

Delivering Flavor

Delivering on the flavor promise requires a well-organized operational flow.

Sound operating practices, in all areas of the restaurant, are crucial to delivering flavorful and high-quality menu items to the guest. Here are some key areas to evaluate to ensure you are creating an organization that can deliver on your flavor and quality benchmarks.

Purchasing

It is important to have an understanding of the product specifications for all ingredients. Your quality and flavor standards are met by these specifications. These specifications will become the “bible” of the purchasing, receiving, storing and handling functions of your operation. Enforce and review these standards with your suppliers so they have an understanding of your goal.

Match the specifications to your quality standard, considering the purpose that each product is going to serve on your menu. For example, do you have to buy the highest-grade bell pepper available, or would a lesser grade of high-quality product offset the higher cost and help you achieve the desired finished product? Perhaps your supplier can source a pepper with the same flavor but in a smaller size, and available at a lower cost.

Being able to recognize values in purchasing is useful, and knowing what is seasonally available on the market is very effective in setting quality, flavor and cost parameters. Look for promotions from vendors, investigate local purveyors and specialty produce suppliers and develop relationships with local growers to provide products to your specifications. This will help enable you to identify and take advantage of products that can give you a competitive edge in the marketplace. For example, a Los Angeles restaurant found a local sausage manufacturer that custom-made a sausage that worked best for its menu requirements. This approach allowed the restaurant to customize a product and differentiate itself from its competition.

In addition to other efficiencies, local and seasonal sourcing can offer operators added value when they are included in menu descriptions. Patrons appreciate both local and seasonal products.

Receiving and storage

Service of quality products to the guest begins at the “back dock.” Ensure accurate receipt of the product immediately upon delivery. Enforce the use of receiving scales to ensure that you’re receiving the correct quantity of product. Does the product meet your approved specifications? Has it been properly handled? Make sure produce is fresh and properly ripened to your specifications.

Products should be delivered in refrigerated trucks to maintain quality and meet all safety standards. When your order is received, avoid deterioration of quality and/or flavor by transferring it immediately into proper storage areas. Strict adherence to food-safety guidelines is crucial today.



Make sure each menu item has a good, sound recipe and consistent preparation method.

Proper storage ensures maintenance of quality and continued ripening of produce, if necessary. For example, if unripe produce is refrigerated, the ripening process is retarded, and the product will not deliver the best quality or flavor when served.

Make sure there is a good, sound system of rotational labeling and dating practices within the restaurant to ensure a “first-in/first-out” usage policy. This will eliminate waste and ensure the best quality and flavor.

Food preparation

Establishing an efficient, uniform system to determine what product should be prepared in what time period helps to uphold the highest possible standard to maintain quality and flavor. Using good food-handling practices helps ensure that you’re preserving the highest quality possible.

Be sure each menu item is produced using a sound recipe.

Establish recipes and production processes that will generate a flavorful, high-quality finished product and meet your volume expectations. Ensure that delicate products are prepared fresh each day. Those products with a longer shelf life can be prepared in advance and properly stored until needed.

After preparation, it is essential to ensure proper handling as necessary. This includes cooling and icing if necessary, proper labeling and storage at temperatures that maintain the quality and flavor you're trying to deliver.

Consistency and uniformity are key in foodservice. Delivering your expectations through sound recipes and preparation methods can help ensure this.

Final preparation

Prior to beginning meal service, go through a series of pre-meal checkpoints to ensure readiness and that all of your quality standards have been met. Confirm that you've maintained a standard of freshness for both hot and cold food in order to deliver your menu offerings to your guests in the highest quality possible.

Develop quality-control procedures for line food. Taste all the products, verify temperatures and provide sufficient quantity on hand to supply the meal period. Also, make sure all equipment is operating at proper temperature and is ready for food preparation.

Make certain that the area is supplied with appropriate serviceware, utensils and tools so the crew is ready to go. Confirm that the cooks and line crew have a thorough understanding of the final preparation of all menu selections and the established expectation of the restaurant in terms of final cooking, plating and garnishing, within a specified "ticket-time" period.

In addition to an expectation of flavor, patrons have an expectation of time that must be met. This is especially crucial at breakfast and lunch meal periods. It is important to have a high level of awareness and organization so quality, flavor and presentation can be consistently well-executed on a timely basis.

Service staff

In order to deliver on all aspects of flavor and quality, you need to make sure your staff is knowledgeable. They must be able to answer questions, suggestively sell menu items and make guests aware of the effort you've put forth.

The service staff should know all the daily specials or features, promotional selections, holiday items and all menu offerings. If questioned in regard to particular ingredients, they should be able to address those questions immediately or get answers very quickly.

Pre-shift or pre-meal meetings are an excellent opportunity for information-sharing between management and staff. This is an effective way to ensure everyone has an understanding of new products and specials. It's also a great opportunity to suggest wine or beer pairings and to offer selling ideas to the service staff.

A lot of restaurants don't get credit for all they do. For example, products like freshly made bread or dressings should be promoted on the menu and through the server, so that you create the picture of a quality establishment with signature offerings.

Many restaurants use only USDA-prime beef, and they promote this on their menu. Emphasize your strengths or quality standards through the menu copy, branding and highlighting items you specialize in. Your servers should be trained to communicate to the guest your signature items to give you a competitive advantage.

Takeout/carryout

Foodservice operators should embrace the growth of the takeout market. Here again it is critical to deliver to the guest takeout products that will maintain flavor and quality through preparation, packaging and delivery.

A big part of this issue is the selection of menu items available for takeout. There are two philosophies an operator can take on this issue: Let the guests order anything on the menu, or direct them toward only the items that travel well. Some restaurants don't offer all items on their takeout menu simply because they feel it may not be the best product possible when it arrives.

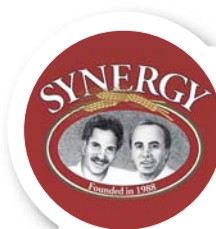
Three key points in takeout preparation to keep in mind:

- 1) Make sure the takeout selections you offer will meet your customers' expectations.
- 2) Use good packaging to maintain hot and/or cold temperatures and packaging that won't open up en route.
- 3) Consider using microwaveable packaging so the meal can easily be reheated if necessary.

Also, it is a good idea to offer something as a giveaway, whether it is your logo on the packaging, a business card or a refrigerator magnet with your logo. This little reminder keeps your restaurant at the top of your patron's mind when making future takeout decisions.

It's also important to make the ordering and pick-up process as easy as possible for the patron. For order placement, is there a dedicated phone number or a fax machine? Is there a staff member in charge of all take-out orders? Are you taking advantage of e-mail and Internet ordering services? Make sure it's easy for takeout patrons to pick up their order. Do you have dedicated parking for to-go customers? Ensure the patrons know where to pick up their order when they come in the restaurant. Last, have an easy system for payment.

It's important to establish a solid plan to effectively execute delivery of a flavorful and quality product. Any one of these elements not addressed can ruin a patron's expectations, and possibly cause you to lose a guest.



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