."

"You can take local sourcing to the next level," says Restaurant Consultants. "We believe these items will continue to grow."

"We don't have to overhype it," says Olson. "We equate locally sourced ingredients with quality."

Playing with these trends in the summer and fall months will be key for many quick-service restaurants.

More fruits and veggies

Quick-service restaurants have never been short on vegetable and fruit offerings—potatoes for french fries; tomatoes, lettuce, and onions on burgers; and various items in salads—but customers will expect more fruit and vegetable variety on menus, the experts say.

"We're seeing all kind of vegetables," Olson says. For example, lettuce will no longer be confined to iceberg; romaine, field greens, and spinach are increasingly being used. Kale, a so-called superfood, is also becoming more popular as a healthful option at some fast-casual restaurants and on college campuses.

The trend is also helping make kids' meals healthier, Olson says. "School foodservice operators are turning vegetables into super heroes with kid-appealing names like Power Punch Broccoli and X-Ray Vision Carrots," she says.

2. Healthy kids' meals

Healthful and creative kids' meals will continue to make an impression on the quick-service industry.

The industry "wrote the book" on understanding kids and kids' meals, says Sharon Olson, executive director of the Culinary Visions panel, which surveyed 3,000 consumers and interviewed dozens of food experts to decide top trends. "They are leaders in knowing what appeals to kids and their parents."