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2021 Global Trends Outlook

By Aaron Jourden

We can only guess what's in store for 2021 in the global restaurant space. 2020 showed us—among so many things—that what's expected and what happens don't always align, to say the least. That said, we think our 2020 restaurant trend forecast holds up fairly well given the reality of the marketplace affected so drastically by the pandemic. Ghost kitchens certainly moved mainstream. Vegan fare got more space to stretch and grow. Plant-based meats continued to inform product development, especially across Asia. Beverage chains certainly broke out from the crowd—again, especially in Asia. And halloumi, pinsa pizzas and sliders had strong showings

on chain menus across the world. So, what's in store for the coming year? Here's Technomic's 2021 global restaurant forecast as best we see it.

It's a Plant-Based World. Now What?

With the recent arrival of meatless luncheon meat, there is zero doubt that plant-based foods and drinks are now fully mainstream on the global stage. Brands and products have launched at rapid paces from Latin America to China and from South Africa to Germany (and all places in between). 2021 poses questions for the suddenly mature category. Namely, how do brands create separation



OmniPork is designed to be an all-purpose, plant-based pork analogue that is environmentally friendly

in an increasingly crowded marketplace that has seen all manner of upstarts, both local and global? Expect plant-based meat players to begin cementing points of differentiation from key competitors to stand out in the crowd. Think local, healthy, indulgent, sustainable. We'll begin to see some consolidation as first-movers grab emergent brands. More meat alternatives will roll out in the pork, fish and lamb categories (maybe even frog and crayfish). Local brands will pose stiffer competition to global brands. And more chains will develop their own in-house meat and dairy alts.

Pinsa pizza, or Roman-style pizza, has a crust which is less dense and chewy compared to a regular pizza



Value Gets a Jolt

Changing habits and disrupted lifestyles jumbled consumers' value equation in 2020. Restaurants altered their messaging from low prices



Image Source: Pret a Manger UK Facebook

Pret A Manger is offering a new in-shop coffee subscription service

to convenience, health and comfort. The focus away from dollar menus and deep discounting will continue into 2021. Restaurants will find success when they provide solutions for today's needs and demands against the backdrop of the ongoing pandemic. Chief among these is convenience in its many forms. Expect operators to address convenience through a variety of initiatives, including multi-occasion solutions such as large-format, prepared-and-bottled beverages and multi-daypart meal bundles to drive patronage. Importantly, chains looking to tap into the increasingly ubiquitous subscription model or the rapidly evolving meal-kit format will need to add something special—like a limited-edition face covering—to these convenience-driven value plays to succeed in 2021.

Experience Matters More Than Ever

Convenience is one end of what will be the barbell strategy for restaurant operators in 2021 and beyond. The other end will be experience—an increasingly critical driver for both dine-in and off-premise traffic. Look for chains to complement the takeaway-focused express shops they're now developing with large-footprint flagship stores and experimental restaurant labs that showcase menu innovation not found in traditional units. Standing out amid the off-premise boom will require more experiential elements, such as creating videos that serve as both entertainment and instruction to go with a meal kit or setting up an online branded hub for connecting far-flung families together for



Image Source: Parrilla Urbana Mexico Instagram

Sonora Grill Group's burger box kit lets guests inject cheese sauce via an included syringe

virtual meals. We will also see more quirky attempts to create experiences and environments that drive patio, parking lot and street dining.

'New and Improved' Is the New 'Limited-Time Offer'

The immediate impact of the crisis put menu development on hold across much of the world as operators reacted to quarantines and all the disruption that followed. Whether by coincidence or by design, operators turned their attention to product upgrades as menu development activity began to pick up. We saw "new and improved" items roll out across the globe, taking some of the spotlight from innovation as consumers craved the familiar but also new. Looking ahead, we will see more chains upgrading their fried chicken, coffee, burger patties and pizza toppings with higher-quality ingredients and enhanced preparation methods. Suppliers will play a critical role in the development of these products. That said, LTOs remain important. Expect more along the lines of celebrity-endorsed meals, mashups that use ingredients already on hand and app-only secret menu items and exclusives. For all menu development, expect a strong emphasis on local and clean label.



Image source: Starbucks South Korea Instagram

Starbucks tapped into South Korea's camping craze with a line of summer gear

The Great Outdoors

Biking is having a moment in Indonesia. Camping kits proved popular in South Korea over the summer. Restaurants are catering to streetside dining and finding ways to make picnics a thing in modern life. Consumers the world over have no doubt started spending more time outdoors as a result of the pandemic, and that's likely to stick heading into the new

year. Look for chains to develop outdoor-friendly foods and beverages—functional for active lifestyles and packaged for outside consumption.

What Else to Expect

Operators will be taking a hard look at changes to their daypart traffic and realign around new consumer habits expected to last beyond the pandemic. Put on hold for a short while, sustainability will return as a crucial aspect to all parts of the foodservice supply chain. Expect to see collaborations get even wilder as restaurants aim to stand out by partnering

with all manner of food, retail, lifestyle and personality brands on unique menu items and retail peripherals intended to stun diners. Mergers and acquisitions are likely to pick up as operators look to leverage scale and potentially snag a delivery-focused brand. Finally, expect more chains to bring some or all of their delivery business in house or join a collective with other brands.

Peter Pane developed in-house delivery during confinement in Germany



Image Source: Peter Pane Germany website



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