

Lean, Green and Ethnic Are Key 2010 Trends

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Depending on whom you listen to or read, the economy will improve rapidly, slowly or not at all in 2010. But, regardless of the speed or degree of recovery, neither life or business are going back to “the way things were.”

The aftershocks of the Great Recession touch all segments of on-site dining service. People in all income brackets have tightened up on discretionary spending, including for meals, and are not likely to loosen up very much in the near future.

While price and quality are top consumer concerns, “green” characteristics are becoming more important, BBMG, a consumer research firm, says. Its survey respondents said “locally grown” (32%), “all-natural” (31%) and USDA-certified organic (22%) are important buying considerations.

The impact of economic change is greatest in corporate dining. Here, reduced employment, increased telecommuting and cutbacks in profitable catering have decimated bottom lines nearly across the board.

Campus dining operations have not been immune, affected by tighter institutional budgets, reduced spending by customers and in some cases, by lower catering, on-campus conference and summer program activity.

All these changes, as well as new, emerging acceptance of a wide variety of international cuisines will shape on-site dining service in 2010.

“U.S. consumers are branching out and sampling more ethnic-inspired fare,” *Whole Foods* magazine reports. Dishes from Asia, Africa, Central and South America and Europe are piquing the interest of consumers, it says.

Make It Authentic

The fastest growing segment of ethnic foods is Indian, according to a September 2009 survey by Mintel, a market research firm, the *Cincinnati Inquirer* reports.

The popularity isn’t restricted to just Indians. Only 15% to 20% of customers in their restaurants are Indians, the *Inquirer* says several Indian restaurateurs told them.

But operators at companies and campuses with large ethnic populations should take care: these folks know what food from home should taste like and won’t be customers for long if the fare isn’t authentic.

Counting Calories

When the new health-care reform bill becomes law, restaurants with 20 or more locations will be

What’s Coming in Campus Cards

Bob Huber, president of Robert Huber Associates, consultants in campus card applications, predicts:

- “Contactless” and “tap and go” technology will replace mag stripes on ID and multiple-use cards.
- Student preferences for variety and convenience will result in more off-campus merchant applications
- Most campus card applications will be customer-managed via 24/7 on-line and imaginative kiosk devices.

All of Mr. Huber’s predictions may be found at www.allcampuscard.com

required to post calories on their menus. Customers may start to expect this and other nutrition information in their corporate and campus dining centers.

More careful food selections by health-conscious customers may not hurt sales. When Le Pain Quotidien, a bakery restaurant chain, began posting calories in its New York City locations, “What we noticed was the lower the calories, the greater the sales,” Jack Moran, vice president, told *The Washington Post*, “and the higher the calories, the greater the sales decline.”

Uno Chicago Grill noted the same result, the *Post* says. Sales of deep-dish pizza fell 6%, but salad orders increased 11%. Overall sales remained steady.

Rays of Sunshine

Innovative operators are identifying trends and finding ways to exploit them to grow their businesses.

“We expect to see continued increases in non-traditional meal times . . . including late night options,” Greg Black, Food Service Director at the University of Iowa, says, quoted in *FoodService Director*.

“Delivery to individuals’ workstations is an untapped market,” Damian Monticello, company dining service liaison at Blue Cross Blue Shield of Florida, told *FSD*.

Corporate catering may stage a modest comeback. Companies are cutting back on restaurant lunches for entertaining clients. A restaurant-quality meal in the office may become an acceptable alternative.

*Clarion can help you revitalize your dining services, improve quality, service sales and reduce costs. Our new **Fresh & Natural** program will introduce your customers to innovative healthy dining. Contact Tom Mac Dermott, FCSI, president, 603/642-8011 or Angela Phelan, senior vice president, 973/762-7933, or e-mail us at info@clariongp.com*