WHAT OTHERS ARE SAYING

Assessing Consumer Trends

IN THIS ISSUE:
- Foodservice Happenings...Social Media and the Industry
- Consumer Research...Data Brief Impacting Away-from-Home
- Consumers & Their Needs...Are College Students Recession-Proof?
- Harvard Scare...Tried or Poisoned?

A Whole New Conversation: Social Media and the Restaurant Industry

The dawn of social media offers the unprecedented chance to listen in on what others think about you—to monitor your brand’s "pulse" in real time, gain qualitative consumer insights, track responses to programs, and create a better understanding of your brand/competitors. New survey data released by TNS and The Conference Board shows a substantial 36 percentage point increase in just a year’s time in the proportion of Internet users who visit social networking sites, as shown in the accompanying graph.

A different survey by Universal McCann showed a similar jump in 2009 for online consumers who have created a social media profile. Increasingly, businesses are joining the social media conversation. A new study by the Association of National Advertisers (ANA) found that 64% of marketers utilize social media in 2009, compared to just 29% of marketers in 2007.

Unenforced Food TRENDS

Independents and Local Units Get into the Act

Social media platforms are not just for the big players—they can be powerful tools for independent operators and local units as well.

- Thyme Out, an independent restaurant in Rockville, MD, is an example of the type of experimentation in social media going on at independent restaurants around the country. Thyme Out is one of many independents exploring opportunities to market their concept across multiple platforms, Thyme Out.
  - Is an advertiser and sponsor of digitalthinksnow.com.
  - Posts weekly updates and coupons on Facebook, and now has more than 100 fans.
  - "First Twitter, but temporarily withdraw after gaining only 20 fans.

- Brooklyn Bites’ national website immediately adds relation to ensure its yelpers are directed to a local website. Each unit, in fact, has its own website, Facebook and MySpace page. An employee is designated as "web host," tasked with updating the site regularly with photos and news about the restaurants and its events—along with his or her own personal information and opinions. It’s a great way to put a human face on the restaurant and present its employees as customers’ friendly peer.

The growth in consumer adoption of social media sites is a wake-up call to those who may have initially labeled it a fad.

Social media firms are making it easier for restaurants to "get in the game" by providing social media platforms to connect with consumers. Launched this summer by MetaFlavor, a new iPhone application allows restaurants to upload their menus for consumers to search. The MetaFlavor database features more than four million menu items—2.5 million of which are accompanied by a photo.

The app also facilitates Facebook posts in which patrons share information about their favorite restaurant dishes with their friends. The capability of this system is indicative of the power that consumers have in word-of-mouth marketing.

Rules for Success in Social Media

Deploying a successful social media program requires experimentation. Understanding the audience is critical. For example, adults and younger people use social media in somewhat different ways. For every age group, the #1 usage is staying in touch with friends. However, significantly more teens than adults
WHAT OTHERS ARE SAYING

**TECHNOMIC**

“The capability of this system is indicative of the power that consumers have in word-of-mouth marketing.”

**KillerStartups**

“...don’t know what to eat tonight? If not, checking out MetaFlavor.com is a must.”

**ziip**

“Awesome food search site with tons of menus and great functionality.”

**NETWEBAPP**

“Search & explore flavors anywhere with the most advanced restaurant and menu application ever.”

**TechXav**

“Probably the best way to search for restaurants...You’ll definitely love it.”