

FOODSERVICE CONSULTANT

Postcards from the edge

Operator tales from the front line of foodservice

Hidden talent?

Why Covid also spread a new set of staff challenges

Blockbuster

Blockchain technology's pivotal role in food safety



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The times they are a-changin’

As the months roll by we are all still labouring under the Covid pandemic. But an interesting thing is beginning to occur. As the old Bob Dylan song shouts out: *The Times They Are A-Changin’!*

I have enjoyed speaking to our members around the globe more often since the advent of this virus. From stunned disbelief, to a sense of reality, to now – a vision of the future and a roadmap to recovery, marking the revolutionary trend that has emerged.

Europe and Asia are ahead of the Americas in recovery, but that has not deterred our members everywhere in saying that a light at the end of the tunnel, although dim, is beginning to appear.

The words: economic depression, business interruption, chaos and uncertainty are giving way to phrases such as: hope, opportunity, new business

horizons and colleagues helping colleagues.

We see the interest shown by record numbers of our members to join FCSI webcasts, podcasts, ‘5 minutes with...’ and ‘In My View’ interviews, sponsored roundtable discussions and all sorts of industry-relevant content. Why? Because they are part of our worldwide family, which is inclusive of our Professional and Allied members combined as one strong force to be heard around the world.

When members email me and say they miss the interaction among friends and colleagues, even offering to host meetings and functions in their hometowns, then we know we have something special going on for FCSI Worldwide.

Keep the faith. We will get through this bigger and better than ever. Then, let’s watch what the economy does and the positive effects on our businesses.



**William Caruso FCSI
President, FCSI Worldwide**

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we support,
we inspire**

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Connecting universally



**Mario Sequeira FCSI
Chair, FCSI Asia Pacific Division**

“What you think – you become;
What you feel, you attract;
What you imagine, you create”
Buddha

The unforeseen and unpredictable events of 2020 continue to evolve. Around the Asia Pacific region and globally, the foodservice industry is being impacted in different ways. With life comes thinking, feeling and doing. These things are so basic we rarely talk about them. Consciousness alone doesn’t do anything. Invisibly, secretly, it holds possibilities,

an infinite number of them, that will manifest as reality. Possibilities – like the universe – are unbounded.

Covid-19 has severely affected our industry. It is up to each one of us on how we negotiate our way through the unprecedented crisis for our clients. And, more importantly, how we can collaborate through the multiple networking possibilities via FCSI APD and globally.

The FCSI APD Board recently engaged a professional dedicated external resource known as

The Association Specialists (TAS) to partner with us in delivering an administrative management service to our members. We look forward to engaging our members with initiatives planned over the next few months.

Every new day is another opportunity as professionals to build on our strengths to make our foodservice industry more resilient and focused on the best customer experience we can deliver.

On behalf of the FCSI APD Board, I wish you continued success – and stay connected.



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Vic Laws MBE FCSI has enjoyed a career that has taken him around the world and won him recognition from her Majesty the Queen for his services to British hospitality. He tells Michael Jones "I love the work I do"

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As the hospitality sector picks itself up, dusts itself down and starts all over again, we examine how foodservice consultants can help clients operate. The three-pronged approach involves



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Jimmy Wong FCSI has been busy designing the eco-conscious and delicious F&B offerings in the freshly rebranded Hyatt Regency Lanzhou, as he tells Amy Snelling



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design (allowing for social distancing), hygiene (always important in foodservice, now doubly so) and technology (embracing contactless technology and remote control of appliances to cut down contact points)

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China's war on waste

The earth's most populous nation is facing up to its growing waste problem and finding various ways to tackle the piles of rubbish and push for a more sustainable future. Amy Snelling examines the effect on foodservice



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Tim Smallwood FFCSI considers the role blockchain technology can play in ensuring food safety and security



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My kitchen

As corporate chef for Spanish equipment manufacturer Fagor, Oier Biritxinaga's kitchen is wherever the next show is in the world

DIGITAL UPDATES

A wealth of extra content is waiting on the *Foodservice Consultant* website. Go to fcsi.org for digital-only interviews, regular blogs, event coverage and expert analysis of the latest industry news. You can also sign up to the *Foodservice Consultant* weekly newsletter, a comprehensive roundup of the stories affecting the global food and beverage industry. The *Foodservice Consultant* app is also available on Apple and Android devices. Top online stories include:

- FCSI's successful 'In My View' series of Professional member video interviews continues, with Brett Daniel

FCSI, BIM Manager & Project Manager at Camacho Associates. Daniel discusses his dreams as a young man of becoming an animator for Pixar; his recommended go-to tourist meal in his home town of Atlanta, Georgia; his fascination with chef Gordon Ramsay and how a medium-rare steak changed how he viewed cuisine.



- Regular blogger Marius Zürcher, co-owner & founder of start-up 1520 in Apeldoorn, Netherlands, addresses the subject of minimum wage, tipping and attracting labour in a post-pandemic foodservice environment.

- The launch of FCSI's Sustainability Lowdown podcast, the first two episodes supported by Meiko, will tackle food waste and energy efficiency. Plus, a wide range of new videos and audio podcasts – featuring Professional member consultants, hospitality owners and professionals and manufacturers – will discuss how foodservice operators can prepare for life after Covid-19.

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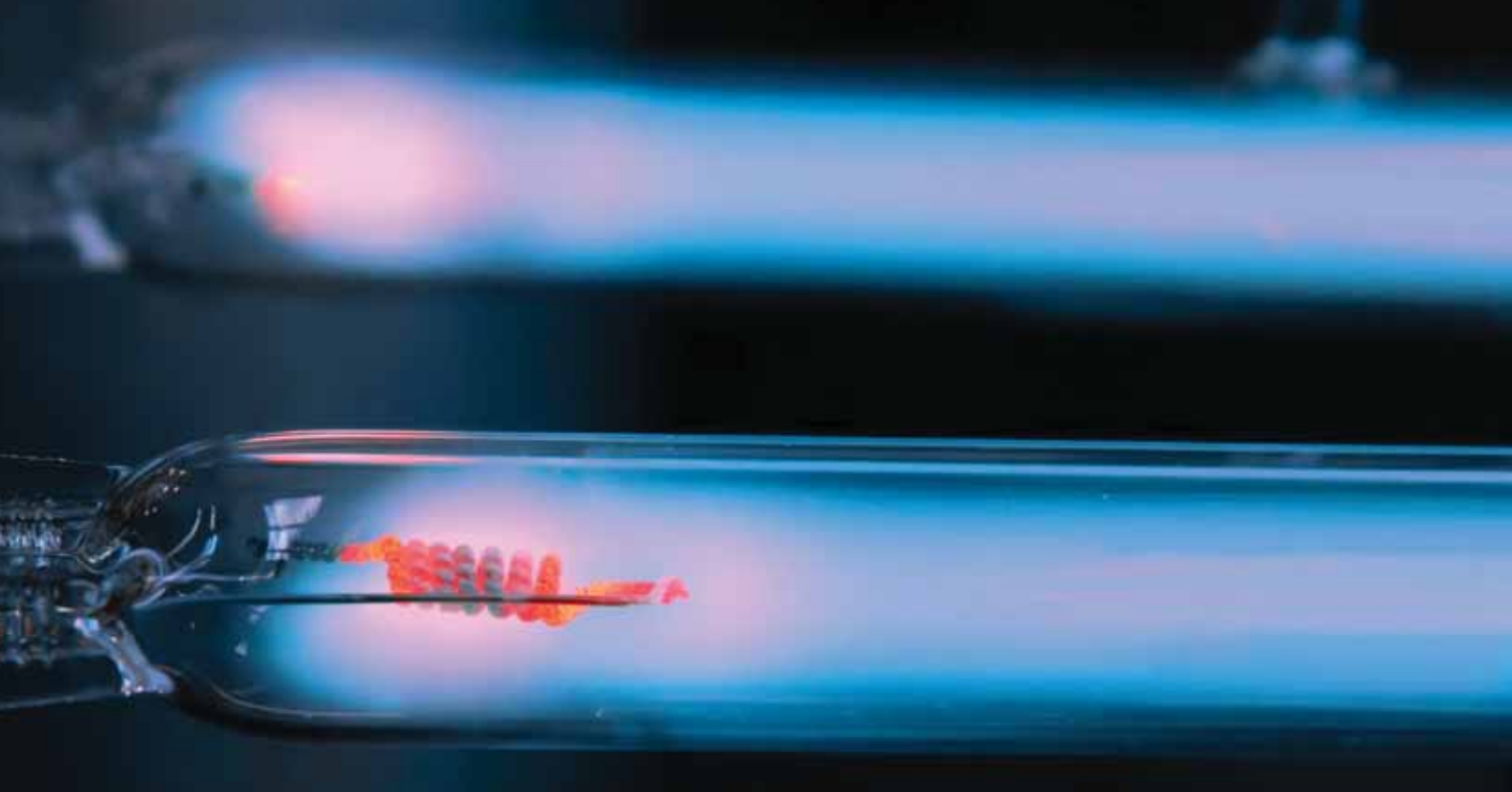
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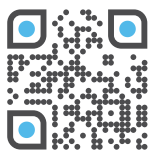
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AROUND THE WORLD

Here's a selection of some of the leading construction projects being planned and built across the globe

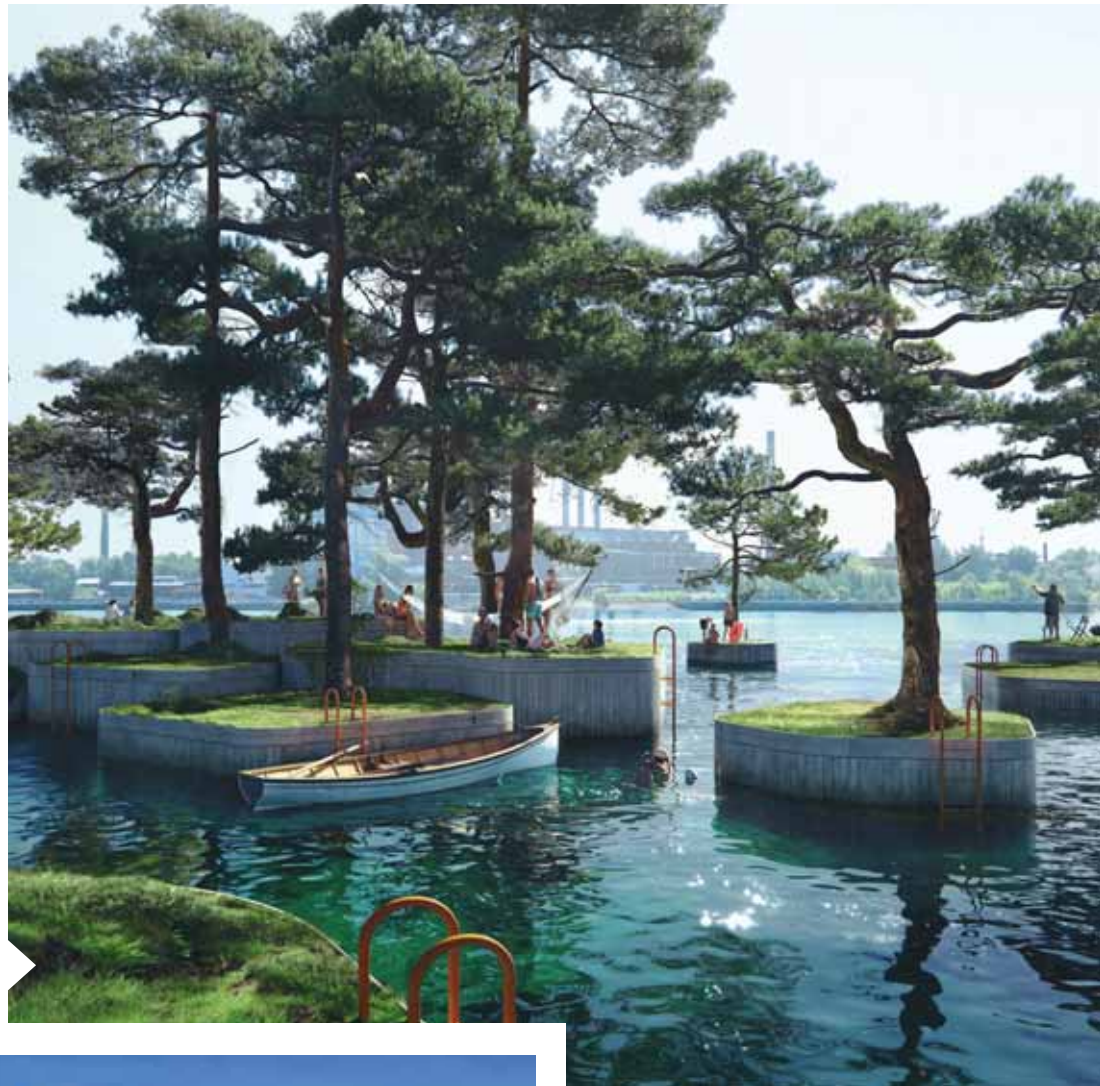
Copenhagen Islands, Copenhagen, Denmark

Architect **Marshall Blecher, Magnus Maarbjerg**

Builder **Fokstrot**

Opens **2020**

A project involving hand-crafted islands on the Danish capital Copenhagen's waterfront is set to create a completely new genre of public parks. The architects are calling it a 'parkipelago' and say the islands will be moved seasonally between underutilised and newly developed parts of the harbour, creating a catalyst for life and activity. Each island will serve as a platform for different activities – forming swim zones, floating saunas, floating gardens, floating mussel farms and a floating sail-in café. The first prototype island was launched in 2018 and it will be followed by three more islands to be launched in 2020, with plans for more in the coming years.



Waldorf Astoria, Cancun, Mexico

Architect **SB Architects**

Builder **TBC**

Opens **2021**

The Waldorf Astoria Cancun will feature 150 guest rooms and suites, with waterfront or mangrove-facing terraces and private balconies. The property will also house the signature Waldorf Astoria spa, integrating Mexican healing traditions with native ingredients, in addition to state-of-the-art fitness facilities, two plunge pools, a signature restaurant, an all-day brasserie and a beachside lounge and poolside bar. Guests will also have the opportunity to enjoy locally sourced Yucatecan cuisine at additional dining experiences throughout the property.





Valley, Amsterdam, Netherlands

Architect **MVRDV**

Builder **TBC**

Opens **2021**

Made up of four intersecting structures – a base for commercial and office spaces and three towers or ‘peaks’ of varying heights – Valley is part of Amsterdam’s ambition to transform its business centre into a more liveable urban quarter. A landscaped centre, or ‘valley’, which is accessible to the public, surrounds the central tower on the fourth and fifth levels, while a sky bar spans the top two floors of the tallest tower, offering panoramic views of the city. There is also a restaurant on the second floor and other F&B outlets on the first. The abundance of outdoor spaces and communal green areas promotes health and well-being as well as contributing to the building’s green ambitions.

New Slussen Masterplan, Stockholm, Sweden

Architect **Foster + Partners**

Builder **TBC**

Opens **2025**

The construction of the New Slussen is one of the largest urban transformation projects in Sweden. A new civic quarter for all, it will provide state-of-the-art transport links alongside prominent new public buildings. A central feature of New Slussen is the ‘Water Plaza’, a pedestrianised public space arranged around the new navigation lock and realigned quayside, enlivened by new restaurants, cafes and cultural amenities.



Qiddiya, Saudi Arabia

Architect **Bjarke Ingels Group (BIG)**

Builder **TBC**

Opens **2023 (first phase)**

In 2019, Saudi Arabia unveiled the master plan of its Qiddiya entertainment city project, which is set to become a ‘Capital of Entertainment, Sports and the Arts’. Located 45km (28 miles) from the capital Riyadh, it will include training academies, desert and asphalt tracks for motorsports enthusiasts, water and snow activities and a range of retail, residential and community services. The Resort Core of Qiddiya is a 150,000 sq m (180,000 sq yd) retail, dining and entertainment ‘spine’ complete with a portfolio of hotel offerings. Adjacent to it will sit a major outdoor entertainment venue capable of hosting events for 4,000 to 40,000 visitors in a park-like setting, along with an ice pavilion and a skate park.



Restaurant favourites on ice

With foodservice outlets across the region affected during lockdown Maida Pineda reports how some restaurants found a cool solution to keep their customers satisfied



Pivot is the magic word for businesses during the Covid-19 pandemic. For restaurants in Asia, it means adapting from open to closed to open depending on the lockdown conditions in each country.

Catering to dine-in customers has not been a reliable source of income for restaurant operators in the past few months. Observing a rise in food deliveries and take-out, many restaurants have pivoted their businesses to a more reliable platform: selling their signature dishes frozen.

In Singapore, despite an easing of lockdown restrictions, many are still hesitant to eat out. But there is a growing appetite for frozen signature dishes from their favourite restaurants. Tung Lok Group, which owns and manages 40 restaurants in Singapore, Indonesia, China, Japan, and Vietnam, is an early adopter. As early as four years ago, it set up an online store called HomeFiesta online shop to sell dim sum items like dumplings and pork buns. It has diversified its frozen offerings in the past four months to include dim sum, dumplings, hot dishes such as half-bird



Manam is considering keeping its ready-to-heat dishes such as Sinigang (above) and Sisig (left)



Filipino comfort food: crispy pork sisig from restaurant Manam

Shanghai Style Braised Duck and Beef Rendang, noodles, soup, vegetarian dishes and even Chicken Pot Pie, Baby Back Ribs and other Western dishes.

Thanks to its over 50 frozen food offerings, it now sells more than 17,000 packets a month online. Din Tai Fung and Paradise Dynasty's frozen dumplings quickly sold out when they were introduced in June. Even Koung's Wan Tan Mee, a hawker stall, has become an adopter in May selling frozen wonton noodle soup. It has sold more than 6,000 packets online and through phone orders.

In Singapore, despite an easing of lockdown restrictions, many are still hesitant to eat out. But there is a growing appetite for frozen signature dishes from their favourite restaurants

Temporary or permanent?

In the Philippines, fast food giant Jollibee began selling its Chicken Joy frozen by the end of March. It was available at select outlets as well as large supermarkets in Manila. Other fast-food chains in the Philippines such as McDonald's, Mang Inasal and Chowking also sold their signature dishes frozen as a limited offer. It was a temporary solution to clear their food inventory during the lockdown.

For other Filipino brands, such as Potato Corner, selling its cook-at-home fries kits with the frozen potatoes and flavorings and Manam, a Filipino restaurant now selling ready-to-heat versions of Filipino comfort-food dishes like Crispy Pork Sisig and Sinigang, this may be a permanent offering.

Frozen meals are a winning solution for customers as well as restaurateurs. They have a longer shelf life than chilled meals, they can be kept in a freezer for months. They can also be sold in supermarkets or convenience stores. In this day and age, restaurant operators need all the help they can get to make their food more accessible to customers. ■

IN MY VIEW

Living it up down under

FCSI Student Team Challenge 2018 winner **Domenique van Nielen** was selected for an internship with members of FCSI Asia Pacific in Australia. He discusses the experience, and his views of the industry, with Michael Jones

Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine I would end up in Perth, Western Australia. My team won the student challenge at HostMilano 2019. The prize: a one-month internship with FCSI in Australia. I had just started in Melbourne when Covid-19 started making an impact on the world. I then had a couple of days with Stephen Kelly FCSI and Hospitality Management Australia in Sydney, but the virus became more serious. I could either stay in Sydney, go back to Melbourne, go back to the Netherlands or go to Perth. This was two days before Australia closed their interstate borders.

My favourite part of the internship was seeing the way foodservice consultants such as Andrew Brain FCSI and Mario Sequeira FCSI dealt with people. When foodservice consultants are involved in huge projects the role involves mediation between the building developer and restaurant operator. These negotiations and compromises are exciting.

Working with people is what I most enjoy about working in foodservice. Creating deeper relationships with guests gives meaning to the industry.

As a child I dreamed of becoming an architect. I won the youth architecture prize in my hometown Amersfoort in The Netherlands when I was 11. When I was 16 I went to work at a restaurant and from then on, hospitality was the answer. My dream of being an architect and my passion for hospitality flow almost seamlessly into a foodservice consultant.

My interest lies in customer experience design and customer relationship management. I find it intriguing how design, staff, music and food can be directed, just like an orchestra, to create the ideal customer experience for your target market.

I would encourage other young professionals to join FCSI because if integrity is one of your core values, FCSI is the club to join. On top of that, being a worldwide organisation, there are many foodservice professionals to meet and share ideas with.

The hospitality industry is taking a big hit at the moment. I think in the casual- and fast-dining sector computers and/or algorithms will replace most front-of-house staff. In luxury and fine-dining settings, humans will always be imperative.

I relax by listening to music, especially disco and funk. Also, being Dutch, I enjoy cycling the coastal bike roads of Perth. ■

"I would encourage other young professionals to join FCSI because if integrity is one of your core values, FCSI is the club to join"

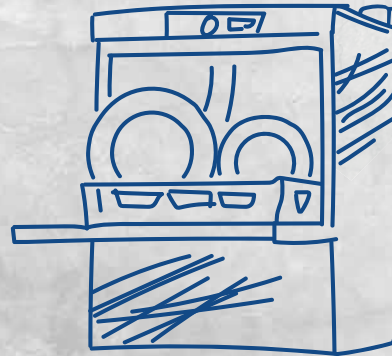
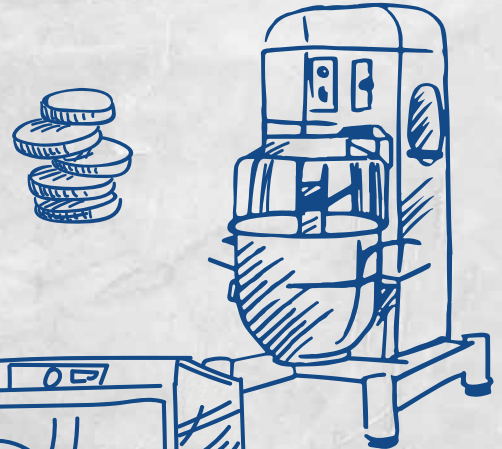


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KITCHEN CONFIDENTIAL

The Secret Chef struggles to put the Covid-19 pandemic into perspective

MORE TIME TO THINK

There are times when I envy those who bow their heads toward Rome. There must be something freeing about confession although I find the concept a little hard to swallow. I'm from northern European, Lutheran stock and, while I've discarded the religious aspects, the work ethic and vague guilt associated with fun and enjoyment remain. I think that's why writing this column is so liberating: I spend a few hours pretending to be someone I can't be during my daily life and have four joyous catharses a year to enable me to ease the weight on my shoulders.

Here is this quarter's confession: this piece is already a week late for submission. As someone who has spent many years abiding by several dozen deadlines throughout the course of every service, tardiness pains me. It niggles away and frustrates me, especially when I know it is my fault. In the kitchen the chain of command allows for the apportion of blame.

With words instead of dishes, screens instead of plates there is only one person at fault and that is the person sitting at the keyboard.

I generally get a little editorial direction when writing: loose themes on which to base my words. Can you write something on food waste? We need a few hundred words on no-shows. Do you fancy submitting your thoughts on tipping? And, generally, I spend a couple

of weeks thinking about the theme and then coalesce the thoughts into something cogent.

This time, unsurprisingly, it was a biggie: "Focus, in some way, on post-pandemic restaurant life, please."

Easy. A veritable buffet of subjects to gorge on and yet here we are, seven days the wrong side of deadline and still not

Here's the scoop: the pandemic isn't over. There is no clarity of hindsight on which to base my thinking because there is no hindsight. The world spluttered, then coughed and then stopped turning entirely

finished, and I've been trying to figure out why.

And now I know. Here's the scoop: the pandemic isn't over. There is no clarity of hindsight on which to base my thinking because there is no hindsight. The world spluttered, then coughed and then stopped turning entirely.

Every single restaurant on the planet closed their doors – and many of them remain closed, countless of those will never serve another customer. Thousands have taken baby steps towards re-opening with masked servers and temperature checks and plastic screens and have since been ordered to shutter once more. The immediate present is one in which indoor dining is a fading memory and a distant hope – how can I do justice to that ridiculous, previously unthinkable notion?

I can't. That's my second confession: I feel inadequate. Pretty much all the time at the moment. Although I could re-open, my restaurant remains a takeout – the prospect of a second wave of infections as summer rolls into the cooler days and nights of autumn is, as far as I'm concerned, an inevitability.

Without a vaccine, other services will be given priority over hospitality, quite rightly. Our kids need educating more than we need to cook a tasting menu. At some point it will be possible to look back at all this and consider what the future looks like. But that time isn't now because, for the moment, we are still right where we are. ■



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TALKBACK

Three foodservice professionals give their views on one question



Russell Stilwell FCSI
Foodservice consultant, Maryland, US

With negative events, there is almost always a silver lining. In this case, my hope is the death of the salad bar and its bad cousin the hot-food bar. Having multiple people serving themselves from the same dish with the same utensils has never been appealing. The saddest thing to me is the loss of so many great restaurants. The permanent closing of restaurants, like Blackbird in Chicago and so many others, is a deep wound to our culinary culture. No one could have been prepared for this type of global pandemic. No one could imagine the shutdown of the world economy.

What we have seen coming out of this period is the humanity, resilience, and creativity of so many chefs, restaurant and food operators, manufacturers, and American workers. It is amazing to see the community feeding their workers and the jobless, reinventing their businesses, and standing together through Covid-19, the collapsed economy, riots. We are still here – ready to re-open, to serve, to feed.

The main lesson is: be prepared, it will happen again. Add that carry-out/pick-up station, ghost kitchen, meal delivery, patio – whatever will give you a backup revenue stream. Keep positive and adapt quickly. Build a rainy-day fund, the government may not always be prepared to print money and give it away. Be grateful if you still have a business, and show your staff your appreciation for the hard work they do.



Agustin Ferrando Balbi
Chef, Hong Kong

We were two weeks into opening our restaurant Andō when the third wave of infections hit Hong Kong, and increasingly severe restrictions started kicking in. First, banning dine-in service from 6pm to 4.59am so we had to close after only 15 days. That said, the team is in high spirits, we're taking the time to develop new recipes and have also launched our home-dining experience for delivery/take-away, At Home with Andō.

The biggest impact is the full closure or the limits on restaurant capacity. Limiting seats means limiting revenue and that affects the chain further down. A restaurant is not only about the food, others are involved – workers, suppliers, producers and distributors – affecting one link in the chain affects all the others.

I have found the situation challenging, but we need to look forward, using this time to regroup and think how to improve the whole experience for our guests.

We will come out of this learning to adapt. This is also a time for reflection, it has allowed us to pay close attention to every single detail of the operation. Sometimes money can hide problems but now we are forced to look at the whole operation and tweak things to make sure we can survive this period. Most of us have built in measures such as take away menus and other different alternatives to the usual restaurant life.



Eneko Atxa
Chef, Bilbao, Spain

My restaurant, Azurmendi, was shut for nearly four months – we closed the doors on 12 March and reopened on 1 July.

I decided that my other restaurants will remain closed for now; it seems the prudent course of action to go slow and see how things develop as we hopefully return to a semblance of normality.

The response to our reopening has been fantastic, better than anything we imagined. We are taking all the precautions, including sanitation and distancing, to keep everybody safe. Right now the most important ingredient is not on the plate, it is the safety of our customers.

The impact on hospitality is already huge. We are lucky at our level of dining because we have a certain visibility, but all the smaller restaurants who don't have this facility will struggle. Many have closed already and many more will follow.

I think society as a whole can learn a lot from the pandemic. We have to remember the basic elements we need in life. We are so used to getting what we want when we want it. We need to prioritise education, investment in science and culture, we need to encourage cooperation and tolerance. Those are the important values in society.

For hospitality, it feels like we have been in constant crisis for a long time, so we are naturally financially conservative. Post-Covid we must continue to keep what we can aside for a rainy day. This has shown us that there could always be something unpleasant waiting around the corner. The pandemic has taught us that even something that we could never even imagine was possible.

What can hospitality learn from Covid-19?

FCSI EF for the future

As the world looks to move on from Covid-19 **Ed Norman**, FFCSI (PP), shares the latest news from the FCSI Educational Foundation

The global pandemic has affected everyone in FCSI, from huge multinational corporations to one-person consultancies and everyone in between. We are all challenged to rethink what our new business environment might look like, and the FCSI Educational Foundation is no different.

All of our fundraising efforts for the year have been put on hold; this is not the time to try to raise money for educational grants and scholarships. Our investments have taken a hit thanks to the fluctuations in the stock market. Our ability to connect with members at the Americas division conference was lost with the cancellation of that event.

But it is not all bad news. During the first stages of the pandemic, we received a grant application from Dan Jin, a graduate student doing her thesis on consumer behaviour in the restaurant industry. She is examining customer touch points in relation to food and service in the restaurant industry.

She requested a grant from the Foundation to complete her thesis by empaneling focus groups as well as collecting data from a Qualtrics online survey. Through her agreement with the Foundation, Dan will make the final research report available to the Foundation for sharing within the FCSI community. She is also willing to share her findings through an article and a live presentation. She is going much deeper into the touch points than has been done



Above: Dan Jin, who has received a grant from FCSI EF

so far. She is exploring many variables that influence the customer experience against what company training manuals and videos desire of employees.

The Foundation board was enthusiastic about this grant application because:

- it would provide original research into an area that would be beneficial to the consultant community
- it would allow the applicant to complete her graduate degree
- it would support an individual who may consider a future career as a foodservice consultant.

The process will take almost a year to complete, so watch out for the Q3 2021

edition of *Foodservice Consultant* for more information and an update.

We are still waiting for the Covid-19 pandemic to settle down so we can once again work on getting an internship program set up for Rodrigo Matamoros, from Mexico. We just about got things underway when the virus hit so we tabled his internship until we can circle back and put a programme together for him.

Stay healthy and safe everyone. ■



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THE BIG PICTURE



Project **WORLDWILD, CHINA**
Architect **BENSLEY**
Builder **Dinglong**
Opens **2024**

Bill Bensley is currently designing his most ambitious wildlife conservation concept to date – WorldWild China or as it’s affectionately become known to the team, The (Luxury) Human Zoo. This ‘animals first’ concept will prioritise animal welfare while offering a unique conservation experience for guests and visitors.

Originally, the firm was approached by Dinglong in China to design a zoo with 2,400 hotel rooms on a piece of land bigger than Central Park. Bensley decided to turn the concept on its head and proposed a wildlife sanctuary and reserve which dedicated 95% of the land for animals to run free and 5% of the land for people to observe and learn about the animals, but stay confined in “viewing cages” – in this case luxury hotels.

Set in 2,000 hectares in southern China’s Guangdong province, the wildlife sanctuary and reserve will house seven luxury hotels with a total of 2,400 rooms, spread across three zones, which represent the three continents of Asia, Africa and Australasia. The hotels will be operated by various brands including Hyatt, Waldorf Astoria and Conrad. One – Kamp Koala – will be a Shinta Mani Bensley Collection Hotel.

There are over a dozen proposed restaurants including several Chinese concepts, as well as a tea room, deli, patisserie, cocktail lounge and wine bar. ■







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WHAT WE DID IN THE PANDEMIC

We have watched, appalled, as Covid-19 spread across the world over the last six months. Schools, factories and offices shut down in an attempt to halt the contagion. And with most people staying at home the foodservice sector lost its purpose – providing hospitality to the hungry and thirsty crowds. Among the wreckage there have been beacons of typical foodservice innovation and generosity. Tina Nielsen talks to some of the protagonists about how they have navigated the rough seas of lockdown



Rasmus Kofoed

chef, Geranium,
Copenhagen, Denmark

The Covid-enforced lockdown afforded chef Rasmus Kofoed the luxury of some time away from the daily grind cooking at his central Copenhagen restaurant, which holds three Michelin stars. Kofoed took the chance to explore new possibilities during time with his family on the remote Danish island of Samsø where he regularly spends his summers.

The result of the considerations is Angelika, a 100% plant-based restaurant, operating in the same space as Geranium and offering a much more casual proposition in style.

The chef confirms that the opening of Angelika is at least partly connected to this year's lockdown due to coronavirus. During his time on Samsø he had the opportunity to do a lot of cooking with his children. The family's meals included dishes such as new potatoes with olives, pickled lemon and black pepper, oven-roasted asparagus with seaweed and preserved ramsons, and creamy butterbeans.

"I have wanted to open a vegetarian restaurant for quite a while but I never had the time to really plan it and make it a reality"

"There is no doubt that the Corona lockdown has contributed to the opening of Angelika. Foremost it is fuelled by an old dream to make a more accessible, green eatery," he says. "However, many of Geranium's guests come from all around the world and they probably won't be able to visit us for a while. Therefore, the opening of Angelika is also a great way to keep our employees – and at the same time show people how delicious and nurturing plant-based meals can be."

Without the enforced time out, he says, Angelika might not have happened. "I would not have had the time to make all this a reality. It gave me the motivation," Kofoed says. "I have wanted to open a vegetarian restaurant for quite a while but I never had the time to really plan it and make it a reality. The Corona situation gave me the opportunity."

Restaurants in Copenhagen reopened their doors as far back as May and the country endured just one month of lockdown. "Fine dining has already returned, we reopened and welcomed guests back to Geranium, it felt really great," says Kofoed.

As for how things might look in restaurants in a post-Covid environment, he thinks little will change. "People will be more aware and also take the time to properly wash their hands and use hand sanitiser, but otherwise I think it will be the same. People go out to dinner because they want to have a good time and a memorable experience."



Chefs in Schools was set up to provide food and, importantly, food education in London schools and has been expanding since launching in 2018.

The model sees chefs going into schools and providing healthy, sustainable meals to children while also teaching them about the food they eat.

When Covid-19 hit the UK at first, they continued to feed the children who receive free school meals, but as Pisani explains, this soon became difficult to manage. "We continued to open the school and feeding them that one meal, but as lockdown restrictions got stricter we realised that asking the chefs and the families to come out every day was quite hard because it was against government regulations," she says.

Instead they came up with the idea of putting together a hamper, providing the families with cooked meals for every day as well as staple ingredients including rice, pasta and vegetables.

The food is collected from restaurants and supermarkets who donate surplus food and the meals are cooked by volunteer chefs who have been put out of work during the lockdown.

Pisani says doing this work has been good for the chefs. "What happened was that chefs went from working an 80-hour week to not working at all. Mentally it just isn't good to go from one extreme to another. Seeing other people, cooking food and making a difference



Nicole Pisani

co-founder and executive chef, Chefs in Schools, London, UK

“We have to be more mindful and trying to source more sustainably instead of expecting everything at the snap of the fingers”

was really beneficial for them,” she says.

At the time of writing the charity was providing food hampers to around 1,000 families.

While the hamper initiative grew out of necessity, it has become clear to the team that it will work during the holidays when there is a recognised problem with children getting food. “Holiday hunger has always been something in the background of what we do,” says Pisani. “We now realise with this model we can continue providing meals throughout the summer – and even at Christmas.”

If there is one thing Pisani would like us all to take away from this time it is a different attitude to waste. “It’s sad to see how much food gets thrown away when on the flipside there is so much hunger in the UK. So, I think we all have to be more mindful with purchasing and cooking and trying to source more sustainably instead of expecting to have everything at the snap of the fingers,” she says. “Food for any chef is such an easy commodity and to realise that people don’t have it is quite heartbreaking.”



Iván Morales

chef owner, Arzábal, Madrid, Spain

The co-founder of Arzábal, a small group of restaurants famed for their high-quality expertly sourced Spanish produce, spoke to *Foodservice Consultant* early in the pandemic. With Spain mandating one of the tightest lockdowns in Europe, Arzábal was forced to close.

Iván Morales and co-founder Álvaro Castellanos were among the first chefs to sign up to join the Spanish branch of World Central Kitchen (WCK), the humanitarian organisation set up by Spanish-American chef José Andrés to feed people in emergencies.

By the time restaurants reopened and the chefs went back to their day jobs, the Spanish WCK set-up had cooked in excess of 1,000,000 meals for people in need during the lockdown. Morales and Castellanos opened their central kitchen to produce daily meals for vulnerable families and the elderly.

Shortly after Spain entered into

“It’s not that different from how we would normally behave in the kitchen – we usually wear hair nets, aprons and gloves. The only thing is that we don’t usually wear face masks”

lockdown, Morales began thinking about how he could make a difference. “I knew that I had to cook, but I didn’t want to be in charge of deciding who would receive our food – that’s a huge responsibility – and of course I wasn’t able to organise the logistics. They are very complicated,” he says.

At Arzábal the team started discussing plans on 25 March and two days later the kitchen was up and running. “We are used to the physical demands of the kitchen, but this was more mental – you have the constant pressure of knowing there are people who are not eating during this time. It makes you think a lot,” says Morales.

But beyond the unusual circumstances, on a practical level, little is different for the kitchen team in Arzábal. “It’s not that different from how we would normally behave in the kitchen – we usually wear hair nets, aprons and gloves. The only thing is that we don’t usually wear face masks,” explains Morales.

Reflecting on the experience, he says volunteering the time and kitchen was instinctive. “If you see an old person falling over in the street, you’ll help them get back up – well, right now our country is falling over and we have to help it get back up,” he says.

Arzábal reopened its Madrid restaurants in June and has been able to return with the full team as well as a new revenue stream from delivery. >



Nick Kokonas,
co-founder, Alinea Group,
Chicago, US

When Covid-19 hit Chicago, fine-dining establishment Alinea surprised much of the culinary community by launching a carry-out option from the three-Michelin-starred restaurant.

“About a week before the shutdown we considered take-out as an option so long as it was safe for our employees and customers,” says Kokonas. “We were up and running three days after the governor of Illinois mandated shelter in place. We wanted to feed our communities and get our team members back to work.”

Alinea launched the carry-out concept selling a weekly pick-up item, charged at \$34.95 – the first meal was a beef short rib wellington with mashed potatoes and a crème brûlée to follow. All 3,500 meals spread over seven days sold out in the four hours they were for sale on Kokonas’ restaurant booking platform Tock, which also pivoted during the crisis to offer restaurants a

“About a week before the shutdown we considered take-out as an option so long as it was safe for our employees and customers”

“It was terribly sad to furlough employees, but we gave everyone a \$1,000 stipend and benefits. We immediately started figuring out ways to re-hire staff, at least some of them”

way to change their proposition. Similar programmes were launched at the groups other restaurants Roister and Next.

Continuing to operate as a restaurant, albeit carry-out rather than dine-in, also meant that the company was able to keep some members of staff employed. As the carry-out service ramped up, 40 out of 300 employees had returned to work.

“It was terribly sad to furlough employees, but we gave everyone a \$1,000 stipend and benefits,” says Kokonas. “We immediately started figuring out ways to re-hire staff or at least some of them. Any profits from our to-go menus will go back to the employees as a whole group – ownership and management is taking no salaries or profits. We will support the team and get through this stronger.”

Alinea Group reopened Roister and Next in June and an outdoor iteration of Alinea, called Alinea in Residence, or AIR, on a Chicago rooftop in July. The team has continued to offer a take-out service.



The restaurant critic of *The New York Times* since 2012, wrote his last review – of Pastrami Masters in Brooklyn – for the paper on 10 March. When the city went into mandated lockdown, restaurants shut along with every other activity in the city.

So, what does a restaurant critic do when there are no restaurants to visit? In the case of Wells, he has become a reporter. “I have been trying to write every week, but it is completely different work,” he says. “Before, I knew what I would be writing every week; I just had to pick the restaurant. Now I have to find stories.”

Since New York City went into quarantine in March, he has covered all areas of the city’s restaurant sector. From restaurant suppliers pivoting to sell direct to consumers as a way of making some money, to chefs selling meal kits and operators across New York City opening dining areas on sidewalks and streets, he has painted a picture of the pandemic’s impact on the city.

It is a different task from his weekly restaurant column. As he says: “The goal with the reporting is to tell a story, not to have an opinion.”

This style of reporting stories is not something he was used to. In fact, the restaurant critic gig was the first time he has been paid to write full time.

“This is the first time I have had a writing job where I have to actually



Pete Wells,
restaurant critic,
The New York Times, US

scramble around for ideas,” he says.

Before Covid he always knew where his article would be placed, but since the pandemic his stories have been published across the paper. “I have had stories in the metro section, in the national section and in the business section. I have not been in the arts section, but it’s only a matter of time,” he laughs.

He admits to feeling ever so slightly disconcerted. “I have one of the great jobs in journalism and what makes it great is that I have a connection with my audience who is really engaged. So, I worry that I have lost touch with my readership a bit,” he says.

At time of writing, four months after that last review, he is yet to start reviewing for his restaurant column again.

While he waits for that, he is enjoying the outdoor-dining scene. “I’d like to do that as long as it is happening. I think the outdoor restaurants are really interesting and I like being outdoors anyway, I am interested in this experiment we are running here putting people in parking spaces in the street,” he says. “I drive and I like my car, but I also think it is kind of crazy how much of the city is given over to cars; parking spaces don’t do much for the urban fabric.”

It’s true there’s little certainty on how this will all shake out when the pandemic is over, but Wells is clear: “We may not know yet, but I am sure every single person in the sector feels there will be major changes to come out of this.”



Prateek Sadhu
chef, **Aditi Dugar**, owner
Masque Restaurant,
Mumbai, India

Started by this enterprising pair in 2016, Masque has been a trailblazer on the Mumbai dining scene, pioneering a modern approach inspired in part by chef Prateek Sadhu’s time learning in kitchens abroad. Earlier this year it was named the One To Watch for Asia in the 2020 edition of Asia’s 50 Best Restaurants.

Restaurant director Aditi Dugar describes how the country and city have been severely affected by the pandemic. “India has been among the worst hit countries worldwide, and Mumbai’s numbers have been among the highest within. We have only just started opening up in pockets, varying from state to state,” she explains.

They made the decision to close the restaurant a week before the nationwide mandated lockdown on 25 March. By mid-April Masque had developed a delivery concept; a first for the restaurant.

“It has been heartbreaking to see the effects of the pandemic on the industry worldwide, and I don’t foresee bouncing back to be a quick and painless process”

“It’s been a big shift, going from a tasting menu-only restaurant to now doing only takeout, but we’ve been fortunate, all things considered,” says Sadhu. “It has been challenging, rewarding, frustrating and nerve-racking – it’s kept us on our toes for sure. It’s been a tough time and quite frankly exhausting, but we’ve pulled through, and I am forever grateful to the diners who enabled that.”

At the time of writing, things are slowly opening up again in India. “Regulations vary between states and cities depending on the severity – but it’s hit the restaurant and hospitality sector hard and there hasn’t been any support in the form of bailouts or aid. Restaurants here in Mumbai aren’t open for dine-in yet,” says Dugar.

Resuming services after Covid-19 will be challenging, says Sadhu. “It has been heartbreaking to see the effects of the pandemic on the industry worldwide, and I don’t foresee bouncing back to be a quick and painless process. I think a fair amount of the damage done is irreparable,” he says, suggesting that technology will play a larger role moving forward. “I do think in time – and with a vaccine, hopefully – we’ll be able to resume providing the sense of comfort that restaurants often do,” he says. “Eating out is, at heart, an act of community and shared experience, and those are things people will always seek out.” ■

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POST-COVID DESIGN: ADAPTING TO SURVIVE

As restaurants, cafés and hotels continue to reopen, post Covid-19 restrictions, the impact of the pandemic is clearly visible. Jim Banks looks at the short-term design changes enabling businesses to operate and the long-term impact on the industry

New

projects are on hold and many restaurants are struggling to make enough money to stay open. That is the harsh reality of lockdown for the foodservice sector. Even with restrictions lifting, many fear the long-term outlook is bleak.

Delivery and takeout options have helped many businesses to keep ticking over until customers were free to dine out again. As lockdown eases around the world and the industry crosses its fingers and hopes there is no second wave, there is a need for the foodservice operations to adapt to find the balance between business recovery and customer safety.

“Every business has an ‘adapt or die’ moment in its lifecycle,” says Joseph Schumaker FCSI, president and CEO

of FoodSpace. “Now, that moment is happening simultaneously for everyone. There will be a moment when we are past this, but the next 18 months are going to suck.”

California-based Schumaker, who often works with hospitality in the corporate sector in Silicon Valley, points to record daily death rates in Los Angeles in July.

“If we would just do what we need to do – wear masks, care for each other, be sensible – then we could change outcomes, but there is such a societal split here in the US,” he says.

FCSI Associate Jay Bandy, president of Goliath Consulting Group, who is based in Georgia, US, tells a similar story. The state is encouraging people to wear masks, but compliance is not good.

“It won’t get better any time soon and the resistance is about political persuasion rather than public health,” he explains.

The effect on some sectors of the foodservice industry is already devastating, with the full story still to play out. Bandy reports large restaurants closing their doors for good. Schumaker sees hard times ahead for many mid-market restaurants.

“It is scary that a restaurant that is normally packed on a Saturday night might be less than half full,” he remarks. “We don’t know the exact extent of the damage yet. It could be that 40% of US restaurants will never reopen. For the mid-market, the independents, this could be fatal.”

New-look dining rooms

To maximise their chance of survival, restaurants, hotels and bars need to make significant changes to front-of-house operations. Though challenging to delivery, the key actions are simple in nature – move tables to enable social distancing, take precautions when guests arrive, provide sanitisation stations and make cleaning procedures more thorough, more frequent and, crucially, more visible.

“There has been a lot of work on design and operation to adapt units to generate revenue,” says Roz Burgess FCSI of UK-based consultancy Intelligent

Catering. “This means reducing eat-in and increasing delivery and collection. Inside the restaurant, this has meant separating delivery drivers from collection customers, creating segregated areas.”

“It is just about keeping people further apart,” agrees Schumaker. “Every other table is redundant. Restaurants are asking customers to make reservations and ensuring that people do not wait in the lobby. They are also asking them to wear a mask on their way to the table.”

One strong message from consultants in both Europe and the US is that need for clear guidance from governments and local regulators. While it is certainly the responsibility of operators and customers to behave responsibly, the process is much easier if there is a set of rules for everyone to follow.

“The government guidance must be clear, but it is blurry right now,” says Burgess. “The same should apply in the restaurant, with rules for regular cleaning and disposable menus, but that is not happening. There is a degree of apathy, so some teams perform well while others don’t. You need consistency and you need to overdo it to keep the risks down.”

Schumaker is working on reopening plans for cafés and restaurants, many in the corporate sector in Silicon Valley. He believes flexibility is the key.

“We are looking at how to use social distancing and technology to our advantage. Now, people will be more willing to use their device for ordering as well as payment.





“It could be that 40% of US restaurants will never reopen. For the mid-market, the independents, this could be fatal”

There has been a huge struggle with this in our sector, where the adoption rate has been less than 5% – even in Silicon Valley – because food is such a personal thing.”

“Now, we could see an adoption rate of 75%,” he says. “This is the moment when we can push that technology over the goal line. We will put the POS in people’s hands.”

People love to look at the display, see and smell the food, before deciding what to eat. Yet we may see much more ordering on personal devices, as they are easy to clean and there is no risk of cross-contamination.

The apps are relatively easy to develop, so customer acceptance is the only barrier.

In the dining room, one of the most visible changes is the growing use of plexiglass barriers – either between tables or between counters and customers, as well as face shields worn by staff. The US is reporting a shortage of plexiglass due to rising demand from the foodservice sector. Though these may eventually come down and tables may move closer together, cleaning regimes may remain more robust and more visible.

Kitchen-planning wins

In China, which is ahead of the rest of the world in its response to Covid-19, much of the restaurant and hotel business has returned to normal, according to consultant Acker So FCSI. There is little change in front-of-house and the focus has turned to long-term plans for back-of-house areas.

“In Shanghai everything is open and back to normal, says So, consultant at Angles and Curves Design and Consulting Co., based in Shanghai and Hong Kong. “Now, more restaurant customers are concerned with bowl, dish or tableware disinfection, so operators are looking at different brands such as Meiko and Winterhalter with a close eye on specifications and standards.”

“People are looking two or three years ahead and at new projects,” he adds. “So, they are looking to study and invest in new technology such as dishwashers, UV water filters and garbage sorting and recycling.”

In the US and Europe, investment in new equipment is less of a priority, though there is some interest among large chain restaurants in fitting UV lights or HEPA filters to HVAC systems. Generally, back-of-house measures are focused on short-term fixes such as reducing the number of menu items, to make food preparation simpler and minimise movement around the kitchen.

Kitchens with a modular design make it easier to manage potential transmission of Covid-19, as distinct areas can be designated for the preparation of specific dishes, which can be stocked with the required ingredients and equipment at the start of each shift.

“Chefs should already be on station to perform their role, but the team must set up the workspace properly,” says Burgess. “This will require a checklist of equipment so they don’t need to move to get a chopping board or a knife. This makes each workstation more effective in terms of time and safety.”

In some kitchens, however, chefs are still working shoulder-to-shoulder as there is little room to reorganise workflow. “In that situation, all you can do is ensure masks are worn and people frequently wash their hands,” says Bandy. >

Lasting benefits

In many parts of the world, the focus is still on short-term fixes to fuel the industry's recovery. Many restaurants are just trying to stay alive until normal service resumes, though there are potentially damaging long-term problems as industries – and entire economies – are building up debt.

Schumaker predicts one change that could bring lasting benefits to foodservice operations. "Now is an opportunity for foodservice businesses to write operating plans so they are prepared for any eventuality," he says.

However, no one feels confident about what the future will look like. Lockdown saw a switch from dining out to cooking at home, though the delivery and takeaway food market flourished.

"It is about consumer confidence but there is also a wildcard in play," says Schumaker. "People are getting used to working remotely and being at home with their families. So, are we creating a new normal where we don't eat out? Millennials and Generation Z were making foodservice outgrow the grocery market but has this moment in history reset things?"

"We are in a place where convenience trumps experience, but as experience comes back, will convenience dominate more than before?" he asks. "Probably yes, but people will be thirsty for experience. They want to go out and eat in groups again but maybe not until we have a vaccine. For restaurants, for now, it will be survival of the fittest."



WILL TAKEAWAY OVERTAKE EATING OUT?

The foodservice sector will recover from lockdown, but its dynamics may have changed with the rise of takeout and delivery as options for customers confined to their homes.

To keep things ticking over, most restaurants have offered takeaway or delivery services, though not always as a long-term plan. "Takeout won't make up for lost revenue and many large restaurants will have to close," says Bandy. "Some pizza delivery businesses and quick-serve restaurants are doing well – some with drive-through service are making more money."

The question is whether customers will decide to eat out less when the pandemic is over. From China, the first country to deal with Covid-19, there are strong signs that the swing towards takeaway food is here to stay. Consultant Acker So FCSI works with many hotels and sees them investing in adaptations to cater for the takeaway market.

"Here, hotels need to build a separate kitchen to handle outside catering business," he says. "This is to meet the standards set down by law for scale takeaway food. They need a separate hot kitchen for retail customers."

If delivery does remain a higher proportion of business, many restaurants may turn to self-delivery rather than relying on outfits such as Deliveroo or GrubHub, which take a large slice of the profit.

HAS COVID KILLED THE SALAD BAR?

Buffets and salad bars are a familiar sight in all kinds of restaurants, enabling operators to cut labour costs. As the industry tries to play its part in stemming the tide of Covid-19, while remaining open for business, the future of self-service options in a dining room is in question.

Putting a member of staff in charge and making customers queue is one option, but it counteracts the labour-saving element and may put off guests who like to be in charge of their choices and their portion size.

"People adore self-service," says Burgess. "They can have what they want without asking for it. It will come back but not until the hygiene issues have been sorted out. It is great value for money, but it may not be the same if it is staffed."

For Schumaker, the appeal of self-service is too great. "It is not dead, it is taking a nap," he says. "It will be back. It is a social thing. There may be a more flexible design rather than the traditional double-sided cattle troughs. We might see pre-packaged salads, which can still be custom made. Perhaps customers will use their own tongs."

The fact is, however, that the self-service side of dine-in restaurants has been in decline for the last 10 years. "Covid-19 is just another hit it is taking," remarks Bandy. "It won't go away completely. It will stay strong in some markets, particularly outside the large urban centres."



TRUST IS A MUST

Professor Ben Voyer, a visiting fellow in the Department of Psychological and Behavioural Science at London School of Economics, outlines how restaurants can attract diners back to the dining room by building a relationship of trust

The general public's perception of the safety of dining out has probably been affected by months of intense safety communication campaigns and lockdown measures. One could expect that the desire to dine out is lower than it was pre-pandemic. This is, however, probably moderated by some personal characteristics. For instance, individuals that are more inclined to take risks may be less likely to be affected by the current crisis. Those that are highly risk averse may be even more affected. Similarly, people that are vulnerable may be even more affected and hold even more cautious attitudes towards dining out than the general population.

Attitudes are often inferred from past behaviours. If people take more precaution



when dining out, this is likely to alter their attitude towards the safety of dining out. The change does not have to be gradual, it can be very sudden – as one would expect a sudden change of attitude towards the safety of using public transport, for instance.

Restaurants can allay people's fears to a certain extent. The best way forward is to communicate in a transparent manner. Acknowledging the fact that some diners may feel anxious about being back; and highlighting the steps taken to create a safe dining experience.

Most of the best practices I have seen revolve around clearly stating that the restaurant follows and exceeds the current recommendations from the government, working with and advertising collaboration with a health and safety expert and using social media to show the safe dining experience created to help diners project into the experience.

There is however a fine line between showcasing a safe dining experience and reminding people that there could be a risk associated with dining out.

The key to a clean bill of health

Hygiene is a priority for any foodservice operation, but the pandemic has highlighted the need for cleaning to be more thorough, visible and frequent. Jim Banks looks at how the industry has responded

The steps to limit

the transmission of Covid-19 have been spelt out since the start of the pandemic: reduce social contact, maintain distance, wear a face covering and wash your hands. Now that people are starting to socialise more and social distancing requirements are easing, hygiene is more important than ever.

Hygiene is more than staff and customers washing their hands. It means washing surfaces, door handles, cutlery, utensils, tables, touchscreens and everything else on a regular basis. Some operations have made this a priority, while others have taken a more relaxed approach.

“If restaurants aren't taking customers contact details, or sanitising they should not be open,” says UK-based consultant Roz Burgess FCSI. “Every touchpoint – front- and back-of-house – needs to be regularly

cleaned, otherwise we are back in lockdown. It is labour-intensive, but more cleaning needs to be done more often.”

In most outlets, the usual cleaning processes may be sufficient, but when the industry's recovery is fragile, more may be needed to rebuild customers' confidence.

“This industry has usually concealed its cleaning practices, but now their visibility has changed,” says Joseph Schumaker FCSI of US consultancy FoodSpace. “People are reassured by seeing those practices done, so we are not doing it stealthily now.”

There is also a push to encourage, or at least enable, customers to be involved in the process. Hand sinks or cleaning stations with hand sanitiser are likely to be a more prominent feature in many dining areas.

“Sanitation is the biggest challenge,” says FCSI Associate Jay Bandy, a consultant based in Georgia, US. “It involves the constant cleaning of door handles, tables, chairs and everything else. Some operators are cleaning the whole restaurant multiple times per day. Some have put one person per shift in charge of sanitisation, which includes ensuring customers behave properly.”

“A lot more attention is paid to sanitation now and the frequency of cleaning is up,” he adds. “And this is not just in the kitchen but also in the customer areas. Utensils and work surfaces are usually cleaned every four hours, but now it is every two hours.”

Some chains, among them McDonald's and Chipotle, have had sanitisation stations in dining rooms for many years, so the concept is not entirely new. Nevertheless, Bandy notes that there is a careful balance to be struck between customers doing what they choose in terms of handwashing, and what a restaurant compels them to do.

Learning from the grocery sector, which has seen a lot of pushback against the requirement to wear masks in stores, the foodservice sector may have to provide recommendations and cleaning facilities without forcing guests to comply.

“It depends on who your customers are,” Bandy adds. “Some people don't like being told what to do.”

TECH STEPS UP

Contactless payment, mobile ordering and delivery and click and collect technology were already growing trends before Covid-19 struck. Safety concerns have accelerated adoption and it's unlikely to return to pre-pandemic levels, as Elly Earls outlines



recent report from market research firm NPD Group, *Covid-19 British Foodservice Sentiment Survey*, showed that contactless payment was among the top five initiatives that made respondents feel safe eating out, chiming with a recent Datassential study in the US revealing that 38% of people are now concerned about touching shared objects.

“Contactless payment is becoming an everyday occurrence now. As well as being safer, it's more efficient for customers because they don't have to fish around for their change,” says Dominic Allport, insights director (foodservice) at NPD Group. “For operators it increases profitability because there are fewer overheads, particularly when it comes to staff time taken up by counting cash. The data around digital

transactions is also increasingly valuable for personalisation and marketing reasons.”

Hospitality reservation platform SevenRooms recently launched a contactless order and pay feature, which can be accessed by guests in three ways without the need to download an app: scanning a QR code, near-field communication (NFC), or visiting a URL on any mobile device. MGM Resorts in Las Vegas implemented it when they reopened their F&B outlets in June. Diners view menus on their mobile devices and use a credit card or digital wallet to pay.

Meanwhile BoxPark in the UK has teamed up with PassKit, which integrates Apple Wallet and Google Pay. Customers can pre-register and pay digitally while also signing up to the UK government's test and trace scheme.

Closer than we think

Allport says the next question, particularly for QSR operators, is whether there's going to be a voice or facial recognition element built into the ordering and payment process soon. KFC already uses facial recognition technology in China and McDonald's recently acquired a voice recognition start-up. He thinks roll-out of technology like this across the sector could happen more quickly than you might imagine.

According to a recent McKinsey report, businesses leaders are accomplishing in 10 days what used to take them 10 months. “They needed to stop questioning whether they needed to do it and just get on and do it,” Allport says. “Post-crisis that pace of innovation may slow down, but many operators are thinking now is a good time to invest and innovate because it means they can capture market share.”

SevenRooms has been working in this space since receiving an investment from Amazon's Alexa Fund to build Alexa-specific skills for restaurant operators. “By harnessing voice technology, SevenRooms' users can instantly access key guest preferences,” says Bianca McLaren Esmond, senior manager of the platform's brand marketing. “This not only limits

contact in the dining room, but also further streamlines operations and allows staff to deliver more personalised experiences while keeping their eyes on the guest.”

Here to stay

Delivery and click and collect technology have also grown hugely in popularity since the pandemic. According to NPD's most recent CREST data, pre-Covid digital orders accounted for 6-7% of all foodservice spend. In Q2 2020 this had risen to 37%. While the total market in Q2 declined in spend by 72% versus last year, digital spend, which mainly comprises pick-up or delivery, rose by 62%.

Like many other foodservice operators London-based Benugo has increased its click and collect business in order to reduce the number of contact points between customers and staff members, a process that has been facilitated by their long-term technology partner, Access Group, as well as pre-payment app Preoday and order-ahead app Ritual.

“Even customers who aren't particularly well versed with contactless, click and collect and wave and pay are managing just fine,” says head of IT at Benugo Mark Robertson. “Moving forward, there will certainly be less inclination to return to a standard, table-based service. Businesses will look to learn from what they've had to do during the Covid-19 pandemic and tailor that into their standard operations.”

A similar shift is underway back of





“We’ve taken what was a very traditional process using emails and spreadsheets and moved it online. That’s something that will never change now. We will not go back to that old way of working”

house. Benugo, which has various arms, including event and venue catering, corporate F&B for clients like Deloitte and Amazon, and high street locations, has kept the kitchens at many of its locations closed during the pandemic, with sites now placing their orders through a central production unit. “We’ve taken what was a very traditional process using emails and spreadsheets and moved it online,” Robertson says. “That’s something that will never change now. We will not go back to that old way of working.”

For more go to [fcsi.org](https://www.fcsi.org)

The scattered market

For Allport one of the challenges of the rapid implementation of new technology is the need to retrain staff. “Hospitality businesses have traditionally recruited people who are good with customers and making people feel welcome. Now, because there’s so much new technology, these staff members have to be tech-savvy so there’s a big onus on operators to upskill and train staff. It’s all very well rolling out new technology but the staff have to be able to use it.”

Sifting through the huge number of new solutions that have hit the market in recent months has been another big challenge for Robertson. “It’s a very scattered market right now – there are some new young businesses that are trying to place themselves at the forefront – I must get 10 or 15 introductions on a weekly basis and it can be an absolute minefield,” he says.

His advice is to choose providers that have enough experience in the sector to know how it works and to try to look beyond the magic of the marketing. With hardware, reliability and robustness are more important than something that looks slick but won’t make it through a busy service.

At SevenRooms, the team have seen three different sorts of customers emerge from the pandemic. There are those that aren’t comfortable dining outside their home, which means a delivery or pick-up solution must be in place. The second guest group is curious about dining out, but wants to make sure the restaurant adheres to social distancing. “For this guest, a virtual waitlist or reservations are essential as they allow guests to know exactly when their table will be ready and where it will be located,” says McLaren Esmond. The third type of guest wants to dine out but also ensure they have as low touch an experience as possible, which is where features like contactless order and pay come in.

Allport says the key for operators is to make sure they put the effort in across all of these channels. “It has to be consistent; otherwise that momentum is going to be lost and people will be concerned,” he says. ■



SPIRIT OF THE LAWS

From travelling the world and working in an array of sectors, to being honoured by the Queen for his services, Dr **Vic Laws** MBE FCSI has had quite the career. “I love the work I do,” he tells Michael Jones

Spending time in the company of Vic Laws as the veteran consultant discusses his career is an industry education in itself. Firstly, there is barely an area of hospitality he has not had experience of at some level or another – from high-end hotels and restaurants, to overseeing the catering operations for stadia, schools, hospitals, care-homes, prisons, airports and airlines. It also ticks off a plethora of iconic UK institutions he has stories about (Wembley Stadium; Heathrow Airport; Windsor Castle; even the rock band The Who). All the while, the conversation saunters through a whistle-stop global tour of countries Laws has worked or trained in: Switzerland, Mexico, Canada, Ireland, Cyprus, Sudan...

So, after such a fêted career, which includes being made a Member of the British Empire (MBE) by the Queen, at 78 Laws must surely be considering retirement? Not at all, it transpires. “I’m a workaholic. I love the work I do,” he says.

“There are always challenges out there and there are always people you can help and guide. I have gained a lot from this profession and now I want to give back and help others to be successful.”

For Laws, that means being involved with the Réunion des Gastronomes and the young chef’s competition for Chaîne des Rôtisseurs. It means continuing his role as restaurant ambassador for The Clink, the charity he has worked with for over 10 years, more recently fundraising and creating awareness both within and outside the hospitality industry.

A past president and fellow of the Institute of Hospitality (IoH) and an active member of FCSI, Lead Association for Caterers in Education (LACA) and Association of Catering Excellence (ACE), Laws is also on the board of the Royal Over-Seas League, an 80-bed club in Mayfair, London, where we photograph him for this story. The shoot involves him performing the sabrage ritual (opening Champagne with a sabre) of the Sabre

d’Or in full traditional costume.

“When people ask me what I do, I say I eat and drink for a living, which is true,” he laughs.

Learning to fly

Despite this storied life in hospitality, Laws pretty much stumbled into the business. “As a youngster, my ambition was either to be a policeman or a lawyer. Unfortunately, I wasn’t academic enough to do either. I loved cooking, so becoming a chef was my next choice,” he says.

“I lived in Harrow, Greater London, with my parents and my sister, who was extremely clever. I was always in her shadow, except when it came to cooking. My mother was a good cook and I learned the basics from her. I used to enter cookery competitions for the local horticultural society and I did quite well.”

Laws attended a co-educational grammar school. “At the age of 14, you had to stream. The choices were woodwork, metalwork, technical drawing, needlework or cookery. I chose cookery because I wasn’t any good at the others, but one of the incentives was there were 30 girls in the group – that informed my decision-making a bit. I did cookery for a couple of years at school and said to my parents, ‘I want to be a chef.’ Neither of my parents were in hospitality, so it was something completely new to them.”

In 1958 Laws had an interview for a chefs’ course at Acton Hotel School (now University of West London). The principal persuaded him to take a hotel operations course. At the end of the second year he got a job as a commis de débarrasseur at Restaurant Schutzenhaus in Switzerland.

“Victor Ceserani taught me how to cook, but also to have time for other people”



Dressed in the traditional costume to perform the sabrage ritual – opening a bottle of Champagne with a sabre

“It was a five-star restaurant and I learned a lot, including the fact that I didn’t know as much as I thought I did, so I returned to college for another year,” says Laws. “Acton, in those days, was one of the best colleges in the country and I had a great instructor in Victor Ceserani MBE, who was one of the first television chefs in the UK. He not only taught me how to cook but also, more importantly, to have time for other people.”

Leaving college in 1961, Laws went to work as a trainee manager in the 750-bed Mount Royal Hotel in Oxford Street, London. “I was there for nine months. I learned that I didn’t particularly like hotels,” he says.

Laws left and began working as assistant catering officer for the City of St Albans. This started a seven-year stint in local government that would later take him to Coventry, where he was promoted to deputy catering superintendent, managing 19 restaurants and outside catering, before he ended up running the Cliffs Pavilion, a multi-purpose entertainment centre seating nearly 1,200 people in Southend, on the Thames estuary. “At the time, offshore radio, such as Radio Caroline, was just starting out, so we used to run pop concerts for bands such as The Who on a Saturday night.”

Believing he needed more sales



“I am a shy person. However, there is a difference when you wear a ‘badge’ and organise things. I’m a team player – as long as I lead the team”

experience on his CV, Laws left in 1964, working for Associated Fisheries selling delicatessen products to hospitals, prisons and institutional establishments.

“I learned selling wasn’t for me but it was an introduction to hospitals and prisons, which was useful in later life with The Clink,” he says. “I knew I wanted to stay in catering. I loved hospitality and working with people.”

Taking flight

In 1968 Laws joined Forte as catering manager at Luton Airport when it was “a couple of tin shacks and a terminal building”. Forte won the inflight catering contract for Britannia Airways (now Thompson) kickstarting 10 years of inflight catering experience with Laws ending up director for Western Europe, based at Heathrow. “We ran catering at airports in the UK, Paris, Amsterdam and Berlin. I used to fly all over the place to see people from Alitalia and Turkish Airlines. I also went to Sudan to have a look at catering out there.”

In 1979 Laws was headhunted to join Grandmet (now Compass), where he ran their airport company with operations in the UK and Mexico. Ultimately Grandmet decided airports were “not for them” and at the same time, in 1981, Laws was headhunted to join ARA (now Aramark) to run its catering and leisure divisions, the latter of which at that time held just one contract, with Chelsea Football Club.

The first tender Laws and his team won was for Wembley Stadium, which

had been with the previous caterer, Letheby and Christopher, for 57 years.

In 1983 Laws left ARA and joined Spinneys, which was owned by the financial organisation British and Commonwealth Shipping. “At that the time [UK prime minister] Margaret Thatcher was trying to break the stranglehold the unions had on the domestic services in the NHS. We started a company using the expertise Spinneys had in the Middle East to set up a hotel services company specialising in cleaning catering and laundry services. We were ahead of our time, but Spinneys were impatient for profit and decided they would pull out of the NHS. How wrong they were as now nearly 50% of services are run by the private sector.”

Going solo

In 1986, Laws was approached by David Hutchins, who had been his managing director at Grandmet and Spinneys, to do some consulting for Kalamazoo, who were looking at computer costing systems and wanted to sell into hospitals. “David once told me, ‘If you don’t enjoy doing a job then don’t do it’. So, I started doing that and the consultancy just grew.”

Laws was instrumental in setting up what is now ISS catering services before establishing catering in hospitals for Taylorplan, subsequently taken over by Gardner Merchant (now Sodexo). “Compulsory competitive tendering (CCT) was being introduced to local government and my experience of contracting came into play. I started consulting for Surrey County Council, my first local authority (LA).”

From there, Laws worked with over 60 LAs across the UK. “I was also to become catering consultant to Mars in Western Europe and worked for many care homes. One of my most interesting jobs was to be consultant with Lansdowne Road Rugby Stadium [now Aviva] in Dublin, with another FCSI consultant from Canada,” he says.

“When I set up AVL Consultancy I did

not want to build a large organisation, as I had worked within so many companies where I was involved with re-structuring and redundancies, so I chose to work with a few selected individuals and helped to start up quite a few of our present FCSI Professional members. I still have clients who I have worked with for over 30 years and, luckily, they’re still going strong.”

Laws also moved into association management, running FCSI UK & Ireland for many years as well as LACA and ACE, where he is still the business manager. “I am basically a shy person,” he says. “However, there is a difference when you wear a ‘badge’ when you go to events or organise things. I am a team player – as long as I lead the team,” he laughs.

Leading the way for so many years led to Laws receiving the honour of an MBE in 2012 for his services to British hospitality. “I was asked if I wanted to go to Buckingham Palace or Windsor Castle to be invested. I chose Windsor as I had been to the Palace twice before. I was lucky enough to have Her Majesty to do the presentation.

That was a great weekend as on the previous Friday I had been given an honorary doctorate from the University of West London, my old college.”

While showing no sign of slowing down professionally, Laws does like to relax via a new-found love of horseracing. “Recently I have taken up shared ownership in race horses through Highclere Racing. I have been part-owner in three, so far. It’s great fun. You don’t do it to make money, although that would be nice, but the company and the atmosphere is enjoyable and so different.”

Doing something for the love of it – and trying different things – is a clear theme in Laws’ life and career. It has afforded him the chance to experience more aspects of the hospitality sector than most could imagine. Laws’ law therefore is a simple one: variety is the spice of life, so long as people are at the heart of what you do. “Nothing beats being with people,” he says. ■

GIVING BACK

There is some competition for Laws’ proudest professional achievement, but he opts for becoming president of the HCIMA (now IoH) in 1998.

“I represented them across the world. I did tours to Cyprus, where I met the Cypriot president, and to Canada, where I lectured university students. I still strongly believe in supporting our professional bodies and I am currently honorary president of the IoH in London and on the Friends Committee of the Royal Academy of Culinary Arts,” he says.

“There are always challenges out there and there are always people you can help and guide. I have gained a lot from this profession and now I want to give back and help others to be successful.”

Laws believes the most important business lesson he has learned is, “be honest with clients and customers and don’t be afraid to speak your mind. In consultancy if you don’t get on with the client then you won’t do a good job – so hand it to somebody else. Integrity and honesty are both very important to me.”



Her Majesty the Queen presenting Laws with an MBE for his services to British hospitality in 2012

Keeping it clean

With many years of experience in the warewashing business Insinger is still innovating. Amelia Levin reports on how the company is adapting its offering in the current pandemic



This industry has seen countless mergers and acquisitions over the past several years, causing manufacturers, dealers and even consulting firms to grow larger and expand by the day. Insinger Machine Co., however, has a different story to tell.

“We are one of the last-standing, family owned businesses in the foodservice equipment manufacturing industry, if not the last one,” says Ari Cantor, president of the Philadelphia-based company and the fifth-generation owner-operator.

Steeped in rich history, Insinger is highly-regarded for its warewashing and custom sheet metal fabrication capabilities, dating back to the late 1800s when Cantor’s great, great grandfather, Emil Levene, acquired the company from the Insinger family. However, for military veterans lucky enough to have enjoyed a “tour of duty” in scullery operations, they will likely know Insinger for its biggest and longest standing customer for the past ninety years: the US Department of Defense.

This year, Insinger celebrates its 127th year of continuous operation. A one-stop-shop for warewashing needs, Insinger offers a complete range of warewashing and related products: from

undercounter to flight-type dishwashers, pulping systems, tray conveyors and accumulators, automated handwashing systems, pot and pan washers, powered sinks and more.

Looking back

Although Insinger has received previous offers to go public or merge with other companies, “there are many benefits to staying independent,” Cantor says. For one, it has allowed the multi-million-dollar company to operate like a small business, with the ability to stay nimble and constantly innovate, including a pivot during the novel Covid-19 pandemic to produce two new products for stepped-up sanitisation (more on that in a bit).

But first, a history lesson.

“Our goal as a company has always been to work with the US Navy and grow alongside it, but over the years a number of restaurant chains came to Insinger in search of products and we have grown and evolved our product line with them as well.” says Cantor.

In 1893, Insinger invented one of the first commercial dishwashers, which was essentially a giant cast iron bathtub with one side for washing and the other for rinsing. It featured a mechanical wooden basket for lowering and raising ware out of the tanks and maintained heat with the

help of two open burner rings below. This semi-automated solution was deemed revolutionary in its day.

On Christmas Eve in 1935, Insinger patented the first modular stainless steel warewasher. The machine could be disassembled in sections for installation or removal. “This product was developed because the military was looking to reduce the removal of hatches and passageways on US Navy ships just to get foodservice equipment on board,” says Cantor.

The company was also called upon during outbreaks of yellow fever and polio because of its sanitising capabilities. Foodservice operations at hospitals, schools, and hotels would sanitise dirty dishes in a large tank with boiling hot water. “We’re literally coming full-circle now with the raging Covid-19 pandemic. Warewashing is a necessary evil in foodservice, and especially now, so fortunately we haven’t missed a beat lately.” says Cantor. “Given our military background, we believe in duty, honor, country, customer and nothing is more important at this moment in time.”

At just 37 years of age, Cantor could be considered quite young, not only for this industry but also for holding such a high-level leadership position. However, he is no spring chicken in business or

even in warewashing and foodservice. After earning his Bachelor of Science in business administration, management and operations from Cornell University, Cantor worked on Wall Street in investment banking and trading for Goldman Sachs and other banks before heading back home during the recession of 2008 and 2009.

He joined Insinger in 2009 and has been with the company for 11 years, starting off as a bills of material specialist and working as technical services manager, vice president of sales and chief operating officer before being promoted to president in 2014. He has been a shareholder of the company since 2012 and now is the sole shareholder, having acquired the company over time from his father, Robert Cantor, the fourth generation of owner-operator who now serves as company chairman. Cantor's performance is overseen by Insinger's executive advisory committee, which includes industry and non-industry professionals.

The same year Cantor joined his family business, a fire broke out at a neighbouring warehouse after a night security officer accidentally left a lit cigarette unattended. "That turned into a fire that you could see from Interstate 95;



Father and son Robert and Ari Cantor; Insinger's chairman and president respectively

the whole block went up in flames and we lost half our facility," says Cantor.

It took a year and a half to rebuild, but the company maintained momentum and employees continued to work in rented trailers in the parking lot and running fabrication with the help of industrial diesel generators. "The show must go on, so that's what we did," Cantor adds.

Insinger repaired the existing facility following the fire and Cantor says there are plans for a major renovation and a new campus, hopefully in the near future, in order to expand engineering and manufacturing capabilities.

The team

Going beyond Insinger's long-time emphasis on service and relationships, Cantor hopes to build on the company's ability to innovate. "Innovation is at the heart of everything we do, from our first product in 1893, through today," he says. "We were the first American warewashing manufacturer to offer a ventless door type dishwasher and later offer a ventless rack conveyor dishwasher, and we produced some of the first undercounter dishwashers in America. We patented the first stainless steel dishwasher in 1935. Now, especially in the wake of Covid-19, we are all about innovation to enhance our

manufacturing operations. We recently invested in new punch and laser cutting machines, new press brakes, new welding technologies, new finishing systems and other fabrication systems that are more automated and can talk to each other."

Cantor points to his newly developed team of veteran warewashing engineers as his ticket to faster and better innovation in the short-term and long-term future. That includes Mark Ferguson and James Calhoun, two long-time warewashing engineers and designers who spent years at Jackson Warewashing Systems in Kentucky.

A little over two years ago, Ferguson moved his family from Kentucky to Philadelphia to take the job of his dreams as director of engineering at Insinger with the freedom and flexibility to lead and execute new design projects. Ferguson, who alone holds about 10 patents for his work, has worked in commercial dishwashing for 31 years, having worked at Jackson WWS as a drafter out of college, becoming a project engineer and serving eight years as the company's research and development director. Prior to joining Insinger, he spent the last 12 years with Meiko and some time with Ecolab. Throughout his career, he has designed all types of dishwashers, from undercounter units to large-scale, flight-type pieces.

Calhoun joined Insinger as chief engineer a little over two years ago after John Stern, a former president of Insinger, recommended him to Cantor. He would have taken Ferguson's job as director of engineering, but wanted less of a management role.

At the time he was contacted, he had retired and was working on his farm (that he still maintains) in Covine, Kentucky, where he'd lived his entire life, but found himself wanting to go back to designing. He and Ferguson work closely with Cantor as a true team, meeting often, even outside of work over dinner, to discuss ideas. This "flat hierarchy" as Cantor refers to it, helps them focus >



Insinger's CX20: the industry's first 60-second ventless door type dishwasher



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“Mark and I have equal roles within the company and we strive to be innovative and lead the industry.” says Calhoun, a United States Navy veteran and former submariner who completed the Navy’s rigorous Naval Nuclear Propulsion Program and spent most of his career with Jackson WWS. “We want to get to the point where everyone is copying our designs, rather than the other way around.” Both Calhoun and Ferguson admit their experience with publicly traded companies did not allow this freedom to act quickly and nimbly for cost and other reasons. “It’s also nice to work for a company where everyone is treated like part of the family.” Calhoun adds.

Cantor reiterates this “open-door policy” at the company. “Our management is structured as a flat hierarchy, he says. “We all share ideas and work together, and personally, it’s important that all our employees feel like we have an inclusive culture. They are stakeholders in our success.”

The CX20 in 60 seconds

Most recently, prior to the pandemic, Ferguson and Calhoun were hard at work developing the industry’s first 60-second ventless door type dishwasher, the CX20. The product was unveiled at the NAFEM exhibition in February 2019 and is in full production today.

The main challenge in designing the piece, Ferguson says, was to combine the popularity of ventless technology with the power of a traditional unit. “Normally, ventless machines take a long time to operate – the typical non-ventless door type machine takes about 60 seconds, or even as little as 45-50 seconds to achieve a capacity of 70 racks per hour, but ventless units take much longer than that.” says Ferguson. “We focused on making a ventless machine capable of maintaining that 60-second cycle.”

When dishwashers take longer to



Inventing one of the world’s first commercial dishwashers, Insinger retains enduring ties with the US military (top)

operate (usually energy-saving models) they cut throughput by 45%, thereby requiring staff to work longer hours, thereby causing an increase in labour costs. Ferguson is also keen to point out that the CX20, which meets and exceeds EnergyStar 2.0, also lowers energy cost due to its speed and differentiated design.

Another efficiency aspect of the CX20 is its built-in booster tank, which saves energy and time overall. “Typically, energy is measured by testing the booster separate from and in addition to the dish machine, but our system is tested on its own and it still uses less energy than other dish machines without a booster heater.” Ferguson says. The natural insulation provided by incorporating the booster inside the hot water tank means the operator doesn’t have to buy a separate dedicated booster heater to maintain the hot water temperature.

“We didn’t stop at that, we went way overboard,” says Ferguson of the design, which is aesthetically pleasing, thanks to its clean, smooth joints and panels and full stainless-steel construction.

“We also used actuator gas springs instead of mechanical springs, which are notorious for breaking and can

TIMELINE: INSINGER MACHINE CO.

1893: The Insinger family founds the business and invents one of the first commercial dishwashers. Emil Levene acquires the company shortly after.

1935: Insinger patents the first modular stainless steel warewasher, which could be disassembled in sections for installation or removal. It proves the perfect fit for US Navy ships.

2009: Ari Cantor joins the family business, becoming president in 2014.

2019: Insinger’s CX20, the industry’s first sixty-second ventless door type dishwasher, is unveiled at NAFEM in Orlando, Florida.

2020: During the Covid-19 pandemic, Insinger pivots its business by fabricating stainless steel and aluminum chambers for sanitising N-95 masks and producing the Outpost sanitiser dispenser system.

cause injury and be extremely difficult to replace.” he says.

The team also designed a completely enclosed, waterproof, swing-out electronic control board. “In my experience most control boards can go bad, especially in humidity and heat, but you can literally dunk this new control board in water and it still works.”

Other standard features include a quad-arm wash system, eco drain overflow system, a foot-operated drain pedal, an ergo-grip door handle which provides multiple hand grip positions and allows clearance for corner installations, a vertically-mounted pump motor, a hinged dishrack support, the RackAware dishrack sensing system, a single point electrical connection, a door safety switch, multiple cycle options, low-water protection, a de-lime programme, a linear motion easy-glide door and detergent connection provisions – all standard features on the CX20 product.

As Calhoun noted, Ferguson expects, even wants, competitors to try to copy their CX20 project. “We always hold back something to continue to take the market a step further and knowing you can do better if other people try to copy >



The Outpost dispenser system, produced by Insinger during the pandemic, holds any one-gallon container of hand sanitiser

you.” says Ferguson. “If they do, we know we’re successful,” he adds, “but it’s best to always have other ideas in your back pocket.”

Quick pivots

Insinger’s long history with sanitation – even during previous pandemics – has not changed in the wake of Covid-19. Even the USNS Comfort and Mercy – US Navy hospital ships that travelled to the east coast to help New York, New Jersey and other hard-hit areas to provide additional medical resources – are customers.

It is no surprise that Cantor and his team were quick to not only want to build products for the industry, but could, given its fabrication capabilities. This is not at all unlike many companies that pivoted to provide supply chain equipment during the second World War.

Insinger began their Covid-19 support efforts by fabricating a stainless steel and aluminum sanitising chamber for another company looking to offer a product that could sanitise N-95 masks used by hospital workers so they could safely be reused. The company bought the empty chamber from Insinger and added UV-C lights inside the chamber

to kill off the virus without destroying the masks.

The second product Insinger has produced during the pandemic is called Outpost. It’s a completely enclosed, commercial grade, stainless steel hand sanitiser dispenser system that holds any one-gallon container of hand sanitiser. The product is dispensed using a foot pedal, making it completely touchless for maximum hygiene.

“It took us five weeks to design and bring that product to market.” says Ferguson. The Insinger Outpost includes a keyed lock to prevent theft or tampering, and sanitiser can be bought through Insinger or through another provider. After just a few weeks on the market, Insinger had sold about 30 of the Outposts with an order for 44 from a restaurant chain. It has pending orders for nearly 275.

Insinger most recently partnered with Meritech to produce CleanTech, an automated hand hygiene system. CleanTech operates by sensing a person’s hands when placed inside two wells and circulating and spraying sanitised water to kill nearly 99% of pathogens and germs in just 12 seconds. The unit also features a closed-loop drainage system with zero contact points. It is even available with an optional footwear sanitising system – the operator simply steps onto the platform in front of the hand washing basins. Insinger claims the product uses 75% less water than traditional hand washing in a sink.

The future

Cantor says any plans for expansion (including the renovation) are carefully thought out. “I drive a modest car and wear a cheap watch; my mentor at Goldman Sachs once told me that problems arise when you take unnecessary risks in business, forget who you are and place profit over customer interest,” he says. “I try to stay humble and grounded.”

In the short term, Cantor says the

company plans to continue developing and marketing its new line of hand hygiene and handwashing systems in partnership with FDA-approved companies. In the long term Insinger will continue to focus its efforts on its new line of ventless dishwashing systems to help customers conserve energy and labour. Cantor also plans to grow the company’s distribution and partnerships with customers overseas.

“We try to remain servant leaders and ask our customers what they’re looking for; we listen rather than speak.” he says. “Insinger has never bitten off more than it can chew, but demand for products remains strong and that’s also driven by consultants and the FCSI community, and for that we remain profusely thankful for all they have done to support us. Sanitation will be with us forever, and I imagine it will only continue to be a bigger focus in a post-pandemic world.”

Cantor points to four key factors that attribute to Insinger’s competitive edge:

1. a focus on American manufacturing and supporting American labour through vertical integration rather than off-shoring jobs.
2. the continuous modernisation of foodservice operations.
3. Insinger’s military heritage – who Insinger is at its core.
4. cleanliness – Insinger’s goal. “Those are the things we strive for each and every day,” he says.

For Insinger, Covid-19 has been both a blessing and a curse. Like most, the company witnessed the tremendous negative impact it has had on the foodservice industry and associated industries, its personnel and its customers. Conversely, as Cantor notes: “Covid-19 shone a spotlight on the importance of proper hygiene. The global pandemic has transformed warewashing from an after-thought to front and centre in the minds of every single operator – because dishwashers provide the most vital foodservice function: guest safety.”

After all, Cantor says, “Happiness is a clean dish.” In a time of pandemic, that has a resounding ring of truth. ■

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The talent pool gets deeper



Before Covid-19, negative media coverage and unrealistic expectations among young people had made it harder than ever for foodservice operators to find staff. Now there's a surplus of people wanting to work in hospitality, operators have a whole new set of staffing challenges, reports Elly Earls

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, foodservice businesses across the globe were facing a skills shortage. In the US, it was estimated that an additional 200,000 line cooks and chefs would be required by 2025. In Canada, 23,500 additional chefs would be needed between 2015 and 2035 and 9,000 of these jobs were predicted to go unfilled.

According to Deloitte, 69% of Australian hospitality businesses were suffering skills shortages, with a predicted 123,000 worker shortfall to hit the industry this year, while 70% of German restaurant owners saw the shortage of skilled staff as their biggest obstacle to staying in business. Figures released in 2019 by recruitment website Caterer.com revealed that 97% of pupils and recent school leavers in the UK had written off a career in the hospitality industry.

The picture could not look more different today. In July, D&D London received almost 1,000 applications for a position at its Manchester restaurant 20 Stories in just 24 hours. Carol Cairnes, the company's director of people, said: "The sheer number of applicants is staggering, we've never seen such a large number come through in such a short amount of time. While it means we will have the pick of an incredibly large number of highly qualified candidates, it's very sad to see how many people need employment. I would love to be able to offer them all the position, but of course that's just not possible at this time."

D&D London is not the first to experience increased demand for positions, following June's report that the number of people out of work in the UK alone had increased by 600,000. In the US, unemployment rose higher in three

months of Covid-19 than it did in two years of the Great Recession. Previously, negative coverage about working in the foodservice sector had put many people off applying for jobs in pubs and restaurants but now priorities have changed.

Clay Walker is president of San Francisco-based restaurant group Gott's Roadside and he has been in the industry 25 years. Before the pandemic, he said it had been harder to find staff than he could ever remember. Today, it's quite the opposite.

"Before the pandemic, unemployment was at an all-time low, creating a shortage of restaurant workers looking for employment because they were gainfully employed elsewhere. The pandemic has forced the closure of many restaurants, flooding the





FCSI Associate Naomi Duncan, owner of Phoenix Consultancy Services


market with a surplus of people looking for work for the first time in a long time,” he says. “The problem now is employee reliability. Employees with Covid-like symptoms must quarantine, rendering them unavailable to work for weeks at a time. Employees with children are unable to work because public schools have been closed since spring, and they need to stay home to take care of their children.”

Safety and wellbeing

Over the last couple of years, there have been more and more examples of operators in the foodservice sector improving working conditions for staff, challenging the industry norm of few perks and poor working conditions. René Redzepi of two-Michelin-starred Noma in Copenhagen, for example, announced last year he was looking at ways to grant staff members three months of paid leave after they’ve completed a certain number of years’ service, while UK-based Michelin-starred chef Paul Kitching planned to introduce a four-day week for his staff without decreasing their salaries.

Other operators, like Gott’s, showed their appreciation for staff in less extreme ways such as free meals for staff and tickets for sporting events. “Our restaurants are also well-designed and comfortable,” says Walker. “For example, we pay more for our kitchen floors to be softer on the body and we’ve invested in noise control on the ceiling, which has made a dramatic difference not only to

“Good businesses fail and contracts are lost and it’s not necessarily lack of vision or lack of creativity or financial management, it’s because the people on the ground don’t feel valued”

97% 

of pupils and recent school leavers in the UK have written off a career in the hospitality industry



the quality of dining experience, but also the quality of work experience.”

For Naomi Duncan, an FCSI Associate, who owns Phoenix Consultancy Services in the UK and is the CEO of charity Chefs in Schools, the simple fact is that if you don’t look after your people, you won’t have a business. “I’ve worked in food my whole career and 60% of what I’ve done is people and 40% is food. Good businesses fail and contracts are lost and it’s not necessarily lack of vision or lack of creativity or financial management, it’s because the people on the ground don’t feel valued,” she says.

Of course, this has come much more sharply into focus since the foodservice industry started reopening post-lockdown, with operators now responsible not only for staff members’ job satisfaction, but also their physical safety. As UK-based hospitality expert Abbie Miller of Lucky Penny Consultants stresses, the biggest issue for operators now is the safety and wellbeing of staff.

“By all accounts this disease is not going to be eradicated anytime soon and as such precautions and protective measures will need to be implemented for the foreseeable future. Working in masks, gloves and face guards is awkward, but entirely necessary to protect

staff and customers so new habits need to be formed.”

In order to protect both customers and staff, many businesses have also introduced remote ordering, QR coded menus and table service only to help minimise the amount of movement and interaction between servers and guests. While this makes sense from a practical standpoint, it also brings up new issues for operators.

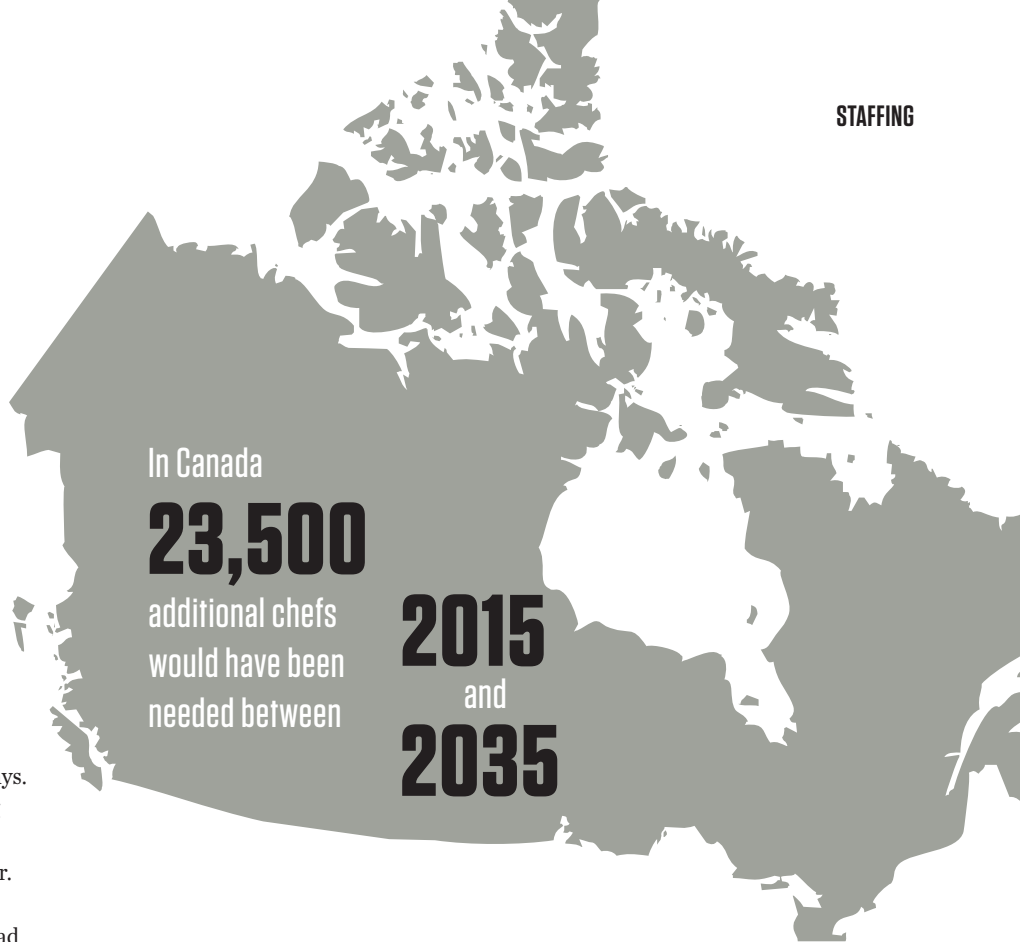
“So much of eating out is that it is an occasion; atmosphere and interaction are essential and right now the industry is still trying to find its feet in terms of still offering that experiential element of going out for a meal or for a few drinks after work,” Miller says.

She also predicts that it won't be too long before chains start going cashless, which will see cash tips for waiting staff all but disappear. “The upside of this is that it could force an improvement on the basic hourly rate. The bad is that it could massively impact the take-home pay for some of the hardest working and lowest paid in the industry,” she says.

Keep in contact

While a lot has changed on the staffing front in the last few months, Duncan's point still stands that hospitality is all about people; treating your staff fairly is the only way to thrive in this industry. For Walker, the operators who continue to provide good working conditions and treat staff fairly and ethically, will be the ones to survive this crisis.

“Hospitality breeds loyalty. Operators are



In Canada

23,500

additional chefs
would have been
needed between

2015

and

2035

only as strong as their people. At Gott's we do our best to treat our people well, who in turn treat our guests well and create memorable dining experiences,” he says.

For him, a huge part of this has always been communication, both in person and via technology. For example, the brand recently invested in a new platform by Paycom, which brings together payroll, recruitment, training and scheduling and allows employees to check their work schedule for the next week on their phone. “It makes our employees' lives easier. And we can send that communication to different groups of people. A lot of companies are not good communicators and when you don't communicate well, people get the sense that you don't care,” Walker says. “We're trying to provide the human touch as much as possible. Even if technology is involved, that's the world we live in and that's the way to reach people at any hour, whether they're online or not.”

Miller thinks communication and being empathetic to the differing needs of the team is only going to become more important in the coming months. “The impact of being quarantined, being isolated, potentially even grieving for a lost loved one, will have affected individuals differently and employers need to

9,000
of these jobs were
predicted to go
unfilled



In the US, it was estimated
that an additional

200,000

line cooks and chefs

will be needed by **2025**



“Might some staff feel forced to return to conditions that they feel are unsafe?”

companies filing bankruptcy, a significant number of businesses, especially independents, will not reopen,” he says.

“In the short-term, we are seeing a surplus of talent looking for more stable employment within the restaurant sector. Depending how long the pandemic lasts and how many restaurants close for good, some restaurant veterans may need to consider different careers, moving to a more affordable city, or both.”

Meanwhile, Miller has seen a whole variety of reactions to the coronavirus crisis from industry veterans. “For some, lockdown has been a wonderful time for them to reconnect with their passions or to find new ones. I’ve spoken to numerous chefs who have said they have fallen back in love with food and started learning new skills, which they would not have otherwise been able to do while working full time – whether this be setting up fresh pasta delivery, making sourdough bagels or doing online cook-alongs with family. There have been some really interesting innovations come out of this,” she says.

She has seen others completely re-evaluate their outlook on life. One chef she spoke to said until lockdown, he had not spent more than a week with his family in over seven years and felt intensely guilty about neglecting his children and wife for so long. “He now wants to leave kitchens and has started a plumbing course to establish a more normalised work life balance,” she says. “I’m pretty sure he will not be the only one.

“I think it is still too early to say how the market and economy will bounce back, but we are anticipating a flood of redundancies and as such any businesses taking on staff or new openings might have the most fertile skills pool to select from. But this remains to be seen.” ■

be mindful of this. Some staff will be anxious about coming back so what can they do to ease the return to work?” she asks.

At Distinctive Inns, a privately owned chain of gastro pubs with four sites in the East Midlands, UK, communication has been key to assuaging employees’ fears about returning to work. Throughout every stage of the process of readying their operation for business post Covid-19 – from the new screens between tables and in front of tills to the sanitiser stations, disposable menus and new test and trace system – staff have been kept informed. “When they all came back and saw it in practice they felt good and they were reassured,” says co-owner James Bull.

Miller wonders whether all owners will be so transparent. “Might some staff feel forced to return to conditions that they feel are unsafe and what or who can they call on to voice any concerns?” she says. “I would not be surprised to see a jump in employment mediation and calls to ACAS to jump up as a result of poor people management during this whole period.”

What does the future hold?

Walker says it’s difficult to predict what will happen once the dust has settled. “Evidenced by the number of retail and restaurant





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Growing and giving back

Flynn Dekker, CEO of Korean fried chicken chain Bonchon, tells Samantha Lande about his plans for future growth and what it takes to adapt to operate during the Covid-19 pandemic

When Jinduk Seo started making sauces in his kitchen, he never meant to create a global brand. But as he moved from experimenting at home to selling his sauces on baked chicken at a college campus in South Korea, he realised he might be on to something. So, he began to manufacture the sauces in 2002.

In 2006, he was approached by someone doing Korean fried chicken in the US who wanted to use the sauces. That was an ‘aha’ moment. He partnered with them and from there the idea took off.

He named the business Bonchon, which >

The restaurant centres around Korean fried chicken; double fried chicken (wings, drumsticks or strips) brushed with one of its signature sauces – spicy, soy or sweet crunch



means “my hometown” in Korean. Fourteen years later, Bonchon has 347 locations, with 103 in the US and the rest across the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore, Cambodia, Kuwait, Myanmar and Vietnam.

The restaurant centres around Korean fried chicken; double fried chicken (wings, drumsticks or strips) brushed with one of its signature sauces – spicy, soy or sweet crunch. The menus are complimented by other Asian-inspired specialities – such as bibimbap, Korean tacos and pork buns, although that varies by location.

All the sauces are still made in its global kitchen in South Korea, but there are no Bonchon restaurants in South Korea. This is by design. South Korea is saturated with fried chicken spots, so it made more sense to introduce the craze in places familiar with

this style of fried chicken, but not inundated with locations on every corner.

CEO Flynn Dekker joined the company about two years ago, when the business was sold to a private equity firm. He had been with a competitor, Wingstop, and was looking for a new challenge. He had always admired the food at Bonchon and called it his “best kept secret” when he took friends to the New York City location. The brand has slowly been gaining traction in popularity as the team adds more locations.

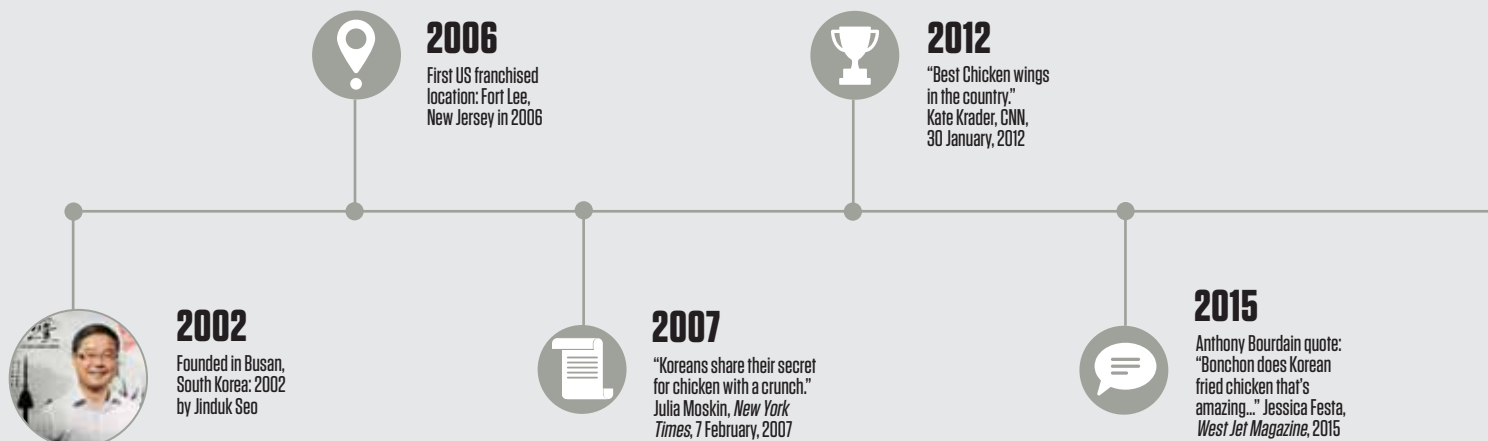
Seo is still involved as both a shareholder and board member. He serves as the chief quality officer as well. “He still has lots to say about the product and stays true to cooking method and sauces,” says Dekker.

Patchwork plan

“The original growth strategy was really patchwork,” says Dekker. “We had lots of open locations, but no real density.” Some of these locations fell in areas with Asian populations already familiar with its cuisine. Others were just because franchisees wanted to open in that particular location.

The first US location of Bonchon opened in 2006 in Fort Lee, New Jersey, which has a large South Korean ex-pat community.

There was also little consistency across the board when it came to menus. The signature Korean fried chicken was always the marquee dish, but many locations added >



“The original growth strategy was really patchwork. We had lots of open locations, but no real density”



Left: “Best kept secret”, the New York City Bonchon location



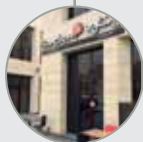
2015
Listed under: “Best Chicken Wings in NYC”
International Business News, 29 January, 2015



2018
First location in Myanmar opened in August 2018



2019
Flynn Dekker appointed CEO: April 2019



2017
First location in Kuwait opened in April 2017



2019
Named gold standard of fried chicken by *Business Insider*, September 2019



2019
100th US location, 18 December, 2019

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regional dishes to appease its customers.

The biggest inconsistencies were in design and operations. “Restaurants in the Philippines have opted for the fast-casual model, while Thailand has chosen a more upscale route,” says Dekker. The US landed somewhere in between, with most locations as quick-serve, sit-down establishments.

A more consistent approach

The next phase of growth is focused on consistency and more of a hub and spoke model versus the former, more random approach. Currently there are only two corporate owned locations in the US, with the vast majority being franchise locations. For all other countries there is a master franchise agreement with one single franchisor in each of those countries.

Dekker would like to see a few more corporate-owned locations with a smaller footprint, so the brand can start testing out different concepts over the next few years. The thought was to build a more fast-casual model across locations and, prior to Covid-19, the company was also exploring the possibility of adding ghost kitchens.

Having studied the markets, the Bonchon team has found that its food resonates across all ages and ethnicities, not just in Asian-dense populations. This information opens up many more locations for them to be successful.

Globally, the focus is currently on marketing, branding framework and signage. Back in the US, Bonchon will start to introduce new design elements and try to work on consistency across menu items.

The goal, says Dekker: “is to make sure we are presenting a consistent picture and menu and offering to all customers, so they know exactly what they can expect.”



Dealing with the pandemic

Part of the plan was always to develop carry-out and delivery, and the team had been actively looking for ways to lower costs and innovate in that space. So, when the Covid-19 pandemic forced restaurants around the world to shutter their dining rooms, Bonchon was already positioned to pivot quickly.

Deliveries are currently made through Postmates, Grubhub, DoorDash and UberEats, but the team is working on an app so that customers can order from any location through the Bonchon website, with white label delivering so it can save money across locations.

Some locations had previously embraced take-out, while others had not. But the virus changed that. “We gave a clear message – you must do this to survive,” says >

“The goal is to make sure we are presenting a consistent picture and menu offering to all customers, so they know exactly what they can expect”

In the US Bonchon is working on consistency in menu and decor

“What we’ve tried to instil in this organisation is a sense of empathy and the thought that we are all in this together”

Dekker, after which everyone jumped on the delivery and carryout bandwagon quickly.

Although many of the dining rooms remain closed or at limited capacity, the company has been able to regain pre-pandemic level sales through delivery and carryout alone.

“We focused our marketing efforts on free delivery promotions through third party delivery platforms and doubled our digital advertising,” says Dekker. It was an effort that proved to be successful.

The virus also caused the company to pause and take a look at its safety measures. Some restaurants implemented plexiglass for their carryout windows. All restaurants increased sanitation, switching to disposable menus and adding safety strips to carryout and delivery orders, so guests know their food hasn’t been tampered with.

Because it hasn’t experienced a great negative financial impact from the pandemic, giving back to those in the restaurant industry became a top priority for Bonchon. It launched a “Heart & Soles” campaign with clothing company

Threadless, creating fried chicken themed shoes, socks and masks, with 100% of the proceeds going to support the National Restaurant Association Educational Foundation (NRAEF) Restaurant Employee Relief Fund, to help others in need.

“What we’ve tried to instil in this organisation is a sense of empathy and the thought that we are all in this together,” says Dekker. “We started by making sure that everyone in corporate kept their job, we gave bonuses to corporate restaurant workers that still wanted to work and provided royalty deferrals to our franchisees.”

Future plans

The company feels fortunate to carry no debt at this time and, even in the middle of a pandemic, Bonchon is still planning to grow. Last year it grew 20% and its original goal was to do the same this year. Some of the locations were already under construction pre-Covid-19 and, if possible, will open this year – although some cities are struggling to get the proper permits.

“The situation is impacting different countries at different times,” says Dekker. “We are still pretty optimistic – it will really depend on the back half of the year.”

Bonchon is still able to import from South Korea, but is keeping a close eye on borders and potential supply chain issues.

For now, there’s a focus on redefining the brand. “We are thinking about what makes us special and what remains unique to Bonchon, says Dekker. “We’ve had lots of success and high growth, but now is the time to shape that.” That includes new technology that can be implemented across stores for carryout and delivery, new menus and new design that will help make the business be more congruent.

The growth goals remain aggressive as Bonchon plans an additional 500 locations in the US over the next seven years, but the company knows this may change. “We are realistic that this virus will determine what Bonchon will look like in the next two to three years,” says Dekker. ■

Delivery and carryout has kept the company’s revenue flowing





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Fabulous fusion on the Silk Road

Long-time foodservice consultant **Jimmy Wong** FCSI has been busy designing a collection of eco-conscious restaurants in one of Lanzhou's newest hotel openings, as he tells Amy Snelling

For a foodservice consultant, breaking into Lanzhou – the capital of China's northwestern Gansu province – wasn't easy, explains the Hong Kong-based managing director of Orange Design, Jimmy Wong FCSI. However, after spending a number of years building a presence in the area, in 2017 Wong and his team took over a project to consult on the food and beverage operations for the freshly rebranded Hyatt Regency Lanzhou.

First entering Lanzhou over a decade ago in 2008, Wong explains that back then there was, "little understanding of foodservice consultants; most hotel developers opted for kitchen equipment factories who would design spaces for free." However, as these suppliers often prioritised their own equipment sales over what necessarily worked best for the catering teams, as well as operators' long-term vision, cracks began to show.

After years of roadshows and government-organised technical exchanges in the area, Wong continues, hotels gradually came to understand the value of impartial consultants and Orange Design was tasked by Hyatt Regency Lanzhou's owner Cheng Yao to take over the project with a more holistic outlook. The brief included consulting on the design and concepts of 24-hour global eatery Market Café, regional Chinese restaurant Xiang Yue (showcasing Gansu, Guangdong and Hangzhou cuisines), and a soon-to-open luxury hotpot venue.



Jimmy Wong (above) and his team were brought in to create an 'only-in Lanzhou' dining experience







The basis of all Orange Design's projects is sustainability at every step. Fortunately this aligned with the owner's requirements of high energy conservation and durability



Creating a tourist destination

Originally opening as the Barazza Fairyland Hotel in November 2019, and now managed by the Hyatt Hotels Corporation, Hyatt Regency Lanzhou is located in the heart of the city and set on the bank of the Yellow River.

Drawing on Wong's years of expertise, Hyatt Regency Lanzhou's marketing and communications manager Luna Lu explains that the Orange team were brought in to meet "the hotel owner's extremely high catering standards" and build an only-in-Lanzhou dining experience, ensuring that the hotel could offer a premium travel experience on par to that of China's first-tier cities.

A highly collaborative venture from start to finish, with these goals in mind, "we had in-depth discussions with the hotel catering team at the beginning of the project," says Wong. For the F&B team, an important part of the food programming was to put



"The programme combines, 25% local specialities, 45% Chinese specialities and 30% dishes from all over the world, so tourists can quickly immerse themselves in a sea of delicious food"

the spotlight on local cuisine.

Thanks to its rich history and its key position on the ancient Silk Road, Lanzhou is home to a mix of ethnicities and cultures, including Islamic influences, as well as being a tourist hub with travellers accounting for over 50% of the target market (75% from other Chinese cities).

Balancing factors including halal dietary requirements and regional palates, Orange recommended integrating different types of cuisine from across the country into the menus "in order to ensure the future rate of return on catering."

After almost six months of discussions, the teams developed what Wong calls a "fusion speciality" programme. Showcasing signature dishes from the region alongside broad flavours to suit a wider range of palates. "The programme combines, 25% local specialities, 45% Chinese specialities and 30% dishes

from all over the world, so tourists can quickly immerse themselves in a sea of delicious food."

And the time investment paid off. "After opening, the hotel's foodservice operations exceeded expectations, especially the buffet, which has become a hot ticket that has to be booked a week in advance."

Thinking green

An essential factor in all of Orange Design's projects is sustainability at every step. Hyatt Regency Lanzhou was no exception. Strongly aligned with what Lu describes as Yao's requirements of "high energy conservation and durability", Wong emphasises that "the technical team's designs are made to maximise energy saving and reduce carbon emissions" – with each piece of kitchen equipment installed playing a vital role.

For example, the team installed a central Bohn cold storage unit, "which can effectively save energy >



The Orange team researched and created a custom air treatment plan to ensure residential areas of the hotel were unaffected



through frequency conversion technology. In addition, the hot water produced by the heat recovery system supplies the entire kitchen system.” Putting the savings into numbers, Wong explains: “The cold storage system alone can reduce about 20,736kg of Co2 emissions annually.” Furthermore, the refrigeration appliances are all latest models from Williams, “a brand that represents excellent performance, high efficiency and durability, [while also meeting] HACCP standards.”

As China increasingly takes drastic nationwide steps to manage and reduce its municipal solid waste, another important area of focus was the all the venues’ waste treatment systems. Kitting out the kitchens with InSinkErators, Wong adds: “Investment in this waste disposal system can cut 1,512 tonnes of kitchen waste discharge every year.” Instead waste is converted into organic fertiliser.



“The F&B outlets have high requirements for exhaust fumes, because low-altitude emissions are required. Due to the restaurants’ position in the hotel, the exhaust outlet faces residential areas, so if not managed correctly the fumes would affect the residents’ living environment”

Overcoming design challenges

By the time Orange came to the project, the structural, electrical and mechanical designs for the hotel had already been determined. Located on the second, third and fourth floors of the hotel respectively, Market Café, Xiang Yue and the hotpot restaurant required special design features.

“The F&B outlets have high requirements for exhaust fumes, because low-altitude emissions are required,” Wong explains. Due to the restaurants’ position in the hotel, “the exhaust outlet faces residential areas, so if not managed correctly the fumes would affect the residents’ living environment.”

Orange’s technical team spent a month researching and formulating an extensive exhaust air treatment plan and customising an control system for the oil fume exhaust. They adopted a “UV-C photolysis treatment to effectively deodorise

the fumes [paired with] electrostatic dust collection to collect the fine particles.” As a result, “The exhaust gas has no impact on the residents and the surrounding air is improved,” Wong says.

Despite what he calls a “relatively late” intervention to the Hyatt Regency Lanzhou project, a combination of the Orange team’s seasoned experience, as well as continued support from Yao and the Hyatt F&B team, resulted in a successful operation for all parties. Not only did Orange Design’s involvement see “the investment budget used rationally to achieve the desired vision, [the team even] exceeded the foodservice brief,” says Lu.

As for Wong? He’s proud of Orange’s achievements, concluding: “Hyatt Regency Lanzhou’s foodservice operations have become representative of the city. This is an endorsement of our team and I’m very happy.” ■

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BRIEFING

Trends and events shaping foodservice in the Asia Pacific region

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Amy Snelling looks at the steps China is taking to tackle its growing waste problem and how foodservice is affected



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Can blockchain technology guarantee food safety? Tim Smallwood FFCSI investigates its potential applications

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My kitchen: Oier Biritxinaga, corporate chef with Fagor, creates a new kitchen at every trade show



When planning a show's kitchen service Biritxinaga opts for a global cuisine that also appeals to the region





SHANGHAI SOLUTIONS

From ambitious waste sorting programmes to a nationwide push for more sustainable practices, China's mounting waste problem has soared to the top of the sustainability agenda. Amy Snelling asks what this means for the foodservice industry

As reports hit headlines of president Xi Jinping's call to cut "shameful" food waste, Shaanxi's mega Jiangcungou landfill reaching capacity two decades ahead of schedule, and rising plastic waste polluting its waters, China's growing waste crisis is in the spotlight.

Adopting a series of ambitious strategies, from stringent sorting schemes to reducing single-use plastics, waste management is at the forefront of the country's sustainability agenda. But as foodservice operators across the world grapple with waste, we explore what China's new regulations mean for the industry and how venues are pushing for a more sustainable future. >

Waste sorting 101

Home to 1.4 billion people, China is the world's second largest producer of municipal solid waste (MSW), the majority of which is food waste. It's not only the amount polluting the country – a lack of enforced sorting has also seen disproportionate amounts of waste piling up in landfills or burnt in incinerators.

Leading the waste management charge in July 2019, megacity Shanghai was the first to implement what is widely considered to be the country's most ambitious rubbish sorting laws to date. Targeting both individuals and companies, the solid waste law requires rubbish be separated into four categories – wet, dry, hazardous and recyclable – with restricted drop-off and collection times. Those who don't comply risk fines (up to 50,000RMB for companies) alongside other penalties in the form of social and tax credit rating deductions.

“The aim of the waste sorting regulations was to separate ‘wet’ (food) and ‘dry’ waste,” explains Alizée Buyschaert, the founder of Zero Waste Shanghai – a waste management consultancy that offers tailored training programmes to support F&B venues.

“Over 40% of the city's waste is incinerated every day. When burning food and dry waste together, the incineration chimneys are burning at 1,200 degrees Celsius. Remove food waste from the equation and it drops to 800 degrees Celsius, which represents a 30% decrease in energy and also has an enormous impact on air pollution. Food waste can then be turned into either compost or biogas.”

Working in conjunction with waste sorting initiatives, at the beginning of the year Beijing also set targets for the catering and restaurant industry to reduce their single-use plastic consumption by 30% by the end of 2020. The Diplomat reports – including banning plastic utensils and non-biodegradable straws. Buyschaert has noted: “More venues using recycled

“Although the trash sorting and collecting can be a bit more complicated for operations I'm happy we're doing it from a sustainability perspective”

or compostable containers with the bare plastic minimum. Even though it's still single use, and ends up in the same place – landfill, incineration or the oceans – I do believe it's a first step in the long process of sustainability that will follow.”

On the ground

Over a year into this series of state-introduced waste management campaigns, foodservice operators are feeling its impact. Sustainably minded Shanghai restaurateur Camden Hauge, who's been running neighbourhood eateries across the city for five years, notes: “Although the trash sorting and collecting can be a bit more complicated for operations – for example, our kitchens aren't designed for the quantity or size of cans, collection times are fixed and may be in the middle of service, etc. I'm happy we're doing it from a sustainability perspective. Shanghai is so vast that we stand to make a huge difference.”

Furthermore, scrutiny over waste has given venues insight into how much and what type they're creating. Managing partner of the el Willy Group, comprising restaurants el Willy, Tomatito and el Ocho in Shanghai, Koen Vessies explains: “We were already sorting as much as we could before regulations arrived,” the improved system has given “clear insight into how much plastic we were using.”

They're now able to address the problem with more informed initiatives. Overall, Vessies believes they are now seeing reduced amounts of plastic in

restaurants and supermarkets.

It's not just Shanghai and other first-tier cities where foodservice operators are embracing the push for sustainable practices. In China's southern island province of Hainan, the recently opened Sanya outpost of the luxury lifestyle hotel chain, 1 Hotel Haitang Bay has implemented waste sorting procedures for its F&B operations in line with local government regulations. Staff education across the venues is prioritised. ‘Front-and back-of-house teams are trained in garbage categorising,’ explains director of culinary Pearl Woo. Ongoing awareness of regulations is something they monitor closely. To reduce overall food waste, they put emphasis on initiatives including calculating food requirements according to covers and using fruit and vegetable trimmings for things such as stocks, juices, and garnishes.

To the west, in Sichuan province, eco-conscious hotel Six Senses Qing Cheng Mountain has been developing its waste management programme over the last few years. Alongside the usual initiatives (dividing waste, carefully calculating food preparation across its F&B outlets including the staff canteen, etc), they also “weigh the garbage every day, making records for comparison so we can easily [monitor and address] if big differences occur,” says a hotel spokesperson. Also, to keep up awareness, “a daily announcement board shows how we fare in terms of waste levels for the week, month and so on.”

Yet, despite these initiatives, Six Senses still faces challenges – one of which is a lack of consumer awareness. “Some guests take a lot of food at once to taste different flavours or for photos – the principle of take only what you can eat is yet to sink in with many.” In the long-term, they feel education will be key.

What's next?

While changes are positive, many believe China's battle with MSW is far from over. Nitin Dani, founder of Green





Initiatives, a Shanghai-based non-profit organisation raising awareness about environmental issues, agrees that a number of foodservice operators have “started embracing greener practices.” He also notes waste sorting has allowed important insights “which means more data, and thus more tools, to deal with the issue [of food waste].” However, he finds challenges persist and solutions need to dig deeper.

Within the foodservice industry, “the major culprit of single-use plastics

Above: Hotel Haitang Bay uses trimmings as garnish. Top: Some commercial kitchens use AI in the battle to cut waste

is in delivery/takeaway. This issue still hasn’t been dealt with. If we add a few drops of water to the sea the level does not rise. In the same way, some large online food takeaway companies introducing a handful of sustainable – often more expensive and not really consistently applied – packaging has barely had any effect.”

Restaurateur Hauge also believes there’s a long way to go; although “forcing vendors to add the option of ‘no cutlery’ as a default on all of the delivery apps will be a minor sea change. China’s reliance on delivery generates excess packaging.” An issue further exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, *South China Morning Post* reports the country’s already-thriving delivery services are experiencing higher demand, resulting in a deluge of plastic waste as people rely on delivery apps to avoid restaurants or shops.

Furthermore, Dani notes the influx of “food products coming from around the world [creates] more packaging, more expired products, more waste.”

For Vessies, although Tomatito sources locally where they can, the demand for foreign ingredients is one of the larger problems they and other operators face when it comes to adopting more sustainable practice. “China should start trusting their own ingredients, because many are top of their kind.”

But Covid-19 has also drawn attention to food waste – or as Dani calls it: “The pandemic that’s much less talked about.” In mid-August, Xi Jinping launched ‘operation empty plate’, calling on the public not to over-order in restaurants and cut down waste amidst food security concerns in part triggered by the virus. “Now, more and more businesses are coming forward to tackle this problem,” Dani says. “From [increasing] public awareness to smart behavioural changes, ways of reducing food waste on the customer side are all going to be important.”

With talk of additional regulations on the horizon, Zero Waste Shanghai’s



WEIGHING THE COSTS

Driven by sustainable goals and cost-saving initiatives, as foodservice operators look for new systems to help manage their kitchen waste, tech companies are increasingly stepping in. One such company, Winnow Solutions, uses AI to “automate many of the administrative tasks required to measure waste.” Its latest product Winnow Vision – equipped with a camera, smart scales and “the same machine-learning technology found in autonomous vehicles – learns to recognise different foods being thrown in the bin and calculates the financial and environment cost of this discarded food to commercial kitchens,” providing operators and kitchen teams with the insights to revise purchasing decisions.

Buysschaert also expects to see more waste reduction initiatives from venues moving forward. “In 2019, the amount of waste discarded didn’t really matter financially, but this is changing now. In the near future, [it’s expected that] companies and venues will be charged according to the amount of waste that leaves their facilities. And by then, tools to support them will either be suggested by the government, or startups will fill that need.”

While China’s battle with MSW is only beginning, increasing government-led initiatives alongside forward-thinking foodservice operators and social organisations pushing for change, should mean hope for a cleaner future. ■



FOODSERVICE CONSULTANTS SOCIETY INTERNATIONAL
EUROPE–AFRICA–MIDDLE EAST

Rescheduled to 15-18 April 2021



FCSI EAME CONFERENCE

FCSI Europe, Middle East and Africa has revealed new plans for the postponed FCSI EAME Conference, which will see delegates heading to France next year

The conference, originally slated to take part this Autumn, has now been rescheduled for 15-18 April 2021 and will take place at the Hyatt Regency Chantilly, a short distance from Paris

“Hyatt Regency Chantilly is a venue with an interesting history and a lot of space, so the team can guarantee sufficient distance, should these requirements remain,” says Elonique Dalhuisen, executive director, FCSI EAME. “Beside the conference there are a lot of possibilities for the partner programme and also for the Friday afternoon tours and the Gala Dinner. “The hotel is really great, with good restaurants a very big garden outside, great wellness facilities, among other things.”

Sustainability and Covid-19

As well as a top-quality venue, delegates can look forward to excellent speakers and content. The programme will mirror that of the Rotterdam conference in 2018 and will feature key-note speakers and masterclasses. “The main theme of the conference is sustainability and, of course, we will discuss the impact of Covid-19 on the world of food and hospitality,” explains Dalhuisen. “During our next board meeting at the end of September we will discuss the programme further, but we can promise excellent speakers.”

Recognising that this is a tough time for the industry and the conference will be organised in a suitably prudent manner. As to what Dalhuisen is most looking forward to, she is clear. “To meet all our FCSI friends and family on 15-18 April 2021, to share knowledge and to inspire in this difficult and strange time,” she concludes.



Blockchain technology's role in food safety

Security and transparency in the food chain is more important than ever.

Tim Smallwood FFCSI looks at how blockchain technology can deliver the high standards required

Blockchain can manage the traceability and transparency of the food supply chain

Food safety management systems are the backbone that holds together the internationally recognised quality standards for all stages of the food industry.

While hazard analysis and critical control point (HACCP) has become ubiquitous in the food industry and ISO 9001 in industry generally, few understand that it is the ISO 22000 family of standards that ties it all together to ensure the safety of the food that we eat.

ISO 22000-2018 standards are the framework of auditable standards for food safety management systems (FSMS) that in the first instance combine the recognised HACCP principals with elements of ISO 9001.

A key component of ISO 22000 standards is prerequisite programmes (PRPs). These are the basic conditions and activities that are necessary within individual organisations and throughout the food chain to maintain food safety. The ISO 22000 family of standards has a series of technical



specifications dedicated to maintaining prerequisite programmes to assist in controlling food safety hazards in the manufacturing, production, storage and transport processes as follows:

ISO 22001 Guidance for the application of ISO 9001 in the food and drink industry

ISO 22002 Prerequisite programmes on food safety: technical standards (TS)

ISO TS-1. Food manufacturing

ISO TS-2. Catering

ISO TS-3. Farming

ISO TS-4. Food packaging manufacturing

ISO TS-5. Transport and storage

ISO 22003 Food safety management systems: requirements for bodies providing audit certification of food safety management systems.

ISO 22004 Food Packaging Manufacturing

ISO 22005 Traceability in the feed and food chain: general principles and basic requirements for system design and implementation.

ISO 22006 Quality management

In the foodservice industry HACCP responsibility thinking generally starts at the loading dock and finishes on the customers plate

systems: guidelines for the application of ISO 9001:2008 to crop production

(ISO 22006 may not be strictly relevant to the foodservice industry)

ISO 22007 Guidance on traceability and transparency in the food chain

While all the standards – and their PRP technical standards – are interconnected, it is ISO 22002 TS-5 and 22007 – when applied to the catering industry – that is seldom considered and is even ignored in the gaining of HACCP accreditation.

In the foodservice industry HACCP responsibility generally starts at the loading dock and finishes on the customers plate. Although these days, with the advent of Deliveroo and ghost kitchens it seems the responsibility from

the caterers' food safety perspective now ends at the kitchen door.

In fact ISO 22007 requires management of the complete supply chain and therefore applies to all meal systems, including where food is distributed away from the premises where it is produced right to the customers plate: actually from farm to plate.

This means that when requiring a supplier be HACCP compliant it is not sufficient to ask for and accept their HACCP compliance accreditation document to ensure that the food or ingredients or even the service that you are receiving ensures your food is safe. It is the ISO 22000 certification that confirms the steps the supplier is taking that validates their ability to control food safety hazards and ensure that the food being supplied is fit for human consumption when it arrives on the plate.

Blockchain delivers

It is this requirement for full traceability and transparency in the food supply chain that can be effectively and

transparently managed through blockchain technology. The connection between a fully operational, farm-to-fork ISO 22000 compliant HACCP system and a blockchain distributed ledger is closer than you might think. In most HACCP systems each link (or node) in the chain will operate independently and pass on their accreditation to the next link in the chain; that will accept it as a given. The system in this case works blindly on trust that each node is doing the right thing because they have provided their HACCP certification.

There is no transparency as to how they are maintaining their compliance or if there could be individual operating conditions or changes that might not of themselves have an impact on their HACCP compliance, but might for a peculiar reason have an impact on the receiving parties' operation and compliance risk. In some cases, the impact may even be further down the supply chain than the next node.

In simple terms a blockchain is structured data that is used to represent a record of every significant transaction, event or operation in the chain.

- Information is digitally encrypted and

recorded to ensure authenticity as it cannot be tampered with.

- The records become a digital ledger which is distributed among the known approved parties (nodes) so that all data is able to be seen by all parties in real time.
- The blockchain is designed to identify parties to the chain and exclude anyone not part of the chain.

In implementing an ISO 22000 blockchain each link in the supply chain becomes a node and all the critical data provided by each node, as part of their compliance, is contained in the ledger, which is open to all participants.

Each participant is able to evaluate the impact of ledger data, data change or addition at any time, on their own HACCP compliance. This can be achieved through each node executing an

In simple terms a blockchain is structured data that is used to represent a record of every significant transaction, event or operation in the chain

algorithm that will identify the impact on their operating systems and compliance of all preceding node inputs and flag any non-compliance, risks or potential hazards that can be then managed by all parties to the supply chain.

For example, a kitchen receiving processed vegetables may pick up that a process change by their supplier means there is no secondary filtering after washing to ensure there are no bugs, potentially contaminating the produce prior to packaging. They can then ensure their own risks are managed and add the change into the blockchain ledger for the following nodes to be aware of.

In this way the requirements of ISO 22007; guidance on traceability and transparency in the food chain, can not only be maintained but also FSMS requirements of each company in the supply chain can be ensured.

ISO 22000 requires transparency in the food chain; blockchain technology can deliver it securely. ■

About the author

Tim Smallwood FFCSI is the principal of Foodservice Design Management in Victoria, Australia



DID YOU KNOW?

And finally, on the subject of standards, you may not know that ISO 7304 provides guidelines for cooking pasta to perfection and that ISO 3103 defines what makes a good cup of tea.

MY KITCHEN

Oier Biritxinaga

The corporate chef of Spanish manufacturer Fagor tells Tina Nielsen why cooking at trade shows around the world continues to excite him

I have been a corporate chef with Fagor Industrial for nearly 13 years and have travelled all over the world to trade shows. As a company we attend between 65 and 70 shows every year; I work 15 shows a year.

This year I have not travelled much due to the Covid-19 pandemic. We all had to respect the health and safety measures so we can get through this in the best way.

Beyond putting out great food and excellent service I have two requirements: I don't want anybody to get injured or hurt themselves in the kitchen and I don't want us to make anyone ill with our output.

During a trade show the booth is our home and we want to show people our equipment and what it can do. Food is

central; it doesn't matter where you are from, we all enjoy good food and company and that is what we aim to provide.

At HostMilano with the full restaurant the kitchen is divided into sections: starter, meat, fish and pastry. Delegates are able to view the kitchen where we work and food is served to the tables where our representatives meet with clients.

For a big show like that I'll have four or five cooks with me in the kitchen, there's one bartender and a team serving.

When planning the kitchen service for a show I try to think of a cuisine that is quite global, but we also want to cook food that appeals to the region. We try to cook something that shows all the different bits

of equipment. On average we serve around 400 meals per day on top of snacks.

Setting up a kitchen at a trade show is a huge logistical operation. If a show starts on a Monday I usually arrive Friday or Saturday, but it is impossible to cook before Sunday – carpenters and painters will be building the booth until then.

I have to plan around how many visitors we expect, how long the show lasts, the space for cold storage, dry storage, and so on. For shows outside Europe I work with local partners to secure quality produce, but in Europe I send ingredients in a truck from Spain 24 hours before.

This lifestyle suits me. Travelling and meeting people makes life interesting. ■

Our concepts range from the gastro bar, offering small bites and drinks, as in the Basque Country, our home region, to a full restaurant set-up.

There are elements that are hard to plan, but we can't improvise everything. There is such a lot of detail involved.

I enjoy cooking, but I couldn't spend every day in the kitchen cooking the same things.





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