

CHAPTER 7

Food and beverage

Introduction

Just think of the lasting memories and friendships that you have developed while sharing your favorite food and drinks. All of us are some of the same needs. Food and beverages are instrumental in filling a number of basic human needs. For example, stopping by a quick service restaurant and grabbing a burger and drink to go may take care of basic physiological needs, but dining out with friends and relatives may fill higher order social needs. Meeting these needs in locations ranging from airline catering kitchens to destination resorts creates a variety of opportunities for tourism service providers to satisfy their guests and build lasting relationships.

Tourists provide an important source of revenue to many, but not all, foodservice operations. Travelers or visitors account for half the sales at table service restaurants with average per person checks of \$25 or more per person and 20 to 25% of the sales at table service restaurants with lower check sizes. Some operations such as Hard rock café and Buddha Gump shrimp Company restaurant and market rely on a steady stream of tourist traffic, while others cater mainly to local clientele. Location and target segments will determine the relative importance of tourists versus local patronage in an operation's financial success. Research has shown that food service providers seeking to cater to tourists can target marketing efforts on one or more of the segments. Since food and beverage experiences are very personal, the thought of pleasing all these different tastes may seem like a difficult task. What may be pleasing and desirable to you may be completely unappealing to someone else. The good news is that there are fundamentals that can be followed to provide successful food and beverage services. You will learn about these principles as well as some of the marketing, management, and financial decisions that combine to create the dynamic and fast-paced working environment of food and beverage operations. You will also discover what manners matter and should be practiced in every professional and social setting.

Major influences on the development of food and beverage services

We can trace the most important influences on the development of foods and beverages to travel experiences and innovations in science and technology. Throughout history, travel has introduced visitors to new tastes, and these discoveries continue today. Visiting new locations allows us to enjoy unfamiliar food. It also allows us to expand our understanding and appreciation of new cultures, ceremonies and traditions. In fact, throughout history, food and beverage have often been at the center of social gatherings and celebrations.

Travel and discovery

The quest to explore and conquer new lands that encouraged any travel also lead to the spread of different food and beverage offerings. The importance of food and beverages to the development of travel and tourism can be seen all the way from the expansion and conquests of the Greek and Roman empires to the travels of Marco polo.

Precious metals and land were not on the all the treasures sought by these early adventurers- so, too, were flavorful spices and herbs. The Greeks brought food related treasures from their travels in Egypt, Persia, Babylon, and India. These culinary treasures were later passed on to the Romans. In fact, at the height of the

Roman Empire, the typical Roman cook was a male slave brought from overthrown Greece where cooking skills and cuisine were highly developed. The Romans' appetites for pleasurable indulgences placed these cooks in high demand and raised the status of cooking to an art form.

As the world moved into the so-called dark ages, travel began to diminish. The art of cooking, however, was preserved during this period because most of the rich cooking styles and the books that discussed food and beverages were guarded in monasteries. Outside monastery walls, people continued to prepare rough, simple dishes that had been passed down unchanged for generations. The revival of travel by the wealthy during the grand tour era after the end of the middle Ages had a significant impact on food and beverages. When the noble classes began to expand their travels into new territories, they encountered and brought home many new food, beverages, and methods of preparation.

As Europeans began to travel to the Americas and West Indies, they returned with many native foods from those regions such as chocolate, chilies, beans, corn, tomatoes, and potatoes. Some of these items were initially avoided and treated with suspicion since they looked different and were often regarded as poisonous. Through the efforts of pioneers such as French agronomist Antoine August Parmentier and American scientist George Washington Carver, deep-seated fears and misconceptions about different foods were dispelled. Parmentier successfully spearheaded a campaign begun in 1774 that made potatoes a staple on the French dinner table. Research efforts led by Carver resulted in over 300 products including cheese, milk, flour, and coffee made from peanuts.

Once people began emigrating from Europe to the new world of North America, they brought along their favorite drinks, bread, desserts, herbs, spices, and fruits. These old favorites were combined with new food, creating distinctive regional cuisines from New England clam chowder to hominy grits. Now, at the dawn of the 21st century, the majority of people in industrialized countries can afford to travel for pleasure and, through tourism, enjoy new food and dining experiences. These experiences continue to influence the development of menus and service styles for food and beverage operations as international and regional cuisines are blended together.

In the same way that travel has driven their development, food and beverages now drive many travel choices. Food and beverage events attract tourists in increasing numbers to resorts, festivals, theme parks, casinos, and many other destinations. For example, travelers come from all over the world to enjoy the sights, sounds and delights of Oktoberfest celebrations throughout Germany or fiesta days in San Antonio, Texas. In fact, pleasant memories of food and beverages enjoyed as part of a trip often linger and are remembered more often than any other part of the travel experience. Just as travel and the quest for new experiences have awakened our taste buds, science and technology have continued to advance so we can enjoy these newfound treats wherever and whenever we desire.

Science and technology

Now more than ever before, food and beverage professionals can deliver on the promise "your wish is my command". If a meeting planner wants to arrange a closing celebration banquet for a sales conference in Arizona in January with live lobster and fresh corn on the cob, no problem! Scientific advances and new technologies have made it possible to transport highly perishable food safely over great distances. Products such as strawberries and asparagus can now be enjoyed anywhere and at any time of the year. Advances in farm technology have increased the quantity, quality, variety, and availability of food, expanding menu choices all over the world. For example, aquaculture now brings high quality seafood such as shrimp, salmon, and oysters to the kitchens of the world 365 days a year.

Refrigeration and freezing technologies, along with the use of irradiation, also allow food to be stored longer and transported over greater distances without affecting quality. Continuing technological advances

have also led to an array of computerized equipment such as internal temperature probes, which can be accurately programmed to regulate oven cooking and holding temperatures. These advances ensure the greatest yields and the highest quality food products. In addition, information and new ideas about food and beverage preparation and presentation are now freely shared. Featured food sections in magazines and newspapers, special television programs, attractive websites, professional publications, and a cable channel dedicated to food have heightened both awareness and appreciation for this segment of the tourism industry.

Building it culinary heritage

Creating the food we enjoy involves a combination of technology, science, and a great deal of culinary and service talent. This talent can be found in many different types of food and beverage operations. The most common are commercial restaurants serving the general public and travelers who dine for reasons that range from need and convenience to entertainment and pleasure. Commercial restaurant operations vary all the way from fast food (quick service) and take out to elegant, full-service, sit down operations. While restaurants are the most typical food and beverage operation, they represent only one of many types of food and beverage services. Others can be classified into employee food service, recreational food service, transportation food service, lodging properties, banquet/meeting and catering facilities, and institutional food service establishments. Most of these food service operations touch travel and tourism in some way.

The beginning of modern service practices

Independent eating and drinking establishment were the first food and beverage operations to evolve and, today, they still generate the majority of all food and beverage revenues. It all began in Paris, way back in 1765 when Monsieur Boulanger served a typical peasant's dish: sheep's feet (also known as trotters) in a white sauce as a restorative along with ales in his tavern. In fact, the word restaurant comes from the French word *restorante*, which means restorative. Tavern keepers in Boulanger's time were limited to serving beers and ales only in accordance with the controls imposed by the medieval guild system. These controls were designed to maintain standards and restrict competition. Since Boulanger was limited by law to serving beers and ales only, he was brought to court to stop the practice of serving food in his tavern. He won the case and the rest is history; the door was opened for restaurants to serve food and drink together.

The French Revolution marked another important milestone in the growth of these new eating establishments. Chefs, who had previously worked for the monarchy or nobility under the constant threat of losing their heads in the guillotine, fled to the countryside and opened restaurants.

Food service operations have come a long way from the pioneering days of Monsieur Boulanger. As societal norms, costumes, and economies evolved, so, too, did the entire food and beverage industry. The first disciplined approach to the culinary arts was captured through the Grande cuisine instituted by Marie Antoinette Careme. His cooking style, along with recipes describing dishes and sausage of the Grande cuisine, were collected and published in *la cuisine classique* (1856) and other books and followed. Although these books were popular in the kitchen of the nobility, they were slow in finding their way to the fledgling restaurants, which offered a simple table d'hôte. This type of menu provided little if any choice. Careme's Grande cuisine created a new style of service and range of menu choices. Menus expanded through the offering of a carte or list of suggestion giving rise to the a la carte restaurant.

The next major step in the development of modern for service operations was marked by the opening of the Savoy Hotel. It opened in London in 1898 under the direction of Caesar Ritz and George Auguste Escoffier. Grande cuisine was still the exception, but it was embraced by these two food service pioneers who ensured that their à la carte presentations were an event. Dinners enjoyed the best of food and service as well the ambience of elegant surroundings.

Escoffier was the most famous chef of his day and is considered by many to be the father of modern day chefs. He revolutionized the methods of food service and kitchen organization during his years of managing the kitchen at the Savoy and later the Carlton hotel. He expanded and refined the idea of a la carte service by establishing carefully planned sequences of courses. For example, a typical sequence of courses for today's full-service casual American style restaurant might start with an appetizer and then be followed by soup, salad, entrée, and dessert.

Escoffier also reorganized tasks and activities in the kitchen, eliminating duplication of effort and improving efficiency in operation by creating in defining the work of stations. More than anyone else, he helped to focus food service providers on the important task of catering to guests' needs and desires by making dining a memorable experience. This was only the beginning, as others contributed to the constantly involving developments in food and beverage

Planning to meet guest expectations

Food service operators are not simply in the business of providing food and beverage; they are in the business of creating guest enjoyment. Achieving this goal requires attention to detail and preparation that begins well in advance of welcoming the first guest. The guest experience is determined by a variety of interrelated factors from menu design and place settings to plate presentation and style of service. Each of these factors plays a significant role in achieving guest satisfaction and must be made within the physical and human constraints of the operation. Issues such as size of storage areas, production and service areas, types of equipment, and the capabilities of preparation, production, and service personnel must all be considered.

Armed with an understanding of these constraints and capabilities, the first step in preparing to welcome guests is designing the menu. Effective menu design begins with identifying target segments and planning to meet their desires. This requires asking some basic questions. What image should food service operations support? How many items should be offered on the menu? How diversified should the offerings be and how seasonal should they be? What impact will different menu items have on preparation, production, presentation, and service? The answer to these questions may result in a variety of menu offerings and styles of service ranging from quick service snacks to full-service formal dining.

The second step involves the design and preparation of the menu itself. Seemingly simple things like deciding what type of menu board should be placed above an ordering station or selecting the paper stock, graphics, color, font, and layout of a menu take on new importance. These decisions communicate an image to guests even before the food is presented. A theme park guest wanting a restful break will have different expectations than a businessperson on an expense account entertaining clients. The design and presentation of the menu sets the stage for the next important decisions.

The third step involves a variety of decisions that range from selecting service ware to designing place settings. These decisions may be driven by the functional demands of serving as many guests as inexpensively as possible or a desire to create an aesthetically pleasing atmosphere. Plastic or paper with self service areas for condiments may be the best selection for guests in a hurry, but the same choice would not be suitable in a fine dining situation.

Designing the actual play presentation is the fourth and possibly most artistic step in the process. Attention to detail in the previous step comes to life when guests receive their selections. Once the order is delivered, whether hot dogs and fries or Chateau Briand, the eyes always take the first taste. Even with simple dishes, the presentation should be designed to fill our senses through a thoughtful combination of color, texture, shape, aroma, and arrangement. Think for a moment about how many different ways a chicken breast could

be prepared and presented. Does your choice encourage the guest to sample and savor or simply eat because it is there and they are hungry?

The fifth and final step in planning to meet guest expectation is accomplished when the type of service is selected for delivering menu items. Service may range from moving down a cafeteria line to formally orchestrated Russian service. Whatever the selection, the ultimate goal is meeting guests' needs. Proper planning sets the stage for enjoyable dining experiences.

It all comes down to rhythm, timing, and flow

Developing menus and having the right equipment, ingredients, and talent to produce these items is only the beginning of a successful food service operation. Just like the conductor of an orchestra who brings a musical score to life, food and beverage managers bring menus to life. The brigade system, developed by Escoffier, was designed to make this task possible. Under this system, each position has a station (assigned workplace) and clear-cut responsibilities. For example, one station in the kitchen makes all of the stocks and reductions needed for the bases of soups and sauces instead of everyone making their own. Although the brigade systems were originally design for the use in fine dining establishments that are flexible and can be modified for use in any size or style of food service operation.

Professionally planned menus, a properly designed and equipped kitchen, well trained employees, and effective preparation and production systems make up the basic ingredients for delivering high-quality food and service. However, it takes more. A dedicated team constantly striving to balance the rhythm, timing, and flow of production and service delivery add the final ingredients that bring the dining experience to life. To achieve this balance, managers must focus on being team leaders or coaches for their employees and move away from the authoritarian approach that has been traditionally used by food service managers.

-Rhythm is the coordination of each required task and activity

-Timing is the sequencing of each task and activity to produce desired results

- Flow is the combination of rhythm and timing resulting in a smooth, efficient operation

To understand the importance of rhythm, timing, and flow, imagine the following setting. You and your friend have just been seated and presented with menus in a full service American style restaurant. The typical sequence of courses in this style of restaurant would be appetizer, soup, salad, entrée, and dessert. As you review the menu, you look around and notice that the dining room is full, and there are customers still waiting to be seated. You see a busser (back waiter) moving a highchair toward a table; the captain (host/hostess) reseating guests who did not like their table; a waiter (front waiter) stopping to answer a guest's question; and you just heard the captain take a special request from the guests at the table next to you. While you're watching all of these activities, your water glasses have been filled and your waiter has already taken and served your drink orders.

When your waiter takes your orders, you notice that each appetizer and entree will have to be prepared differently. The shrimp cocktail and the mozzarella cheese sticks, just like the grilled salmon and the fettuccini alfredo, will all come from different stations in the kitchen. Your waiter passes through the kitchen doors and you hear a muffled burst of activity before the doors quickly close. When the rhythm, timing, and flow of all of these activities occur as planned, the dining experience can be as pleasurable as listening to a well-rehearsed symphony. Bon appétit!

Adding value to food and beverage experience

Successful food and beverage operations are quick to point out the need for differentiating their operation from their competitors. Operators strive to distinguish themselves by focusing on guests' service, adding value through quality or pricing, providing unique atmosphere and dining experience, or offering innovative food, beverages, and services. Any of these approaches, when successfully implemented, may attract new guests as well as encourage loyal supporters to come back time and time again and bring their families and friends.

With many smaller food and beverage operations, managers are usually in close contact with the entire operation, enabling them to gain personal insight into guests' needs. As operations become more complex in settings such as hotels and resorts and the number of outlets increases, the need for formal planning processes and procedures becomes more important. There are two typical designs or approaches to planning and delivering food and beverage services in these large property settings. The approach chosen usually depends on factors such as the number of food service outlets, services provided (for example, room service, event catering, pool side service, etc), and the property's overall marketing strategy for attracting and serving guests.

At one location, food and beverage facilities may be designed to provide service to a captive audience of guests while, at another location, facilities may be designed to attract guests. Let's consider a ski area's approach to its food and beverage operations. There may be thousands of skiers on the mountain and many more guests in the base area. Most of the skiers are planning to take a break from skiing between 11:30a.m. and 1:30p.m. to have lunch. They expect conveniently located restaurants with a layout that allows traffic to flow smoothly (the skiers want to move about without feeling as if they are stuck in a crowd). They expect to be able to order, receive, and pay for their food without long waits. They expect hot food and beverages to be served hot, and cold items to be served cold. They might expect prices to be a little higher on the mountain because of location and the desire for convenience, but they still expect good food quality. Other guests who have decided not to ski and are staying in the base area or village want the same quality and convenience, but they may desire a larger selection of food and service options.

To run the ski resort's food and beverage operations successfully, manager must pay close attention to a number of things. For example, organized commissary operations will be important to make sure each restaurant has everything it needs. Accurate tracking systems of food and supplies from the commissary to each restaurant will also be needed. By tracking food and supplies accurately, managers know how much it cost to run each food service outlet. Watching the costs of each of these outlets helps managers to identify and respond to potential problems quickly. Items on the menu for these types of food service operation are usually the result of needing to please the mainstream desires of guests by providing items quickly and in large quantities.

At another property, such as a destination resort, the typical approach for food and beverage operations might be quite a bit different than the one we just discussed. In the type of situation, food and beverages may be used to support a property's overall marketing strategy. For example, an ocean side resort in Monterey, California, may use distinctive food and beverage offerings as marketing tools to attract guests and to distinguish itself from competitors. These types of properties tend to use their food and beverage operations for three special reasons:

- Creating a desired public image and defining their place in the market. Food and beverage operations can have a significant impact on a property's image in the marketplace by serving as a center for community groups and organizations, causing the property to be perceived as a point of pride in the community.

- Attracting desired business. Food and beverage operations can be used to add quality or value to a property's overall image by attracting individuals such as travel agents and meeting planners who influence travel decisions. These operations are often used to attract group business by discounting food and beverage items, which adds value to the total meeting package and prevents the need to discount sleeping room prices. Actions like this can increase overall and profitability since rooms have a greater contribution margin than food and beverage.
- Creating new business opportunities. By producing events, a property can use food and beverage operations to create new business opportunities. Wine tastings, celebrations, theme dinners, balls, brunches, and other combinations of food, beverage, and entertainment often entice people to visit a property. Once there, they may stay longer to enjoy the guest rooms, restaurants, lounges, pools, spas, and golf and tennis facilities. These marketing strategies can be especially effective for generating business during shoulder seasons.

In properties that use food and beverage as part of their overall marketing strategy, the food and beverage director is expected to run the operations in a way that will best benefit the entire property. In other words, the food and beverage director should be more concerned with the overall profitability of the property and meeting guests' needs rather than simply the profitability of food and beverage operations. This approach can be seen in operations in which attention to little details and customer service are the norm. Little things like responding to a guest request for an item not on the menu, such as a peanut butter and jelly or grilled cheese sandwich, or grander gestures, such as hosting a no charge cocktail reception as a kick off to a three day conference, create lasting and positive impressions.

Other tourism suppliers face similar types of decisions. Should food and beverages simply be provided to fill a basic human need or should they be used as a valuable addition to the marketing mix? To answer that question, think about the approaches taken by two different airlines. Singapore Airlines is noted for its high quality food service operations and uses this as a marketing tool, while Southwest Airline flies only short legs, choosing to avoid the costs and challenges associated with food service operations.

From ten to ten thousand

How many did you say we should expect? Feeding small and large groups of guests on a one time basis creates some unique challenges for food service operators. Meeting these special needs will range from simple to complex. It may be as simple as reserving a special section in a restaurant for a tour group as they step off the bus to enjoy a relaxing lunch, or it may be as complex as serving multiple meals at scattered sites across a broad geographic setting such as at the Summer Olympics.

Whether it's providing breakfast, lunch, dinner, or refreshment breaks for groups, food service teams must be prepared to flexibly meet the needs and budgets. These are a variety of facilities either specifically designed for banquets or that can be easily converted to make catering needs. Most large hotels and resorts and many smaller properties have multipurpose rooms that can be used for both meetings and food functions while convention centers and even sports arenas can be converted to feed tens of thousands of guests. The task of planning, setting up, and serving these functions falls in the capable hands of catering (also called banquet) managers and their supporting service teams.

Catering sales managers work with clients to discover their needs for such things as meeting and exhibit space as well as food and beverage requirements. These requirements are then described in great detail for internal use for kitchen and service employees on a catering contract or banquet event order (BEO) form. The BEO serves as an internal form of communication that provides specific timing and instructions for the banquet service team to meet guest expectations. This level of detail becomes especially important when dealing with groups requiring a variety of services over multiple days. For

example, at a four day conference, meeting goers will likely be served breakfasts, lunches, dinners, refreshment breaks, and cocktail parties. These may range from a formal dinner dance banquet to a self-service continental breakfast.

Building profitable operations

Mention food and beverage, and most hotel owners and managers want to run for the exits. Restaurants, and to a lesser extent bars and lounges, are hard to conceive, staff, operate, and certainly profit from. Competition in the food and beverage industry is fierce, with owners and managers facing the added problem of operating on very thin profit margins. So it not surprising that the failure rate of food and drink establishments as reported by Dun and Bradstreet is higher than for all of other business groups.

Why is this failure rate so high? People seem to become financially involved with food and beverage establishments naïvely or for many of the wrong reasons. Some are motivated to own or invest in a restaurant because they crave social recognition while others like to dine out and think they know how to deliver the dining experience. Still others venture into this line of business because they have gained status as accomplished cooks from dinner parties put on for friends. Such experiences lead many to believe falsely that they have the necessary skills to be good food and beverage operators.

Even if they do have the necessary talent, they may often fail to realize that food service operators are faced with working long hours and then dealing with many complex problems in today's competitive environment. Profit margins are shrinking, and controllable costs, such as payroll, employee benefits, food costs, and taxes, are being forced up by inflation and governmental regulations while food service patrons are unwilling to accept higher menu prices. In fact, food and beverage operations require a great deal of attention to detail and they are a business in which every nickel counts and profits are often measured in pennies.

According to one industry expert, there are a number of steps restaurant operators can take to ensure success. Some of the more common performance measures that are used to evaluate performance in food service operations include sales per seat, sales per employee, and the number of time a seat turns over in one day. It is important to note that these benchmarks and ratios will vary depending on the type of restaurant. Rather than face the complexities of food service operations alone, tourism service suppliers (especially small lodging properties) are turning in increasing numbers to the expertise provided through branded concepts. Guest needs can be met, kitchen labor costs can be substantially reduced, and marketing efforts can be minimized by putting together well known brands as Taco John's, Blimpies, Pizza Hut, and Nathan's Famous in a food court setting. Assembling a branded bundle of food service concepts can also reduce front line service staffing needs.

Balancing payroll costs with productivity

Producing some menu items can be very complicated as well as labor-intensive and costly. Labor and food costs are the largest controllable expenses for food and beverage operations. High employee turnover, the availability and quality of new employees, and the constant need for training all combine to create significant operating costs. Consequently, food and beverage managers must constantly focus their efforts on making employees more productive through education, training, and technology enhancements. In response to continuing labor shortages, most food service operations are buying some ingredients that have been either partially or fully prepared. This allows managers to hire fewer employees and reduces culinary training needs.

Increasing employee productivity typically involves investing for future profitability. Keep in mind that recruiting, training, and retaining skilled employees, as well as equipping them with the best tools and

technology, will be costly decisions. These decisions are often difficult since the paybacks in efficiencies may be more long-term than immediate. Other approaches such as reminding food servers of a simple slogan such as “hands full into the kitchen and hands full out of the kitchen” can do wonders to increase productivity and employee satisfaction.

Food quality and food costs are the results of effective purchasing

As important as controlling labor costs in food and beverage operations is the challenge of controlling the cost of food. Therefore, just as much attention should be paid to purchasing, receiving, and storing these products as is paid to controlling labor costs. Purchasing is much more than simply ordering and receiving food and beverage products. The greater the food knowledge and skills of the purchasing agent, the more effective the purchasing processes will be. For example, the purchaser must understand the impact that the menu, preparation methods, ingredients, shelf life, storage facilities, equipment, skill level of the staff, and guests expectations have on production and service delivery. Without this knowledge, problems are sure to occur. In addition, no matter how good the purchasing processes are, they can be made totally ineffective by poor receiving and storage procedures. Simple mistakes such as failing to verify amounts and weights or not checking product specification against the purchase order as well as using newer items before older items can have an adverse impact on profitability and quality.

As in many competitive industries, food service operators are finding it beneficial to create partnership relationships with their suppliers. These suppliers are called purveyors in the food service industry and the relationships they are creating are called prime vendor agreements. In a prime vendor agreement, food service operators agree to direct a large portion (typically up to 80%) of their orders to a specific purveyor. In return, the purveyor agrees to categorize purchases into broad groupings, such as meat, poultry, seafood, and canned goods, and then negotiate prices for items in each category based on a set percentage markup above cost. Other incentives such as providing training or lending specialized equipment may also be offered by the purveyor to obtain additional business.

Using technology to improve service delivery

Point of sales systems are being integrated into management information systems to improve food service efficiency and profitability at a staggering pace. They are no longer just glorified cash registers. Computer software suppliers are constantly updating their systems and food service operators are eagerly embracing and purchasing system enhancements. Touch screen and wireless systems are quickly becoming the standard, allowing food servers to enter customer orders without having to make unnecessary trips to the kitchen. The kitchen staff notifies the server via a vibrating pager with a digital readout when orders are ready. Newer advances allow servers to place orders using handheld devices, and serve voice recognition systems have already been prototyped. These new systems will make it possible for servers to remain in the dining area to provide customers with more personalized attention.

In addition to improving the flow of information from the wait staff to the kitchen production staff, the real-time data also improve purchasing and inventory controls. Wider wireless local area networks are giving properties with multiple food service outlets the ability to integrate information and consolidate operations. Consolidated data accumulated by a chain or a POS provider is available via an internet site. Profitability as well as enhanced food quality is achieved by keeping inventories lower through rapid turnover. The leading POS systems offer an instant multi-location interface, so that sales, labor, inventory, and purchasing information can be shared on demand. This easy access of information creates a cost saving environment through centralized data storage. These databases create powerful tools for making improved marketing, management, and financial decisions.

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure

Food service operators also invest a great deal of time and money in training and technology for reasons other than improving service and profitability. In the same way an airline captain is charged with the safety of crew and passengers, so too are food service managers with their employees and guests. They must ensure that safe and proper sanitation practices and procedures are always given priority in daily operations. As you consider the following information, think about the potential dangers that could be created if sanitation were not maintained as a high priority.

Food borne illnesses concern both consumers and suppliers. When asked what factors influenced their confidence in food safety, consumers resoundingly said cleanliness of plates and silverware, tables and tablecloths, and restrooms. How have food service operators responded to these concerns?

Scientific developments may have increased our understanding of food processing, improved our methods of preparation, and allowed us to improve sanitation and food storage techniques, but common sense is still needed. In the past, traditional safety and sanitation practices focused mainly on the external cleanliness of food production areas and equipment, leaving invisible contaminants free to grow into illness causing hazards. Most bacteria grow or multiply rapidly when products are held at temperatures between 40 and 140°F, which is known as “the bacterial red zone”. Knowledge of how and when bacteria can grow and cause food borne illnesses as well as the practice of basic sanitation techniques provides the foundations for protecting guests and employee safety and health.

Frequent hand washing, frequent sterilization of food service equipment and careful use of cutting boards can go a long way toward preventing future problems. For example, cutting boards can be color-coded and dedicated for use with a specific product. One color would be used only for cutting raw poultry, another only for fresh vegetables, and another for bread. This help to prevent the danger of cross contamination when handling different types of food.

Beverages

The distillation, fermentation, and compounding of spirit is surrounded by a history as long and rich as the history of food. No one really knows who the alchemist was who invented the distillation process, so it is no wonder that many people through the centuries have referred to it as a gift from the gods. It was the Arabs of Saracens who gave us the word “alcohol” and “alembic”, the latter word meaning a still. In fact, the word alembic is used in all but the English speaking countries even today.

Beers, wine, and spirits can enhance food and add to the overall dining experience. However, a lively bar will seldom complement a candle-lit dining experience just as a great selection of wines does little to enhance a hot dog stand on the beach. Beer, wine, and spirits not only make a good companion for a dining experience, but they are often the predominant flavor in a sauce, entrée, or dessert. They can also be used in food preparation to season and tenderize food.

When alcohol beverages are used in hot food dishes, the alcohol quickly evaporates, leaving only the flavor. In recipes, open desserts, where an alcoholic beverage is not heated and cooked off, the practice is referred to as perfuming. In short, the relationship between food and beverages is a marriage made in heaven and there are many cultures who take the relationship for granted. For example, in Germany, you can order a beer with your big Mac and, on a trip to Japan; you can find vending machines offering not only food, but also cold beer or hot sake as well.

Beverage operations

Successful beverage operations depend on many of the same fundamental business principles that we previously discussed in developing efficient, profitable, and safe food service organizations. In addition, beverage operations also required a great deal of attention to detail since they represent a substantial investment in equipment, furniture, décor, and inventory.

Books, television, and movies have all painted a picture of the bartender full of character, serving the guest whose stress is lifted away with a warm greeting. At the guest's request, the bartender reaches for a bottle or pulls the tap. That practice is called "free-pouring", and it is fading away to be recalled as a thing of the past. Today, it is common to see the increasing use of technology in bar operations in response to dramatic drops in profit margins. The causes of these drops are heavy taxes on alcoholic beverages and a change in consumption behavior as people are drinking less but ordering more premium products. These changes along with guests' intolerance of higher prices are leading to narrower profit margins.

Today, instead of allowing the bartender to free pour, automated systems strictly control the amount of alcohol poured and electronically transmit information to the computerized cash register system that rings up the sale and updates the bar's perpetual inventory. Although these systems are practical, many guests find them to be impersonal and many professional bartenders dislike their inflexibility. Some guests and bartenders perceive the bar as a place for relaxed, social exchanges where technology should be forgotten and hand shakes remembered.

Keeping spirits under control

Establishments serving alcohol beverages face a unique set of legal and social challenges. Many states have Dram shop or Civil liability acts which impose liability on the seller of intoxicating liquors (which may or may not include beer), when a third party is injured as a result of the intoxication of the buyer where the sale has caused or contributed to such intoxication. In addition, society's demand for more responsible drinking and stricter drinking and driving laws are creating additional demands on operators who serve alcohol beverages.

These legal and social concerns are being met with strong industry support for responsible serving practices. Training programs that focus on recognition and service support for customers who have enjoyed too much of a good time are now the industry standard. Simple tactics for bartenders and wait staff that include slowing down the speed of service, keeping "munchies" on the table, and offering appetizer menus and water are just a few approaches to responsible alcohol service. More drastic measures such as denying service, having a guest escorted to their room, or calling a taxicab may also be required.

The laws defining legal levels of blood alcohol before driving impairment occurs vary. So, can a person drink and still drive? The answer is yes, not much, or maybe not at all. A good rule of thumb to follow in the United States is that a person can drink one ounce of distilled spirits, one beer, or one glass of wine an hour and still be capable of driving legally. However, countries in Europe have much stricter laws. In the United Kingdom, alcohol is limited to 0.4 mg/L of blood, and falls to 0.25mg in most other countries including Germany and France, but the limit in Norway is 0.1mg. Gibraltar is the strictest country of all; any trace of alcohol is considered a violation. Paying attention to customers' needs and enjoyment can go a long way toward protecting the customer, the establishment, and the general public.

Discussion questions

1. How has travel expanded our acceptance of different food and beverages?
2. How have scientific and technological advances increased the availability and variety of food and beverages?
3. Why are the concepts of rhythm, timing, and flow important in food service operations?
4. How can food and beverage operations be used as a marketing tool?
5. Why must food service operators pay attention to detail and watch every penny?
6. Why is sanitation such an important issue in food service operations?