

CStoreDecisions

SOLUTIONS FOR CONVENIENCE RETAILERS

NEW STUDY EXPLORES POST-PANDEMIC FOOD LIFESTYLE CHOICES

Enthusiasm for sharing food experiences with friends and family quickly rising as preferences for meal delivery and convenience wane.

By Thomas Mulloy | July 8, 2021

New consumer research by Culinary Visions, a food-focused insights and trends forecasting practice that studies a wide range of culinary topics important to consumers and food industry professionals, points to the importance of sharing food experiences with friends and family as a new normal emerges for U.S. consumers.

The surge in demand for food experiences can mean opportunity for all types of foodservice and retail establishments.

“The enthusiasm for sharing dining experiences with friends and family is exploding as restaurants reopen and summer-time across the country fuels the desire to get out and get on with life,” said Sharon Olson, executive director of Culinary Visions. “Restarting an industry is hardly like flipping a switch, and foodservice operators are working beyond overtime to welcome the onslaught.”

Convenience Reconsidered

During the pandemic, when everyday life was fraught with unimagined difficulties, the cost of convenience was almost priceless. More than half (51%) of consumers agreed that online delivery services were their lifeline for meals. Consumers are now beginning to scrutinize the cost of delivery, with 68% saying that delivery fees will determine whether they order takeout from a restaurant.

Home delivery that made lock down life a little easier is losing favor now that restaurant dining experiences are more widely available. Just a year ago, 56% of those that participated in a



study of pandemic-era consumers preferred online delivery services over going somewhere in person. That percentage dropped to 47% by the end of the year.

Today's consumers have come to appreciate eating at home during the past year, and they are discovering a broader range of resources to make at-home dining more appetizing and convenient.

Although 81% agreed that their new normal is going to include more dining at home, it is not necessarily going to involve cooking. In fact, 51% prefer purchasing fully prepared foods over making food from scratch. And 59% of those surveyed said they have gained a new appreciation for the supermarket deli as a source for meals.

Appreciating What Matters

Sharing a meal with family and friends is one of life's pleasures and even though virtual encounters have become a way of life, 65% of consumers who participated in the recent survey said they did not enjoy sharing virtual meals with friends as much as dining out. Also, 66% said they miss being around other people when dining in a foodservice establishment.

They have also gained greater appreciation for everyone involved in bringing those meals to the table, from chefs to restaurant employees: 73% agreed that chefs became heroes working to serve communities during the past year. And consumers say this new appreciation is impacting their behavior. More than half (53%) said they have changed the restaurants they patronize based on how employees were being taken care of in recent months.

Culinary Adventure Is On the Menu

The majority of consumers surveyed (78%) said they are looking forward to the experience of dining in a restaurant. Pre-pandemic, consumers were in charge and accustomed to having their foodservice experiences customized and on-demand.

Although many gained a new appreciation for a myriad of things they took for granted this past year, they are tiring of the compromises that characterized lockdown life in their appetite for the way things used to be. In fact, 56% are tired of restaurants that have pared down their regular menus and offer only a limited variety of items.

Although consumers are looking forward to more shared experiences, they are not necessarily keen on sharing their food. Sharing food in restaurants has traditionally been a convivial way of appreciating a culinary experience. Just two years before the pandemic emerged, a global study by Culinary Visions found that Americans were more likely to enjoy sharing desserts than restaurant patrons in France, Italy, Germany and Great Britain. However, in the recent study, 67% of those surveyed said they are more reluctant to share food when dining out.

The survey included 4,000 U.S. consumers who were surveyed during the course of the study that was initiated in 2020 and completed in early 2021. Participants were asked closed-ended questions about their food and dining experiences, and results of each wave of the study were compared to those from previous surveys.

In the most recent survey of 2,000 consumers, 36% of those surveyed were under the age of 34, 40% were ages 35-54 and 24% were ages 55 and over. The consumer female to male ratio was 53:47, respectively. Of those consumers surveyed, 42% live in a one- or two-person household, 58% live in a household of three people or more. The Global Indulgence study noted was conducted in 2018 among 2,000 consumers – 1,000 in the U.S. and 250 in each Italy, France, Germany and Great Britain.