

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**

**We share,
we support,
we inspire**

**We want to hear your views
feedback@foodserviceconsultant.org**

A plan for Spring



**Remko van der Graaff FCSI
Chair, FCSI Europe, Africa, Middle East**

Today I am sitting in the kitchen of my home writing this welcome letter, having just had a digital meeting with the FCSI EAME board of trustees. It was good to see and speak to each other as we shared ideas.

Each local FCSI unit chair gave a short report about the Covid-19 situation where they are. It is amazing how strong and together FCSI members are. The EAME division has organised webinars, with up to 200 participants, weekly Zoom, Teams, Skype and other digital meetings and events. The challenges the different

local units have faced have revealed big changes to how our members operate.

Restaurants, pubs, hotels and other food and beverage concepts reopened their doors to a 1.5 metre economy. We need each other in these times, more than ever. That is why I ask you to share, support and inspire each other.

To stay positive, I turn to my 'fish philosophy', whereby everyone in the team has to catch a toy fish, which is thrown at them randomly. When they receive it, they get to have their say on any topic.

I try, each day, to play this game to demonstrate that you choose your own attitude.

Meanwhile, the conference committee has been busy and I'm proud to announce that the FCSI EAME Conference 2021 will be held on 15-18 April 2021 at the Hyatt Regency Chantilly in Paris, France. The hotel, just outside the city centre, has lots of conference space and lovely gardens and is easily reachable by train, plane and car.

I hope we can all see each other in Paris. In the meantime, I wish you all the best. Take care and stay healthy.

**KEEP IN
TOUCH**

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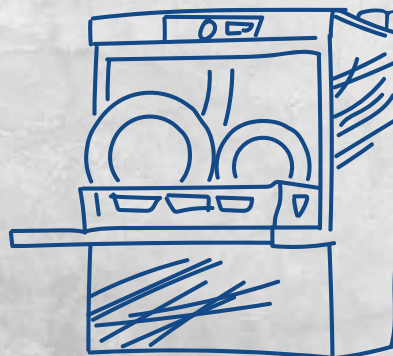
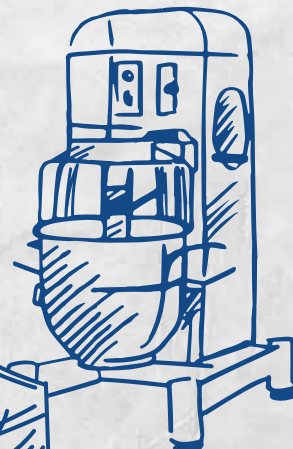
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CONTENTS

NEWS & VIEWS

3

WELCOME

From your FCSI Worldwide president and regional chair



6

ONLINE ROUNDUP

Find out about additional content on the fcsi.org website

8

AROUND THE WORLD

What's going up around the globe



10

THE INTELLIGENCE: The EAME Division

We have the hard facts and figures that show the impact of lockdown on hospitality in the EAME region. Plus, comment from The Secret Chef and we meet Des Mahon FCSI (right), MD of Authenticare in Dublin, Ireland



46

FEATURES

20 The big picture

23 Pandemic tales

Participants from different sectors of foodservice talk to Tina Nielsen about what they did to survive in the choppy waters of lockdown and the efforts they are putting in to facilitate reopening in a post-pandemic landscape

36 The FCSI interview

Vic Laws MBE FCSI has enjoyed a career that has taken him around the world and won him recognition for his services to British hospitality.

40 Company spotlight

Family-owned business Insinger Machine Co is doing what it has done for years: helping operators keep tableware clean and hygienic

12

46 No vacancies

Sadly, the closure of many foodservice outlets seems to have solved what was becoming a major headache for many operators – staff shortages

53 Operator profile

Flynn Dekker, CEO of Korean fried chicken chain Bonchon, talks about adapting and growing

60 Project

Sanktanns restaurant in Munich, a vegetarian take on South Tyrol mountain cuisine, created with help from Bettina von Massenbach FCSI

COVER STORY

29 Time of change

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



53

66 Sustainable bargain

Too good to go: an app helping foodservice businesses eliminate food waste. Its goal is to "inspire people and create a whole movement against food waste"

66



BRIEFING

72

Get back

Using marketing to regain customers' trust and tempt them back to dine

75

Around the block

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

78

Consultancy focus

Flatow & Drews Consulting; a technical foodservice consultancy

82

My kitchen

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



72



78

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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:

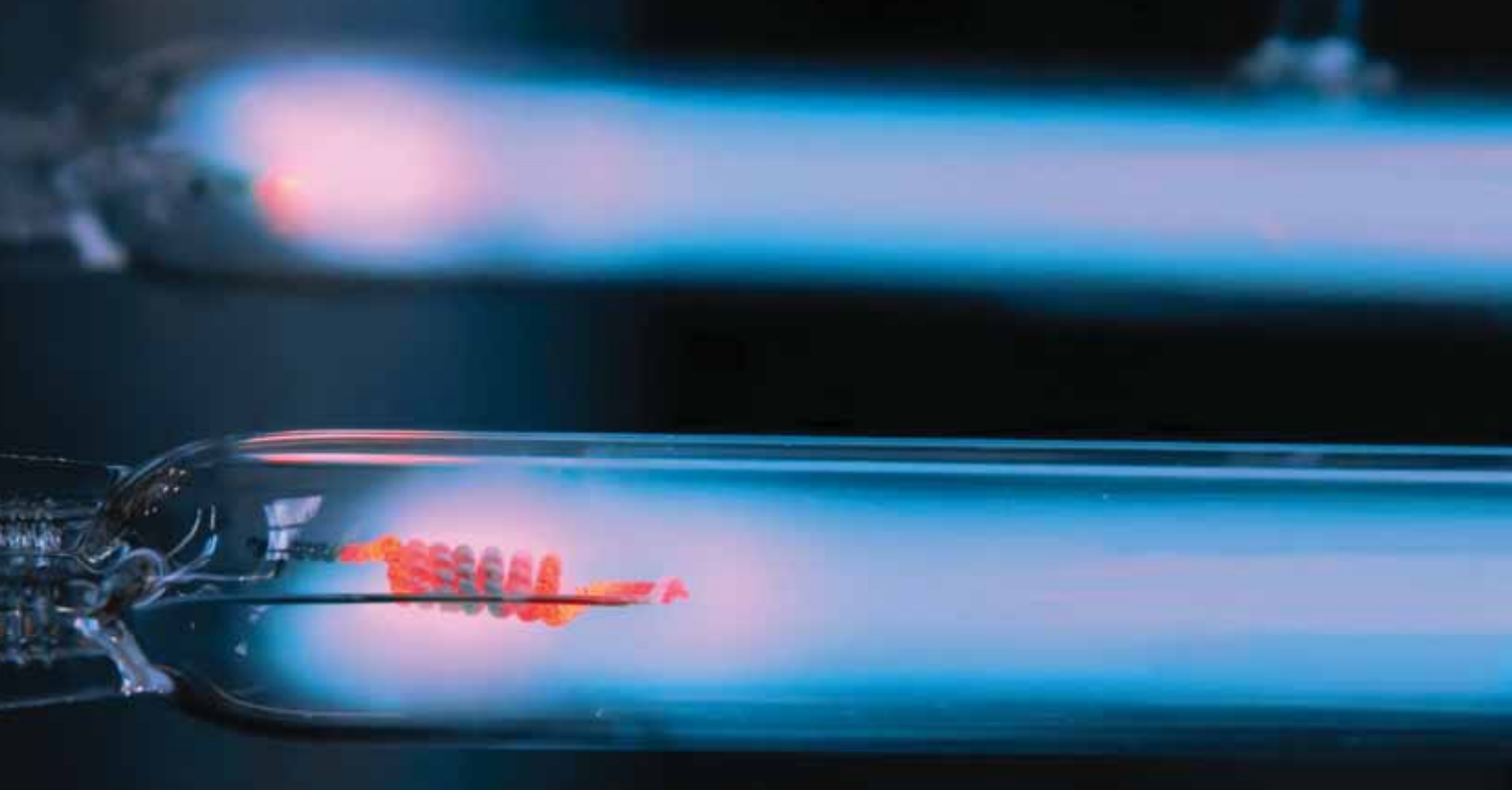
● FCSI's successful 'In My View' series of Professional member video interviews continues, with Brett Daniel

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.

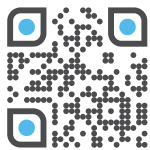
● The launch of FCSI's Sustainability Lowdown podcast, the first two episodes supported by Meiko, will tackle food waste and energy efficiency. Plus, a wide range of new videos and audio podcasts – featuring Professional member consultants, hospitality owners and professionals and manufacturers – will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



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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.

AFTERSHOCKS OF THE PANDEMIC

Liz Cooley looks at the impact of lockdown and continued Covid-19 precautions on hospitality in the EAME region

International tourist arrivals in Europe fell by

99%

in May, down from over 60 million people in 2019



Rabobank predicted a loss of between

51% - 77%

of expected revenue for foodservice operators across Europe, with Spain and Italy the worst affected countries



In the UK, the hospitality sector saw losses of

£30bn

between April and June 2020





95%

reported actual fall in
revenue across the region

1/2

of restaurants
in Dubai expected to
remain closed

Countries across Europe, Africa and the Middle East are beginning to ease restrictions after months of lockdown, even encouraging people to travel, both domestically and abroad. But the consequences of business closures, travel bans and falling consumer confidence over the last few months are likely to be felt for years to come.

Sector shutdown

Travel and tourism plummeted in the first half of the year, as the virus spread and millions of holidaymakers were forced to cancel their plans.

International tourist arrivals in Europe fell by 99% in May, down from over 60 million people in 2019, according to figures from the World Tourism Organization, while the number of flights operated by carriers in Africa and the Middle East was down 70% as of July, according to the International Air Transport Association.

Hotels were generally forced to close their doors to all but essential workers and long-term residents at the height of the crisis and restaurants, bars, clubs and other hospitality venues were also subject to widespread closures.

Impact on revenue

Unsurprisingly, the financial impact of these closures has had a devastating effect on foodservice.

In March, banking and financial services company Rabobank predicted a loss of between 51% and 77% of expected revenue for foodservice operators across Europe, with Spain and Italy the worst affected countries. Data collected by industry analyst Kerry, published in May, suggested revenues had in fact fallen by 95% across the region.

This resulted in many foodservice

“We are already seeing the Eat Out to Help Out scheme have a positive effect. It seems to have helped persuade customers to venture out into venues to enjoy themselves”

operators having to close their doors for good. The HORECA federation, which represents the Belgian hospitality industry, has predicted up to 30% of restaurants will never reopen. And it's a familiar story. Gates Hospitality founder and CEO Naim Maadad in the United Arab Emirates believes that 50% of Dubai's restaurants will remain closed due to coronavirus.

In the UK, the hospitality sector saw losses of £30bn between April and June when compared with 2019 figures, according to UKHospitality, with one in four restaurants expected to fold.

“The pandemic has been disastrous for the sector. We have already seen businesses fail and people have lost their jobs and, realistically, we are likely to see more,” says Kate Nicholls, CEO of UKHospitality.

The UK government launched the Eat Out to Help Out scheme, to encourage customers back into restaurants and protect jobs by offering a 50% discount of up to £10 per person in participating establishments.

“Being able to get customers in through the doors is crucial,” says Nicholls. “We are already seeing the Eat Out to Help Out scheme have a positive effect. It seems to have helped persuade customers to venture out into venues to enjoy themselves. Boosting consumer confidence is a big part in the battle ahead and this scheme seems to be helping.” ■

IN MY VIEW

Offer to serve, not to sell

Des Mahon FCSI, managing director of Authenticate in Dublin, Ireland, speaks to Michael Jones about becoming a trusted advisor in the foodservice sector

As managing director of **Authenticate** I specialise in procurement and contract management for catering services in Ireland. What I love about the foodservice sector is that it's unpredictable. All I can expect from a working day is that it will be different from the last, and that no two contracts or clients will be the same.

As a child, I wanted to be a teacher – the main attraction being the summer holidays. I eventually ended up working as head of sales for the largest contract caterer in Ireland. While I was there, I saw a gap in the market to move to the 'dark side' of foodservice consultancy. It was 10 years ago that I made the jump, and I haven't looked back since.

For me, being a member of FCSI means I'm excited to engage with my peers, accessing and sharing best practice and growing our network of contacts internationally.

The coronavirus pandemic hasn't left the food sector without its challenges: rebuilding and reimagining business models for a post-Covid world is a top priority right now. We need to pivot to survive before we can begin to thrive, and clients and contractors need to be open and transparent with each other. We need to work collectively to adjust to the "new normal" – whatever that may be.

If there's anything I've learned in my career, it's that you should offer to serve, not to sell. In the commercially focused, highly competitive and demanding foodservice sector, clients need you to be a trusted advisor – the hard sell does not work.

Across my career, I've learned from everyone I've worked with. I was influenced just as much by the guys I washed pots with in the 1990s in the hot basement kitchen of a New York City nursing home, as by some of the foodservice leaders I do business with today. What they taught me was the importance of treating people with respect, whatever position they hold, and of keeping that sense of humour close by.

I tend to relax by spending quiet time with my family, usually going for a walk or for a game of golf – sometimes simultaneously. ■

"I'm excited to engage with my peers, accessing and sharing best practice and growing our network of contacts internationally"





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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**
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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

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. >

“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”



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."

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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.”

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



Insinger's new headquarters will showcase the manufacturer's commitment to innovation

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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on constantly innovating without the impediments of bureaucracy.

“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

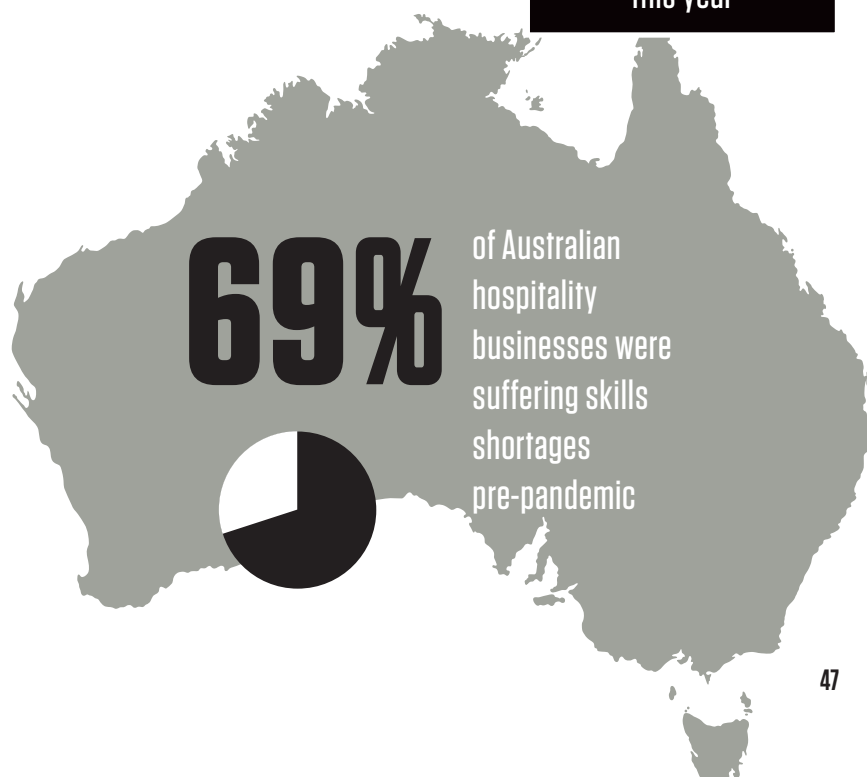
months of Covid-19 than it did in two years of the Great Recession. Previously, negative coverage about working in the foodservice sector had put many people off applying for jobs in pubs and restaurants but now priorities have changed.

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

Before Covid-19,
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123,000

worker shortfall
to hit the industry
this year





FCSI Associate Naomi Duncan, owner of Phoenix Consultancy Services

“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”

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

97% 

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

70%

of German restaurant owners saw the shortage of skilled staff as their biggest obstacle to staying in business



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

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“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 specialties – 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.

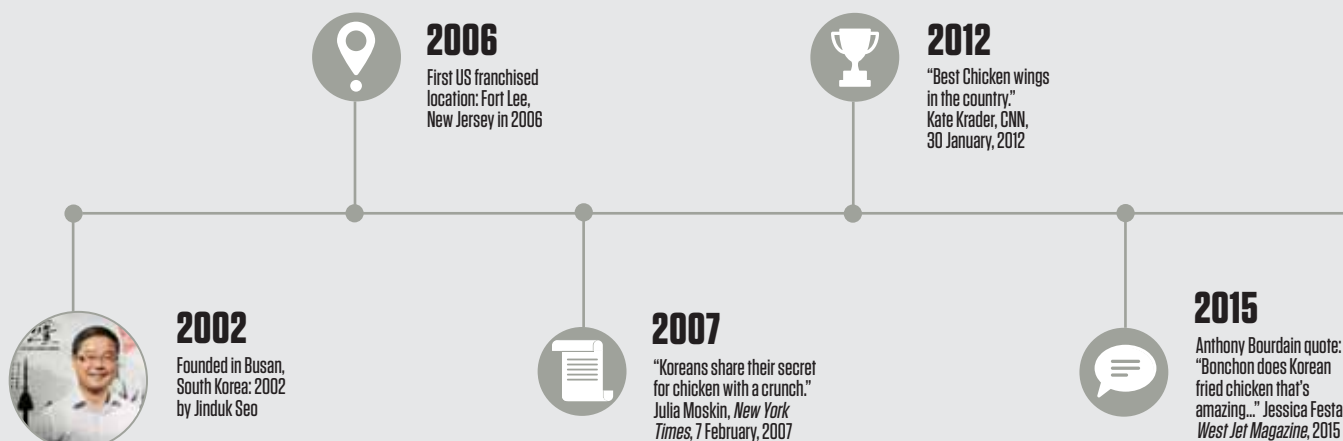
Seo is still involved as both a shareholder and board member. He serves as the chief quality officer as well. “He still has lots to say about the product and stays true to cooking method and sauces,” says Dekker.

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



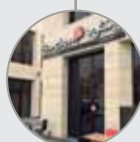
2018

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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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.



Refreshing mountain flavours

The new Sanktannas alpine eatery brings a taste of South Tyrol to the heart of Munich. Offering a modern take on traditional dumplings from the Dolomites, it has proven a new venture can succeed in the most challenging of circumstances, reports Jim Banks

Munich is a city with a myriad of dining options. Traditional Bavarian beer gardens sit alongside restaurants with international flavour, where any type of cuisine you can think of is available, and where vegan and vegetarian food are more and more common.

In the heart of the city lies Gärtnerplatz, an area known for its trendy bars and restaurants, as well as the elegant Staatstheater, which hosts orchestras and opera companies. Around the ornate fountain at its centre, Gärtnerplatz always has a lively, but relaxed, atmosphere that attracts all kinds of people. It is the perfect place for Sanktannas, a new restaurant that promises 'für jemand etwas' – something for everyone.

Balas in Bavaria

On offer at Sanktannas is a tempting array of balas – a new take on the traditional dumpling, or knödel, from the valleys of the Dolomites. Knödel are often made with beef or liver, but Sanktannas is a vegetarian restaurant so the balas are made with mountain cheese, turmeric,

herbs, beetroot, spinach and a range of other natural ingredients.

"It is a new interpretation of the knödel with new flavours, new ingredients, new sauces," says Bettina von Massenbach FCSI, owner of Oyster Hospitality Management and an experienced hotel and restaurant consultant who helped to design and create the restaurant. "The dishes look great and have very interesting flavours and colours."

Balas can be customised to the taste of individual customers, who can choose their own combinations of fillings and sauces. They can be served with a garnish for diners eating in the calm and airy dining area or taken away in a Bala-Box. They can be presented in the traditional way or in the form of a burger.

Made with products from alpine farming and artisanal manufacturing processes, using no artificial ingredients, balas embody much of the character of the region of South Tyrol, the region that Theodor Falser, who designed the food concept for Sanktannas, calls home.

Based in Italy, Falser is chef de cuisine at Hotel Engel, a gourmet resort and spa in Welschnofen. He is the



The restaurant promises "something for everyone" and the food is sourced from alpine farms and artisanal producers



Theodor Falser wanted to ensure that although the concept was fast-casual, the customers could eat well and healthily

“I had carte blanche to do what I wanted. This is the first project I have done with investors who are not from the hospitality industry. Investors are usually focused primarily on the design, but we were fully focused on the needs of the customer”

recipient of a Michelin star for the hotel's Johannesstube gourmet restaurant.

"I love the clear skies here, the clean water, the fresh air," he says. "We are at the crossroads between Italian food and Austrian food. Here, one of the most traditional dishes is schlutzkrappen, which is like ravioli filled with spinach and local cheese, cooked with browned butter and chives. It really reflects our culture."

Complete control

Falser has opened 29 restaurants around the world in places as diverse as Rome and Shanghai. In every venture, he has shown his passion for natural, healthy food, which appealed to the backers of Sanktannas. On seeing the plans for the restaurant, he knew they shared his vision.

"This is my first fast-casual restaurant and I wanted to make sure people could eat well and healthily," he explains. "We don't use any chemicals, colouring or preservatives and we pay the farmers well for their produce. We work with small independent suppliers – local where possible – and we think about our impact on the environment. We are showing

that you can do everything right and still make money."

Falser was given complete control of all elements of food production – concept, sourcing, training of chefs and the design of the kitchen.

"I had carte blanche to do what I wanted," he says. "This is the first project I have done with investors who are not from the hospitality industry. Investors are usually focused primarily on the design, but we were fully focused on the needs of the customer."

When it came to the kitchen, Falser took the reins, knowing that with an ambitious concept that required fast output from a small space there would be no room for mistakes. To get the design exactly right, the entire kitchen was mocked up in wood. Every element was then put together in different combinations until the right workflow and use of space was achieved.

Falser met von Massenbach at the 2018 FCSI EAME conference in Rotterdam, and the two quickly struck up an enduring friendship. When he became involved in Sanktannas he urged the owners to involve



The restaurant reflects the food of the South Tyrol – at the junction between Italian and Austrian cuisine



“It is a totally original interpretation of a traditional concept, so we created a space that was cosy, but in a modern way. It is very light, relaxing and welcoming”



Above: Bettina von Massenbach FCSI brought her local knowledge and enthusiasm to the project

von Massenbach, who ended up playing a key role in its successful launch.

“It would have been very difficult without Bettina,” says Falser. “I recommended her because we needed someone who knows Munich, who lives there and who understands the city. Bettina is very eager and she has helped to make Sanktannas very successful.”

Once on board, von Massenbach played a central role in putting together the team that would make the vision of Sanktannas a reality, handling recruitment, rotas and payment. She was also in control of compliance with all of the Covid-related regulations concerning hygiene, licensing and the training of staff.

“It is a totally original interpretation of a traditional concept, so we created a space that was cosy but in a modern way,” she explains. “It is very light, relaxing and welcoming. The culture of South Tyrol is all about welcoming and warm-hearted hospitality, so Sanktannas is all about spoiling our guests.”

Finding its home

The story of Sanktannas is one of success in challenging circumstances. The restaurant opened in early July, with Covid-19 restrictions fully in place in Munich, and with the foodservice industry trying to recover from a pandemic that none could have predicted. Its success is due in no small part to the dynamic between the chef and the consultant.

“I loved working with Theo, he is very laid back but he knows exactly what he is doing,” says von Massenbach. “He helped in any way he could. He has seen a lot of things and he has tasted many flavours from around the world, and he is always interested in doing something new.”

“The restaurant business is recovering here in Germany,” she says. “People are dining out again and Sanktannas has been very successful since it launched.”

Sanktannas proves that with passion behind it, a novel concept can find its home even when the industry is under unprecedented pressure. ■



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A SUSTAINABLE BARGAIN



The team behind the Too Good To Go app have pioneered a new approach to help the foodservice sector combat food waste. CEO Mette Lykke tells Andrea Tolu why it works and how the Covid-19 pandemic has affected the way it operates

During the lockdowns imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, food waste stopped being a problem for the foodservice sector, for the worst possible reason: closed kitchens have no food and therefore no surplus either.

Now that restrictions have lifted across Europe, and many commercial kitchens are reopening, the issue is likely to return, albeit with an important difference: the pressure to avoid useless costs (and no cost is more useless than wasted food) will be even stronger.

Too Good To Go is an app that helps foodservice businesses eliminate the problem of wasting unsold food by selling it on to others. On its platform, restaurants, hotels, bakeries, grocery stores and supermarkets can make food packs available at a discounted price, which is usually half or one third of the original value. Customers buy them through the app and go to the store to collect them.

For food businesses, it's a way to generate revenue from food that would otherwise be thrown away. It can also work as an additional channel to find potential new customers, by showing them

an active effort towards sustainability as well as developing relationships.

Too Good To Go was founded in Denmark in 2015 and has grown exponentially in the last five years. Not only are people downloading the app at a more rapid pace, they also buy more meals. In February 2018, about 261,000 new users downloaded the app and saved 1.2 meals on average. In February 2020, just before the pandemic hit, 1.3 million new users joined and each one bought almost two meals on average. Partnering stores are following a very similar progression.

As of today, the app has 22.4 million users in 15 countries (14 in Europe, plus the United States), partners with more than 47,000 establishments, and has saved almost 40 million meals.

A different kind of ROI

Such impressive growth, however, is only part of the reason why Too Good To Go exists. Its goal is to “inspire people and create a whole movement against food waste.” Consistent with its ambition, the company is part of several initiatives to raise awareness about this global issue.

One of these initiatives aims to end the confusion between ‘best before’, ‘use by,’ and ‘sell by’ dates, which is estimated to cause about nine million tonnes of food waste every year in the EU. >



Food packs are sold at discounted prices via the Too Good To Go app



The contents of each pack is unknown, so a desire to save edible food from being wasted is key

“Our initiatives help change mindsets and inspire people to think differently. Everything we do is part of the same movement against food waste”



“We have been working with some of the biggest food producers to improve date labelling and make it clearer that ‘best before’ often really means ‘good after’,” says CEO Mette Lykke.

Another example is a campaign launched in Spain, called Chefs contra el desperdicio (Chefs against waste), where 10 famous chefs share their anti-food-waste recipes and explain why it is important to use as much food as possible in professional kitchens.

For Lykke, business growth and higher social goals are really two sides of the same coin. “There are great synergies between the two. Every meal we save is a win from both a commercial and a mission perspective,” she says.

“We’ve also found that what we do outside of the marketplace helps drive the marketplace as well. Some of our initiatives don’t have the traditional return on investment, so we cannot measure exactly what we get out of them. But they do help change mindsets and inspire people to think differently. Everything we do is part of the same movement against food waste.”

When it comes to expanding into a new country, however, finding a minimum level of awareness about environmental issues in its population is an important factor.

“We have a framework with 35 different criteria. Some of the bigger themes are around the eating culture and mindset towards sustainability and

climate change,” says Lykke. “Surprisingly, there are very few differences. No two countries are the same, but we don’t have to tweak our model a lot between them. Everywhere we operate we have seen a rise of the food waste agenda, which we have probably also helped speed up.”

An anti-food-waste mindset is important because Too Good To Go is much more than a place to find meals at cheap prices. When users buy a food pack through the app, it is not possible to know in advance what it will contain. This is, of course, inevitable, as the stores themselves will not know what food is left until the last minute. But this is an element of surprise we are not necessarily used to when it comes to buying food – rather, freedom of choice is the norm. So, the discount alone would probably not be enough of a reason to give up that choice. There also has to be the desire to save perfectly edible food from being wasted.

“Everywhere we operate we have seen a rise of the food waste agenda, which we’ve probably also helped speed up”

A shock to the system

Lockdown restrictions had little direct impact on Too Good To Go’s operations, thanks to its logistics based on proximity. Delivery is not part of its business model: food bags have to be collected directly at the store.

The indirect impact, however, was significant. With numerous establishments closed and people confined to their homes, user growth and platform activity slowed down considerably.

“We saw a big decline, especially in the restaurant and hotel segments. Bakeries have been holding up a lot better, because they have been allowed to stay open,” explains Lykke. “To some extent, the supply >



Too Good To Go is much more than a place to find meals at cheap prices

and demand sides go hand in hand, so when there's less activity on the platform we also have fewer new users per day. But as the countries have opened up again, they're both growing very rapidly."

While it put the battle against food waste temporarily on hold, Too Good To Go made the platform available for takeaway orders. The initiative, called Takeaway to Give Back, was non-profit (the app only charged enough fees to cover the costs) and helped restaurants in 10 European countries sell 25,000 meals.

In fact, for Too Good To Go, the pandemic was an opportunity to expand its marketplace to food producers. "We had a cheese factory, a meat factory and other companies reaching out to us because all the regular customers in the food service business were no longer buying what they had already produced. We helped save tonnes of cheese and meat and chocolate and other foods for some of these companies. With a big enough user base, we can move pretty big quantities in a short period of time," says Lykke.

This type of request from manufacturers is very much in line with the serious impact of the pandemic on the food system. "If you want to keep food waste down you need high predictability. But what we saw was that all of the predictability across the supply chain was basically destroyed. When all these shocks started hitting the system, a lot of additional food was wasted," Lykke explains.

"A lot of the companies working with food suddenly weren't able to sell it. Farmers could no longer get workers in across the border for harvesting and had to let produce rot on the fields;



supermarkets went from extreme to very low demand after the hoarding phase passed; and the hospitality industry was left with all the food it already had in stock."

"That was an eye opener. We could see how our supply chains are maybe not as resilient as we thought they were. I think that the pictures of completely empty shelves in supermarkets are going to stick with us for a long time."

The next normal

For Lykke, the effects of the crisis on the foodservice sector will still be felt for some time to come. "We expect to see a lot of deals in this space, with one chain buying another and new investors coming in," she explains. "Restaurants and food stores that were already struggling before Covid-19 – at least some of them – are probably not going to make it. The fine dining segment will probably take the biggest hit, less so the coffee shops and the bakeries that we primarily work with."

On the consumer side, once health and safety concerns take a step back, sustainability will be a priority again. "Even more than before, consumers are demanding sustainability from the whole sector, so the issue of food waste will be even higher on their agenda. Also, with a lot of stores under pressure financially, it also makes good sense not to throw away your resources, but to make the most of them," says Lykke. ■

"Consumers are demanding sustainability from the whole sector, so the issue of food waste will be even higher on their agenda"



Top right: Too Good To Go's CEO Mette Lykke
Bottom left: awareness of environmental issues has increased consumer appetite for sustainable practices

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BRIEFING

Trends and events shaping foodservice in the EAME region

THIS ISSUE

72

Bringing customers back to dine

75

Tim Smallwood FFCSI looks at blockchain for food security



78

Consultancy focus: Flatow & Drews Consulting

82

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



WELCOME BACK

Restaurants across the region have opened their doors over the last few months, yet consumers are cautious about eating out. Tina Nielsen considers how marketing can help operators bring back diners





Although it's hardly a return to business as usual – dining rooms feature fewer tables, greater distance between people and more focus on sanitation – restaurants are reopening.

Customers, however, remain uncertain about a return to the dining room. Hesitation about re-entering a restaurant is understandable. So, what can operators do to help clients feel safe when returning to the restaurants?

Patricia Mateo, managing director of Madrid-based marketing agency Mateo & Co, works with Spain's top chefs and she has helped clients to rebuild that trust and confidence with diners.

One of her observations is that the restaurants that have maintained contact with their community of regular diners have strengthened that relationship and loyalty and once they reopened their doors those clients were quick to return.

"When we talk about community we are referring to the database that the restaurants hold," she explains. "Those who had an active database, knew who their clients were and where they came from and understood perfectly what menu items were the most successful in building their brand in the first place."

Activities that build the relationship with clients include sending emails to regulars, telling them what the kitchen are working on during the shutdown.

"State what you are doing to create a safe environment, create clear messages that allow consumers to trust you and get to know what you stand for"



"Some sent clients the Spotify playlist from the dining room or the recipes for the popular dishes allowing customers to cook them at home while the restaurant is closed," says Mateo.

Open communication is the key, according to **Mark Dempsey**, consulting director – foodservice, at Globaldata. "State what you are doing to create a safe environment, create clear messages that allow consumers to trust you and get to know what you stand for," he says.

Mateo adds that social media will be crucial in this process. "Social media channels become even more important, show how you keep staff and customers safe and post photos; operators can show processes from the kitchen – how food is prepared and how staff are dressed to protect everybody from the virus," she says.

She also suggests operators tweak the menu. "Make it shorter and make sure everything is served in individual portions," she explains. Minimum contact points are vital too. "Use contactless payment systems, spread out the tables and ensure staff are wearing PPE and hand sanitiser is plentiful."

Though it is hard to imagine, there will be a world after the pandemic and it makes sense for operators to consider the longer term. "Safety and a risk-free environment will be critical in the short-term, ie the next 6-9 months, to allow consumers to get back into the habit of foodservice and to allow the return of those great foodservice experiences that we all love to enjoy," says Dempsey. "But operators must not lose sight of the trends that were driving growth prior to the pandemic, including artisan/craft food and beverages, increased prevalence of ethnic ingredients and inspirations, and healthy indulgence." ■

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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 many not know that ISO 7304 provides guidelines for cooking pasta to perfection and that ISO 3103 defines what makes a good cup of tea.



Embracing the opportunities

Michael Flatow FCSI's big break came in 1992 when he consulted on a mega project in newly unified Berlin. Since then, his business has gone from strength to strength, but the road hasn't always been smooth, he tells Elly Earls

Flatow & Drews Consulting is a Germany-based technical foodservice consultancy built on its team's decades of experience in engineering and turnkey installations of kitchen and laundry projects. Its international clients range from high profile hotel chains, including Marriott, Hilton and Hyatt, to airline catering providers and corporate cafeterias.

It all started when co-founder Michael Flatow FCSI was at university in Berlin. While studying industrial engineering, he opened two restaurants and a bar in what, at the time, was West Berlin, getting a taste of what it looked like to run a foodservice business – from the cooking to the finances. Upon graduating in 1977, he decided to combine this experience with his engineering degree and took a job with renowned German kitchen and laundry contractor



Silber Herthel, which counted Grosvenor House in London among its clients.

Five years down the line, the owner of Silber Herthel sold the company and founded a new one, KEP Servotel, which Flatow took over in 1985 as managing partner. It was there he gained much of the experience that would later prove crucial to the success of Flatow & Drews Consulting.

Fast forward to 1992. The Berlin Wall had not long come down and big developments had started popping up all around the newly unified capital. Flatow was enlisted to take over the design work for one of these, Potsdamer Platz, a mega project that was to feature a Grand Hyatt, a Marriott, a Ritz Carlton, a casino and a theatre.

“We were lucky, perhaps,” he recalls. “It all started from the Potsdamer Platz. It’s there we learned the guidelines of certain major hotel chains. Due to our

Above left: The Clock Tower development, Makkah, Saudi Arabia.
Above: SIXTY restaurant in Moscow

references there, we then had contacts with international hotel chains and were recommended to other projects.”

These included high-profile hotel projects both in Germany and further afield. Flatow & Drews Consulting was founded in 2002, and their next mega project came in 2013, when they were appointed as foodservice and laundry consultant for the Clock Tower development in Saudi Arabia, which included a Raffles, a Fairmont and a Swissotel, among several other hotels.

Currently, the consultancy is working on three projects on the Canary Islands, The Address Hotel in Istanbul and a new project planned to accommodate more pilgrims in the Saudi holy city of Makkah (the transliteration the Saudi government use for what we previously

called Mecca), which will include two developments, Jabal Al Kaaba, a four-star hotel consisting of three towers, and Kaaki Land, a three-star property made up of five buildings.

Common requests

According to Flatow, his consultancy’s engineering expertise – most of the team are engineering graduates – and their more than 30 years of experience in turnkey kitchen projects set them apart from the competition. “We are very well set up in the value engineering phase and clearly everybody wants to save a little bit of money. We can give them alternative proposals to the norm,” he says. “Due to

“It all started from the Potsdamer Platz. It’s there we learned the guidelines of certain major hotel chains. Due to our references there, we then had contacts with international hotel chains and were recommended to other projects”

our engineering background, we are also very proficient when it comes to coordinating with mechanical, electrical and plumbing (MEP) consultants. We’re able to deliver special documents to them so sites can be prepared exactly according to clients’ demands.”

The consultancy is often asked to set up world-class catering operations in expensive cities such as London, Paris and Rome, which, due to space constraints, must frequently be located in the basement. “The ground floor in these hotels has to be used as outlets – shops and restaurants – so the back of house has to go downstairs, which presents problems because, according to work safety issues, these kitchens must have daylight. There are many challenges to meet,” Flatow says.

Waste is another issue that needs additional consideration when kitchens are located underground. Flatow & Drews >

Consulting generally addresses this by installing state-of-the-art waste disposal concepts, capable of pumping waste from below ground directly to disposal trucks.

Other common focus areas of hotel clients include smart energy and ventilation systems, which automatically switch on and off when needed, and back of house labour savings.

Flatow & Drews Consulting's team is well able to cope with these requests. It's made up of a project manager who previously worked for Lufthansa airline catering, where hygiene was a top priority, an engineer who specialises in total waste management concepts, an AutoCAD specialist and an FCSI-

“With the success of the hospitality industry related to the volume of international travel, projects have been put on hold. There's also hesitation from hotel developers and investors around setting up new projects”

accredited contractor based in Turkey, who is responsible for coordinating the Makkah projects.

Of course, building strong relationships with the other freelancers and contractors involved in projects is part and parcel of success as a foodservice consultancy. Flatow says the most important collaborations are with MEP consultants, interior designers and architects, largely thanks to the growing popularity of show kitchens.

“Say a show kitchen has a metal work counter with a granite top and the kitchen equipment will be dropped into this granite top – we have to coordinate with the engineer and interior designer about how to combine them,” he explains. “Many hotel chains also want open-fire grill systems so the guests can see the flames – these require special ventilation systems, which need to be coordinated with the MEP contractors.”



Flatow Drews' consultants can seamlessly collaborate with chefs to interior designers and MEP consultants

Staying agile

It hasn't been all smooth sailing for Flatow & Drews Consulting over the decades. The 2008 global recession led to a sharp decline in investment in foodservice, political unrest in countries such as Syria has cut certain contracts short and now, of course, the world is dealing with Covid-19.

“With the success of the hospitality industry related to the volume of international travel, projects have been put on hold,” Flatow says. “There is also hesitation from hotel developers and investors around setting up new projects. Plus, we have had to change the way we work to incorporate more home office and video conferencing and less travelling.”

Flatow & Drews Consulting has managed to weather these various storms by being agile and adapting to the situation. “For example, we tend to focus



KEY PROJECTS

Mega project: Potsdamer Platz Berlin, Germany

- Grand Hyatt Hotel
- Marriott Hotel
- Casino
- Stella Musical Theater/ Theater am Potsdamer Platz
- The Ritz Carlton Hotel



Mega project: Mecca, KSA

- Fairmont Makkah Clock Royal Tower
- Raffles Makkah Palace
- Swissôtel Makkah
- Abraj Al Bait Mall Makkah
- Holiday Inn Makkah Al Aziziah
- Sheraton Makkah Jabal Al Kaaba (ongoing)
- Anjum Hotel

a bit more on Europe now because it's a politically, safer area," Flatow says. An exception would be Saudi Arabia, where tourism is a high priority at present.

"They're interested in getting tourists to come and visit their country as they want to become less dependent on the oil industry," Flatow explains. "We're also focusing more on canteens and cafeterias, not only on hotel projects."

The team also makes sure to identify the most important lessons each project has taught them and bring those new ideas forward to their other clients. "Working with international brands, we've learned a lot about different cultures, types of food and menus," Flatow says. "For instance, we were involved in the Shangri-La Hotel in Paris, where we worked with a major Chinese chef. From our discussions with him, we learned a lot about designing a high-tech Chinese restaurant kitchen and we can



The popularity of show kitchens means collaboration with MEP consultants

now bring that experience to other hotel clients who might be wondering what to do for their speciality restaurant."

Another big learning experience was the Clock Tower mega project in Saudi Arabia. "There, they have to serve 18,000 meals after sunset during Hajj and it's a big challenge to design a kitchen that can cope with that sort of volume," he says.

New opportunities

While Covid-19 has delivered an enormous blow to the hospitality industry, Flatow also sees opportunities for his firm. The breakfast buffet, for example, may end up being a casualty of the pandemic, so hoteliers will be looking for new ways to serve breakfast safely. The Flatow & Drews Consulting team is currently working on developing new breakfast concepts.

There will also be much more focus not only on reducing the amount of contact points between staff and customers, but also between different staff members. "This is an issue we're addressing with our total waste concept systems," Flatow says. "Leftover food doesn't go into the kitchen, it is sent to the stewarding area. From there it goes through the building in special stainless-steel pipes to the basement before being pushed pneumatically into a truck on the ground floor."

With foodservice operators rethinking their technology stacks – whether by introducing contactless payment or new delivery and click-and-collect systems – there are likely to be opportunities for foodservice consultants on the digital engineering front.

"There are many more hotel brands focused on young people who are more interested in communication than a large hotel room," Flatow says. "Instead of a reception desk, there might be an iPad, or even automated check-in. That increased use of technology is also going to translate to foodservice and there will be many opportunities to develop new concepts over the next few years." ■

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.

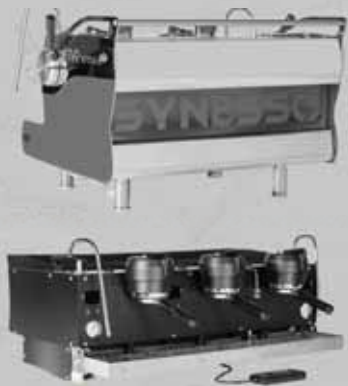




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