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THE AI ISSUE

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With tweaking and fine-tuning, technology can create crave-worthy dishes.

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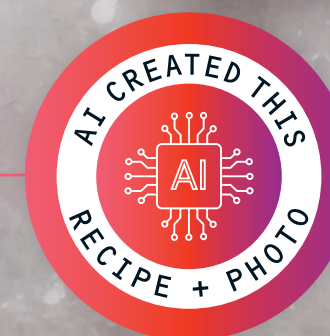
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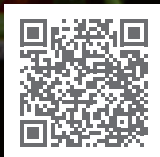
To learn more about this AI-created fluffy egg sandwich, turn to page 4.

ON THE COVER

Artificial intelligence compiled a recipe for this Korean-inspired crispy grilled chicken sandwich while the AI platform Firefly created the photo, a much heavier lift than the recipe. Get the recipe on page 12 and learn more about AI photo creation on page 54.

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THE FUTURE OF FOOD

Welcome to the AI deep-dive issue of Food Fanatics® Magazine!

In this issue, we give you the download on artificial intelligence, more commonly referred to as "AI," and how this technology can be applied to foodservice. While these bots and programs aren't magic – and human interaction remains important – operators can certainly start using the AI data and tools already available to create an easier, more successful business. The key points we cover include:

Loyalty. We all know that creating and keeping customers is key to a successful operation. In our cover story, "Loyal to a T," we uncover how AI can track precise customer ordering habits to create menu options and promotional materials for precise targeting. Also in this issue, we dive further into predicting needs like customer behavior, kitchen efficiencies and inventory as low-touch ways to keep your business on top of its game.

Content and Communication. Building your brand is an ongoing investment. While it may feel futuristic, we offer recommended tips, tricks and best practices to create AI content – including photos! – so these materials look and sound like your own brand and style. We also investigate text-based chats to find out if they're popular and reliable enough for restaurateurs to communicate with customers.

Menu. While most chefs say they wouldn't use AI for developing dishes – because technology can't taste (yet!) – algorithms can analyze the compatibility of ingredients, quickly explain the history of a recipe and summarize what's in a particular dish. AI won't replace menu-making – the most creative aspect of a chef's job – but it can help with prompts of inspiration and easier ways to work.

Now commonplace, voice commerce, menu optimization, employee management, marketing programs and fraud detection are all ways that AI can benefit our industry, if we choose to embrace it. As always, please enjoy our carefully curated stories, beautiful photography (like our AI cover!) and insightful advice to take your business into the future.

Thanks for reading,

Randy Taylor
Executive Vice President,
Field Operations and Local Sales
US Foods®





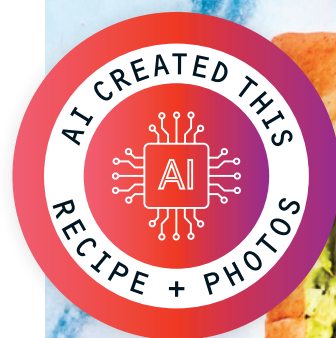
Chef AI

With tweaking and fine-tuning, tech can create crave-worthy dishes

By Amber Gibson
Photos recreated in Adobe Firefly with inspiration from photographer Matt Armendariz, food stylist Adam Pearson and prop stylist Amy Paliwoda



CEO Nikita Khandheria of Ditas Marin in Sausalito, California, created this Sunset Bliss Coastal Flatbread recipe using ChatGPT, which took about 20 minutes. "We wanted something cost-effective, easy (and) memorable" to build on.



AI photography platforms have their limitations. Firefly was unable to remove the fibrous tails from the shrimp in the right image, but managed to partially complete the task in the two photos below.



AI recommended a layer of avocados mashed with cilantro, lime zest, smoked sea salt and cracked black pepper on flatbread.



Shrimp, tossed with tequila, lime juice, minced garlic and cayenne and then grilled, satisfies a prompt for a protein-forward topping.



For a tropical garnish, AI suggested a salsa with mango, pineapple, kiwi, red onion, mint leaves, passion fruit juice, pink Himalayan salt and cayenne.



Prompted for contrast, AI added an herb goat cheese.

Know that chatbots own any information you provide and can use it without your consent.



51%

Operators interested in AI recipe development and menu design

Source: Datassential

Restaurants are in the infant stages of using artificial intelligence to develop menus. These early adopters are using Generative Pre-Trained Transformers (GPT), such as ChatGPT, Bard and Claude, to create recipes for sample menus and limited time-only offerings.

Type a command into the GPT's chat box and it provides a response. It's easy but still a good amount of work.

Last summer, globally inspired Velvet Taco ran its first AI-generated menu item as a weekly taco feature known as WTF across all 45 locations. Strongly supported by marketing, including a billboard campaign, The ChatGPTaco featured grilled steak, grilled shrimp, crispy potatoes, chimichurri, queso fresco, jalapenos, grilled onions and red chili aioli on a corn tortilla. The item performed so well that it stayed on the menu for two weeks instead of the requisite one.

Venecia Willis, Velvet Taco's culinary director, came up with the idea when she was using ChatGPT 4.0 for a work presentation. "I thought if it could write a presentation for me, why couldn't it create a recipe?" Her first query for ChatGPT to create a taco recipe was too broad and vague, and Willis says the results were not on brand.

"I knew I needed to specify more details in the rules that I wrote, so I went down the line of current ingredients that are offered in our tacos today, naming all of the tortilla options, all the protein options that we have," she says. She asked ChatGPT to create a taco with eight ingredients or fewer, using only in-house ingredients. "I ran it four times and it spit out four different builds," she says. After a taste test of the four options, the winning taco made it on the menu and Willis says there might be more ChatGPTacos in the future.

Wood-Grilled Wagyu Picanha with Chimichurri Vinaigrette and Farofa

AI recipe by Gemini, inspired by menu item at Brasero, Chicago
AI photo by Firefly

- 4 cloves garlic, roughly chopped
- 2 cups parsley
- 2 shallots, roughly chopped
- 1 cup extra virgin olive oil
- 1 cup cilantro
- ¼ oregano
- ¼ cup white wine vinegar
- ½ teaspoon red pepper flakes
- Kosher salt and pepper to taste
- 1 lime
- ½ cup butter
- ¼ cup bacon, finely chopped
- ¼ cup yellow onion, finely chopped
- 1½ cups manioc, yuca or cassava flour
- 2-2.5 pounds Wagyu picanha steak, tri-tip or New York strip
- 1 tablespoon coarse sea salt
- 1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

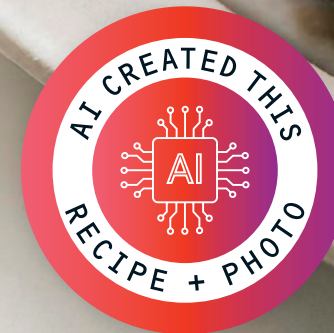
Combine garlic, parsley, shallots, oil, cilantro, oregano, white wine vinegar and red pepper flakes in a blender and blend to desired consistency. Season with salt, pepper and lime to taste. Set aside the chimichurri.

Melt butter in a skillet over medium heat and add bacon and cook until crispy. Remove bacon and set aside. Add onion to the pan and cook until softened. Set aside. Toast flour in pan with butter and cook, stirring constantly, 5 to 7 minutes, or until golden brown and toasted. Return bacon and onion to the pan and season with salt and pepper to taste. Set aside farofa.

Season meat generously with coarse sea salt and black pepper on all sides. Char the steak for 2 to 3 minutes per side for a nice sear. Move the picanha away from direct heat on the grill and cook indirectly for an additional 10 to 15 minutes, or until desired internal temperature is reached for medium-rare.

Rest meat, cut into thick slices, fan on a large plate and serve chimichurri and farofa in small bowls on the plate as condiments.

AI produced a good enough photo but not a single serving of meat or size appropriate accompaniments.

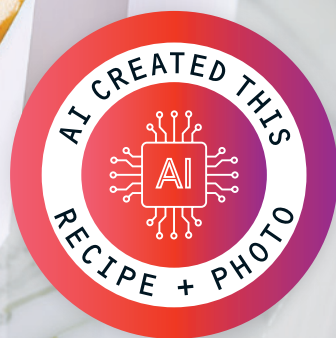




77%

Consumers open to trying a dish or product created by a computer

Source: Datassential



Wowed by fluffy egg sandwiches like the ones at buzzy Los Angeles-based Egg Tuck? Ask a chatbot to create a version like this for you.

Fluffy Egg Sandwich with Smoked Ham, Cheddar, Kewpie Mayo, Sriracha Aioli and Chives

AI recipe by Copilot

AI photo by Firefly

- 3 large eggs
- 2 tablespoons whole milk or cream
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter
- 2 slices thick soft bread, such as brioche
- 2 to 3 slices smoked ham
- 1 to 2 slices cheddar cheese
- Kewpie mayo, as needed
- Sriracha aioli, as needed
- Chives, finely chopped, as needed

Whisk together eggs, dairy, salt and pepper until well-combined and slightly frothy.

Add butter to a non-stick pan over low heat. Pour egg mixture into the pan and cook undisturbed for a moment until it starts to set at the edges.

Gently stir the eggs with a spatula, folding the edges into the center, allowing the uncooked eggs to flow to the edges. The key is to do this gently and slowly to create soft, creamy curds.

Remove the eggs from heat when they are still slightly runny. Meanwhile, warm smoked ham.

Spread Kewpie on bread. Layer the warm ham slices over the mayo. Carefully place the fluffy scrambled eggs on top of the ham. Place cheese on hot eggs to melt. Drizzle aioli over the cheese and sprinkle with chives. Place second slice of bread on top. Gently press down to ensure the sandwich holds together. Insert into a paper holder.

How to use an AI chatbot



Defined as generative AI, GPTs (generative pre-trained transformers) are chatbots that prompt the user to input a query. They're trained on vast amounts of data scraped off the internet as well as any information users enter to improve its database. That means the company behind the technology owns the information users enter.

To get started with menu development using an AI chat box, here are tips from CEO Nikita Khandheria of Ditas Marin in Sausalito, California.

GIVE GOOD COMMANDS

For example: I want to open a restaurant that is \$2 more expensive than all my neighbors. Here are some samples of their menus. These are dishes that are successful elsewhere. Using this understanding of the customer's palate, develop a fish dish and I want my food cost to be 20%.

DON'T BE GENERIC

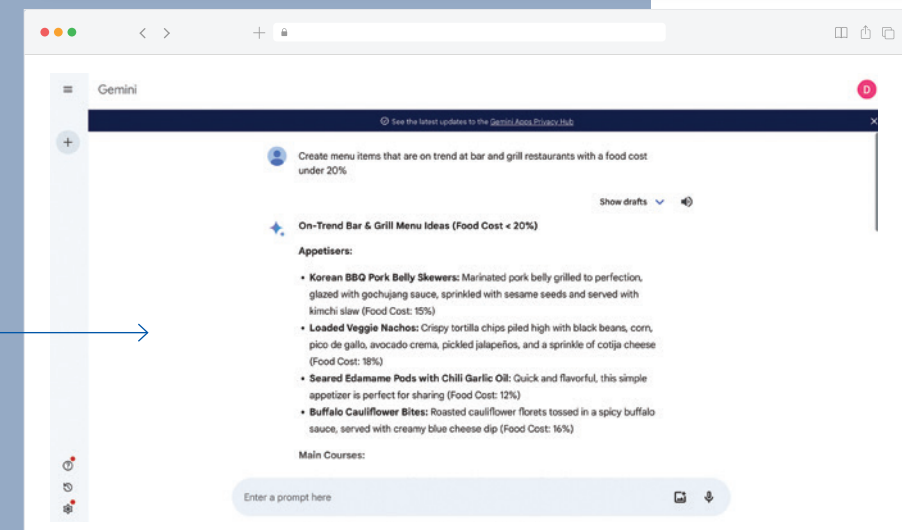
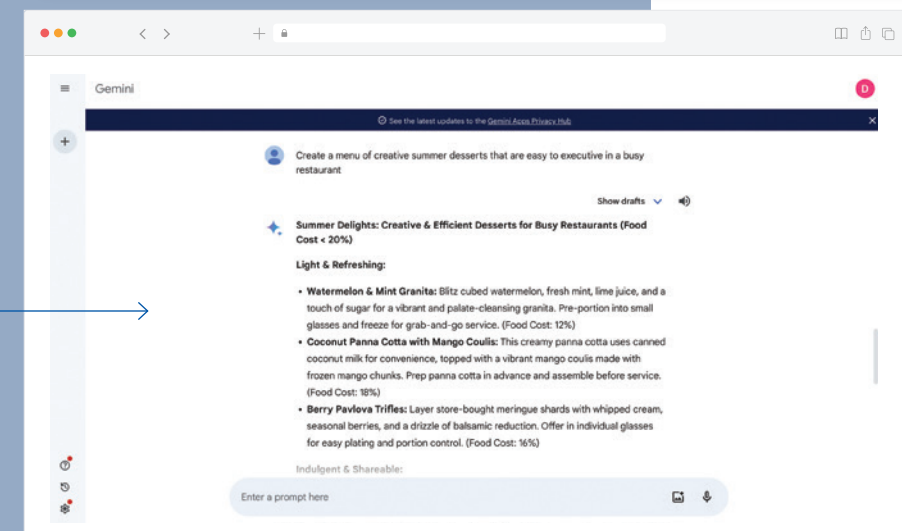
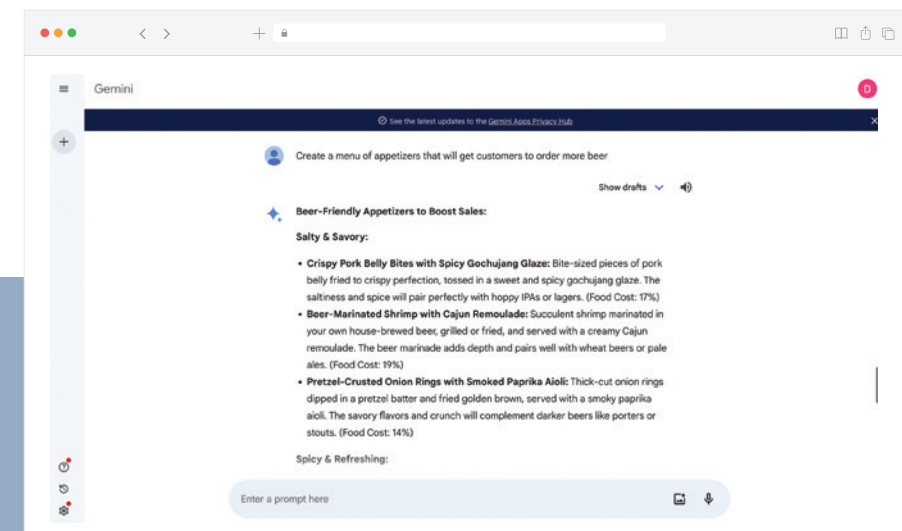
Refrain from asking for an entire menu at once. It's better to go one dish at a time and provide as much context and information as possible.

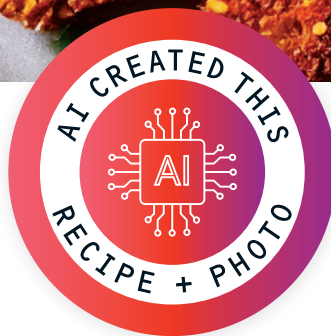
HAVE A CONVERSATION

Understand that ChatGPT is a conversational platform. It's not a one and done. Put in a prompt and play around with the output for an extended period. You don't just put something in and immediately get the answer you want.

SPECIFY THE DESIRED FOOD COST

Chefs say the best part of ChatGPT is that it helps with costing a percentage using a price set that you input.





"On-trend" for Google's Gemini seemed to default to Korean influences, even when asked for a healthy on-trend recipe using buckwheat for a restaurant bar, while ChatGPT provided a snack of uncooked groats with a red pepper dipping sauce. After some finessing, ChatGPT provided one that called for cooking the groats and forming patties.

Crispy Buckwheat and Roasted Red Pepper Bites

*AI recipe by ChatGPT
AI photo by Firefly*

- 1 cup buckwheat groats, rinsed
- 2 cups vegetable stock
- 1 large red bell pepper, charred, skin peeled, seeds removed and chopped
- 1 small onion, finely chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 egg
- ¼ cup flour or a gluten-free alternative
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- Olive oil, for frying
- Fresh herbs (like parsley or cilantro), for garnish
- Dipping sauces, such as tzatziki, spicy aioli or zesty marinara

Simmer groats in vegetable broth or water, 10 to 15 minutes, or until the liquid is absorbed and the buckwheat is tender.

Combine buckwheat, red pepper, onion, garlic, egg and flour. Season with salt and pepper. Form mixture into small patties.

Fry the patties for a few minutes on each side until they are golden brown and crispy. Serve plain or with sauces.

"It's definitely a tool in the toolbox," Willis says. "If I'm feeling not as creative that month, it's something I can pull out and embrace that technology to come up with fun ideas that maybe I wouldn't have come up with myself."

CEO Nikita Khandheria of Ditas Marin in Sausalito, California, says that everything on her to-do list is in some way routed through GPT. She even coded her own GPT to sound and think more like her, which she also uses for strategy.

"I maybe work 16 hours a day and sleep for four or five hours a day because I'm still in school and running a restaurant," she says, adding that GPTs save her exponential time.

Khandheria relies on GPTs when she is pitching new concepts to landlords or hotels to create a framework menu. "I'll use GPTs to figure out the basic menu and to show the concept to the chef and the landlord," she says. "It can autogenerate combinations to create

unique dishes based on an analysis of all the restaurants in the world."

She then shares the menu framework with the chef who will oversee the restaurant, but allows them to use those guidelines to make the menu their own. "I'm a huge believer in letting chefs put their personal signature on the menu," she says.

Independent restaurant chefs known for their creative menus didn't want to go on record about whether they use GPTs to develop recipes. Users and nonusers alike, however, agree that GPT results are only as good as the experience and creativity of the user. AI is not intuitive like humans.

"AI can spit out a recipe in the style of Jose Andres, Rene Redzepi or Dominique Crenn, but it doesn't taste, feel or sense ingredients so it will never be great on its own. It needs human creativity," one chef says. ■

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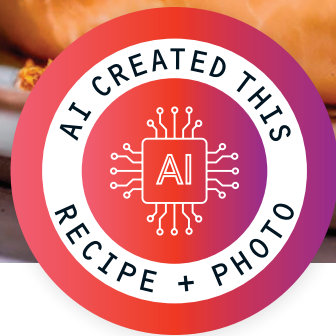


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Asked to “create an on-trend chicken sandwich,” Google’s Gemini provided a crispy chicken sandwich with Korean influences, including kimchi mayo and a barbecue glaze with gochujang, above. Anthropic’s Claude presented a ubiquitous rendition with no global influences. No matter the platform, adjusting with more details produces the best results.

Southern-Korean Fusion Chicken Sandwich with Unique Condiments

*AI recipe by Gemini
AI photo by Firefly*

- 1 cup buttermilk
- 1 tablespoon gochujang
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon smoked paprika
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 4 boneless, skinless chicken breasts, pounded to even thickness
- 1 cup flour
- ½ cup cornmeal

- 1 tablespoon gochugaru (Korean chili flakes)
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- Frying oil, as needed
- 2 cups coleslaw mix
- Sweet and tangy coleslaw dressing, recipe follows
- 4 large brioche buns, toasted
- Korean barbecue mayo, recipe follows
- Kimchi, your recipe, as needed
- Spicy honey mustard, as needed, recipe follows
- Fresh arugula or other greens

Whisk together buttermilk, gochujang, garlic powder, smoked paprika, salt and pepper. Add the chicken and ensure it’s well-coated. Marinate for at least 2 hours or overnight.

Mix flour, cornmeal, gochugaru, baking powder, salt and pepper. Dredge chicken in the mixture and fry in oil heated to 350F until golden brown and cooked through, about 7 to 8 minutes. Drain.

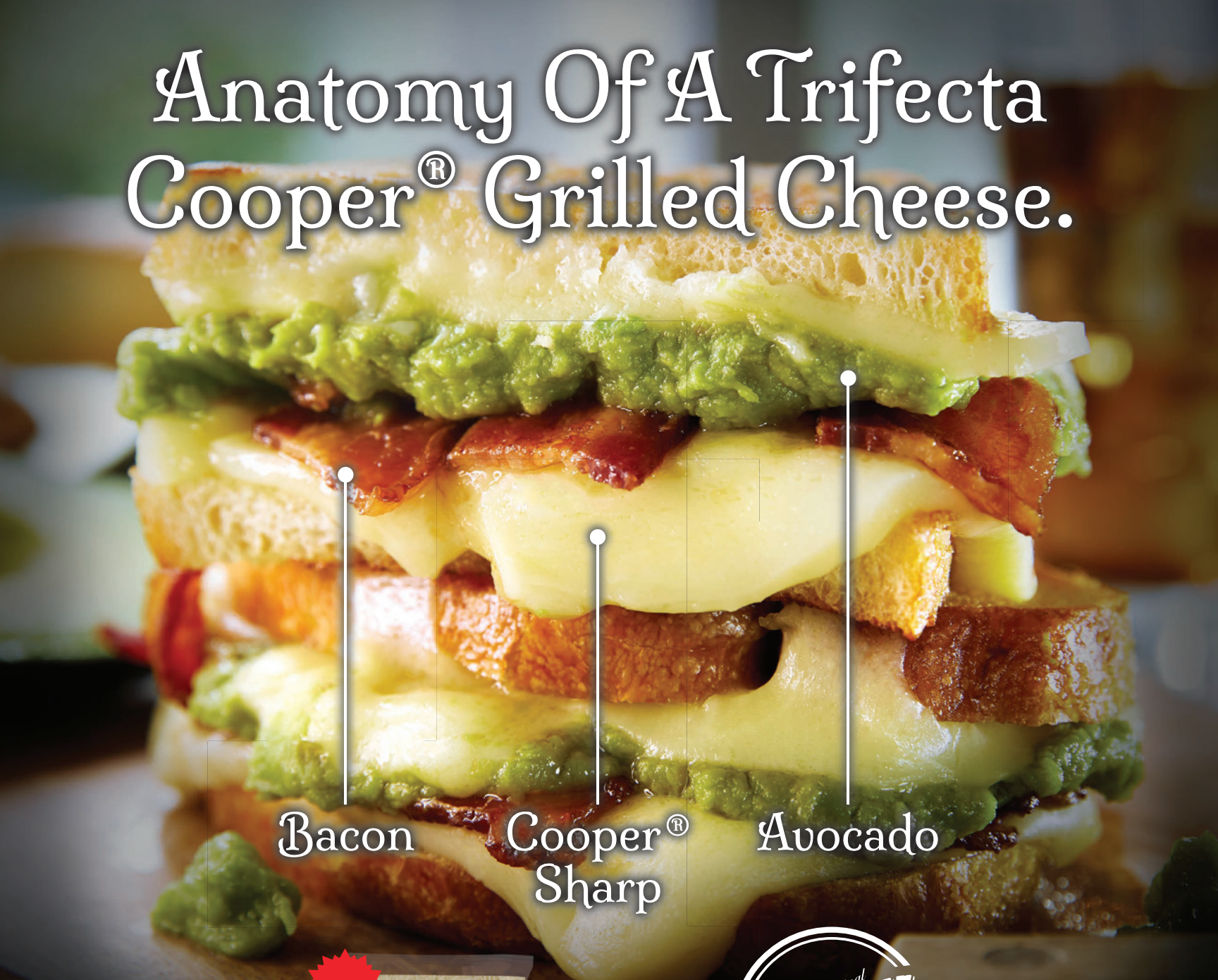
Toss coleslaw mix with dressing and assemble sandwiches: Spread Korean barbecue mayo on the bottom half of each toasted bun. Place a fried chicken breast on top, followed by a generous helping of sweet and tangy slaw. Add kimchi for an extra kick, drizzle some spicy honey mustard over the top and finish with a handful of arugula or lettuce. Place the top half of the bun.

To make sweet and tangy slaw dressing: Combine ¼ cup apple cider vinegar, 2 tablespoons brown sugar, 1 tablespoon soy sauce and 1 teaspoon sesame seeds.

To make Korean barbecue mayo: Combine ½ cup mayonnaise, 2 tablespoons Korean barbecue sauce and 1 teaspoon sesame oil.

To make spicy honey mustard: Combine ¼ cup honey, ¼ cup Dijon mustard and 1 tablespoon gochujang.

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TECH

on the



- Garlic
- Red onion
- Dill
- Herring
- Bay leaf
- Black Peppercorns
- Cayenne
- Rice vinegar
- Sugar

↓
The early days of AI created Baltic herring salad with curry eggplant ikra, pickled onions and lemon creme fraiche, but chefs did the heavy lifting.



PLATE

What you need to know about AI recipe development

By Bret Thorn
Photography by Matt Armendariz
Food styling by Adam Pearson
Prop styling by Amy Paliwoda



↓
 The ease and success of the AI-generated taco from Velvet Taco, left and opposite page, shows the technology has come a long way since the IBM Supercomputer created recipes for the Institute of Culinary Education nearly a decade ago.

- Crispy potatoes
- Onions
- Chimichurri
- Jalapeños
- Red chili aioli
- Grilled steak
- Shrimp
- Grilled onions

About a decade ago, two chefs from the Institute of Culinary Education in New York City, Michael Laiskonis and James Briscione, teamed up with IBM Supercomputer Watson. The humans provided the names of ingredients and types of cuisine and asked the computer to suggest food combinations.

Dishes like Russian beet salad with yellow tomato, cornichons and prunes and Cuban lobster bouillabaisse with plantains, butternut squash and jalapeño peppers surfaced, but the chefs still had to do the heavy lifting. They had to select the combinations that looked good and work out the ratios and techniques that would make them taste good.

The best results were published in a 2015 cookbook by ICE titled, "Cognitive Cooking with Chef Watson: Recipes for Innovation from IBM and the Institute of Culinary Education."

Can tech taste?

AI-assisted recipe apps exist, but ICE hasn't repeated its experiment. Rick Smilow, ICE chairman and CEO, says he's unaware of any culinary schools experimenting with the technology and a representative from The Culinary Institute of America said that school hasn't looked to AI for menu development either. But it may be a matter of time. While most chefs say they wouldn't use AI for developing dishes—arguably the most creative part of the job—in part because technology can't taste, AI algorithms can analyze the compatibility of ingredients.

"There's interest in trying AI-created flavor combinations," says Simon Dolinky, director of culinary development support at Kimpton Hotels and Restaurants. "But there's always going to be that human touch."

However, Dolinky sees a role for AI in writing menus. The technology is a whiz at translating terms from different languages, quickly finding and explaining the history of a dish or summarizing what's in a particular item.

"It really shortens the time, but you still have to edit it for your particular use," he says.

Cuts research time

Brandon Frohne, a former culinary director for Cracker Barrel's former fast casual concept Holler & Dash and currently culinary director





↓
The Institute of Culinary Education's collaboration with IBM Supercomputer Watson included James' Thai Jewish Chicken, a dish with grilled chicken, potato tots, rice puffs, curried banana gelee and asparagus in a curry broth.

Potato
 Banana
 Rice
 Asparagus
 Apple
 Chicken

at Moonshot Management in Nashville, says AI can be a valuable tool in many ways. "It can generate industry food trends to consider when developing menu strategy, top-rated restaurants to visit in various cities during the R&D phase, and it can even create baseline menu concepts if you're looking for some quick inspiration," he says.

Kimberly R. Letizia, a consultant with management consulting firm Kinetic12, agrees that AI can help with the early development process. "Where I think there is still opportunity is for it to be leveraged with more data integration to be more specific to brand recommendations and social scraping of trends, so it becomes more real-time predictive insights," she says.

However, people still need to be involved, she added. "(There's) still a way to go in my opinion for it to be fully used as a replacement for the human creative mind for full concept development."

Fills the gaps

James Walker, chief culinary and concept officer for Experiential Brands, which includes The Original Hot Chicken, Inked Tacos and Pinsa Roman Pizza, added that AI can be a huge money saver in the long term by collecting consumer and trend data, but time-consuming and expensive to collect initially.

He's also bullish on using AI for recipe development, including flavor combinations, textures, colors and naming protocols.

"The data's out there," he says, and AI's expertise is collecting that data and analyzing

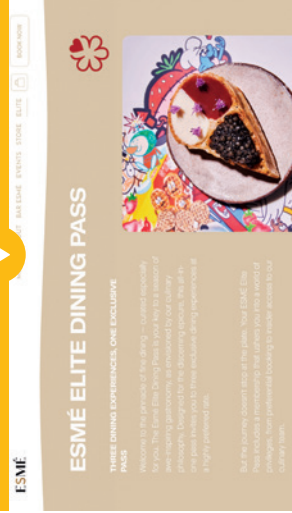
it. That includes the balance of sweet, salty, sour, bitter and savory flavors, "the structure that you use for flavor development—I think you can put those parameters into the decision-making set (that you feed AI)," he says. "I think it gives you a great starting point." But Walker agrees that AI's not ready to be let loose in the kitchen.

"Currently, you still need a human to look at the data and make a decision," he says, and the most important steps of consumer paneling and market testing still require humans to try the food. ■



TREND TRACKER

ON THE RADAR



Members Only.

Some restaurateurs are betting that exclusivity has its perks and create FOMO by offering memberships. **Last seen:** Chicago's Michelin-starred Esmé recently rolled out an elite dining pass with three tiers. Membership starts at \$650 per person and includes preferred rates and reservation access, cooking classes, private tastings, artist studio visits and field trips.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY BACALAR

Dumplings Dump the Gluten.

No need to imagine a corn-based dumpling that's not gooey or gummy. Corn nixtamalized is the trick. **Last seen:** At the Yucatan Peninsula-inspired Bacalar in Austin, Chef/partner Gabe Erales serves lamb dumplings with wrappers made from a malleable masa dough. "They're gluten-free so these dumplings don't get gooey or gummy when cooked," he says.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALEXANDER'S PATISSERIE

The Ultimate Shape Shifter.

No form can defy laminated dough, from bold stripes and small enough to fit on a spoon to spiral-stuffed, cubed-filled and shaped into a cone for soft-serve ice cream. But a squashed croissant? Oh yes. **Last seen:** Flattened and dipped in different chocolate flavors at Alexander's Patisserie in San Francisco.

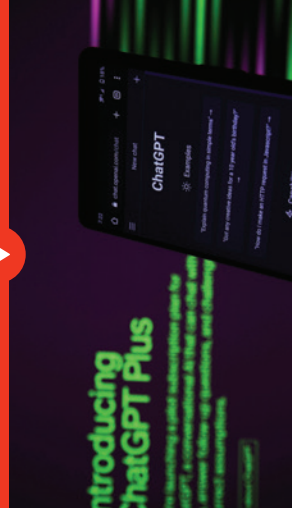


PHOTOGRAPHY BY CAILIN SAKDALAN

Get Cheesy.

What started as a trendy bubble tea topping (cheese foam) is migrating behind bars as mixologists add a savory richness to cocktails. **Last seen:** Parmesan-washed gin Genovese Fizz with pine nuts, basil and limoncello at Don Angie in New York.

HIGH ALERT



Tech Talks.

Since the 2022 rollout of OpenAI's ChatGPT, artificial intelligence is dominating the biggest industries, all of which are reflected in the stock market.

Last Seen: Here and everywhere. See page 4 to start.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY CH PROJECTS

In Your Face.

Maximalist design—custom typography, bold graphics, and fresh experimental design is in—in a big way.

Last seen: Quixote, a new Oaxacan-inspired mezcaleria in San Diego, is constructed from a decommissioned Catholic church shipped from Mexico, with stained-glass windows and Baroque pews. Level 8 in downtown Los Angeles composed of eight over-the-top bars and restaurants.

FADING OUT



Food Profiling.

Food lab nutritional testing is an expensive, time-consuming and open to inaccuracy unless everything is exactly proportioned.

Try this instead: Use your words in a way that's not restricting but positive. Need help? Try a chatbot. See page 44.



Inefficient Prep.

A slip-up in prep can start your night off in the weeds.

Try this instead: New York-based DIG and Chicago-based Urbanbelly restaurants are saving time and reducing food waste by using PreciTaste's Prep Assistant to automate production schedules using quantity forecasts.



Tapped Out on Tapas.

Calculating portion sizes for tapas and the amount to order shouldn't be stressful when you just want to have a good time.

Try this instead: Italian wine bar Fossetta on New York's Lower East Side serves a selection of 10 identically sized antipasti along with a few different types of focaccia for peckish guests.



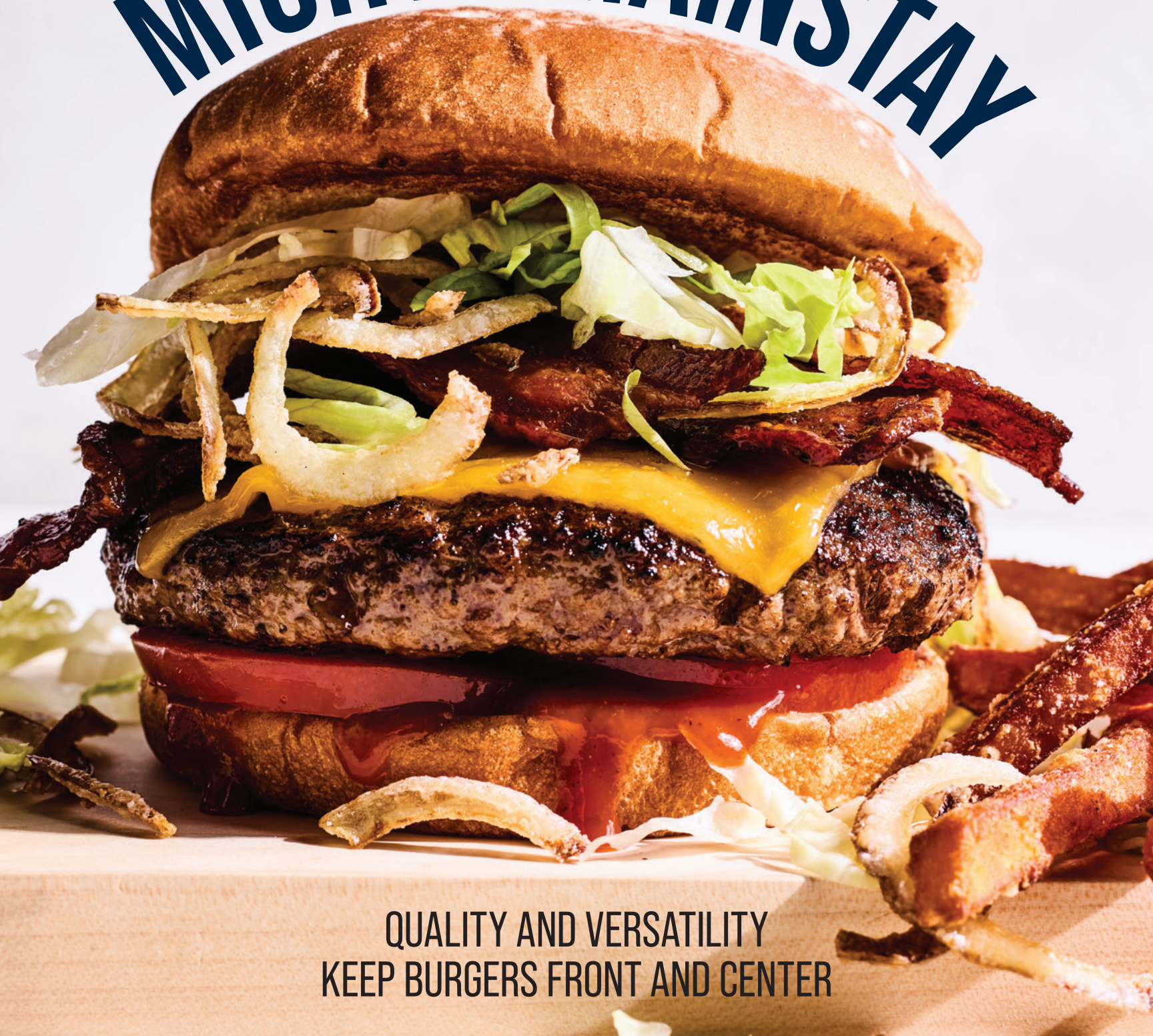
Big Bad Cabs.

Boomers love their Napa cabernet sauvignon, but a new generation of drinkers (the same ones who prefer iced coffee) are looking for something lighter that won't put them to sleep, especially during warmer months.

Try this instead: Lighter, fruit-forward, chilled reds are getting their own section on the wine menu at restaurants like Delaney Oyster House in Charleston and One Market in San Francisco.



MIGHTY MAINSTAY



QUALITY AND VERSATILITY
KEEP BURGERS FRONT AND CENTER

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MATT ARMENDARIZ. FOOD STYLING BY ADAM PEARSON. PROP STYLING BY AMY PALIWODA

➤ **IN A BUSINESS OF UPS AND DOWNS, RESTAURANTS CAN RELY ON ONE CONSTANT: THE POPULARITY OF BURGERS.**

They've defied just about every trend, whether dietary, lifestyle or economic, that seemingly would work against them. Unlike any other menu item, burgers are a foundation for building flavors that cross every cultural boundary; they fit as comfortably in quick service as they do in fine dining.

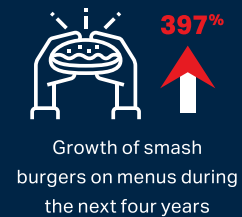
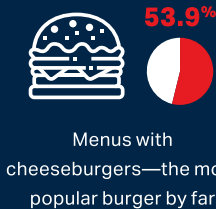
Chefs may differ on why burgers enjoy universal appeal, but the most fastidious agree that it begins with quality. George Motz, historian, author and filmmaker who traveled the country in search of great regional American burgers for his book and documentary, uses only fresh ground chuck from Schweid & Sons at his new buzzy New York luncheonette. Named after the film and one of his books, Hamburger America focuses on what Eater New York calls "the burger that America deserves," including the signature George Motz's Fried Onion Burger with American cheese and Classic Smash Burger with diced onion, pickles and cheese.

At Boston-based Broadway Hospitality Group, the umbrella company for several concepts including the 15-location Tavern in the Square, Schweid & Sons also is the burger of choice. Its Tavern Burger, accompanied by lettuce, tomato and a "secret sauce," is especially beloved by diners who want the beefy flavor to stand out, while others appreciate the contrasting umami and salinity from blue cheese, bacon, Cajun spice and caramelized onions that accompany the Blackened Bacon + Blue Burger.

It's not surprising that restaurants known for stellar burgers rely on Schweid & Sons, a multi-generational business that started in the late 1800s. Butcher Harry Schweid, an



BURGERS BY THE NUMBERS



Source: Datassential

immigrant, had started building a reputation for selling high-quality meat to restaurants on Manhattan's Lower East Side. By the 1950s, his son Sam opened his own butcher shop in Harlem and became known for offering the finest meat in the city.

Sam's son David founded Schweid & Sons in 1978 and decided to focus solely on ground beef. By the time the burger boom started to take hold in early 2000, the family business was well-situated and ready to supply restaurants with the "very best" ground beef blends.

"The purpose of that change was to create a relationship with our customer, with our consumer, that they know the Schweid family has been in the meat business for four generations (and) is putting their time, effort and love into making the best burger," says CEO Jamie Schweid, who currently runs the company with his brother, Brad, chief administrative officer, both sons of David Schweid.

The family's award-winning Signature Blend (chuck and brisket), used in burgers across the country, consists of what chefs consider



PHOTOGRAPHY BY MATT ARMENDARIZ. FOOD STYLING BY ADAM PEARSON. PROP STYLING BY AMY PALIWODA

the ideal combination. The Schweids say one of their sources is from the same family farm that raises Angus beef without antibiotics, hormones or steroids to ensure consistency and quality.

Schweid's expansion of product offerings mirrors the evolving burger, from pucks for smash burgers to its Katana Blend Burger, a 100% USDA highly marbled American wagyu beef. During the past decade, the presence of burgers on fine dining menus has grown—second only to fast-casual restaurants—often differentiated by the meat (Angus or wagyu) and on-trend toppings.

The spotlight, however, is currently on smash burgers with enough fat that they sizzle in it, creating crispy browned edges. At Bar Charley in the Adams Morgan section of Washington, D.C., the smash burger of grilled wagyu is topped with aged white cheddar, bibb lettuce and truffle aioli. In Austin, Texas, Spread & Co., pairs two smash burgers with 5-year-old cheddar,

raclette and a "fancy sauce" (ketchup and mayo) on brioche.

When the meat is top-notch, everything else comes down to preference. The trend, according to food research firm Datassential, is toward classic burgers that focus on the meat. But most restaurants will also offer ways to amp up tradition. River City Cafe, with several locations in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, starts off its 24 choices with Schweid & Sons burgers, ranging from the Cheese Lover's, with pepper jack, Swiss, cheddar and American, to the Philly Cheeseburger, topped with shaved steak, green peppers, provolone, fried onion strings, lettuce, tomato and spicy chipotle mayo.

"We love the innovation and creativity with burgers that we see across the country," says Jennifer Versacci, executive vice president of marketing and innovation. "Understanding and delivering against consumer trends are a priority for the company, including getting ahead of new flavors, ingredients and technology to provide the very best to our customers." ■

ON THE MENU



▶ SPICY BURGER

Fried bacon, pepper jack cheese, toasted jalapeno and spicy mayo
The Mercantile, Worcester, Massachusetts

▶ ROYALE WITH CHEESE

Wagyu beef with American cheese, dill pickle and buttery sesame brioche
Marlowe's Tavern, Georgia and Florida

▶ SMOKEHOUSE BURGER

House-smoked barbecue pulled pork, smoked provolone, bacon onion relish, Carolina mustard barbecue sauce and crispy buttermilk onion rings
City Works Restaurant, Pennsylvania

▶ ANGRY BURGER

Dipped in buffalo hot sauce, Maytag bleu cheese and crispy onions
Stout, New York City

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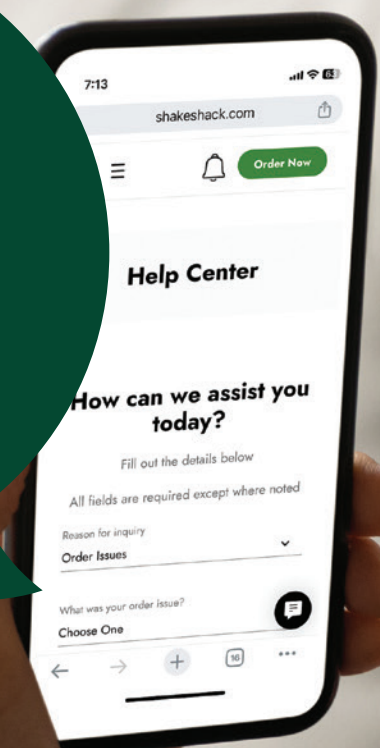
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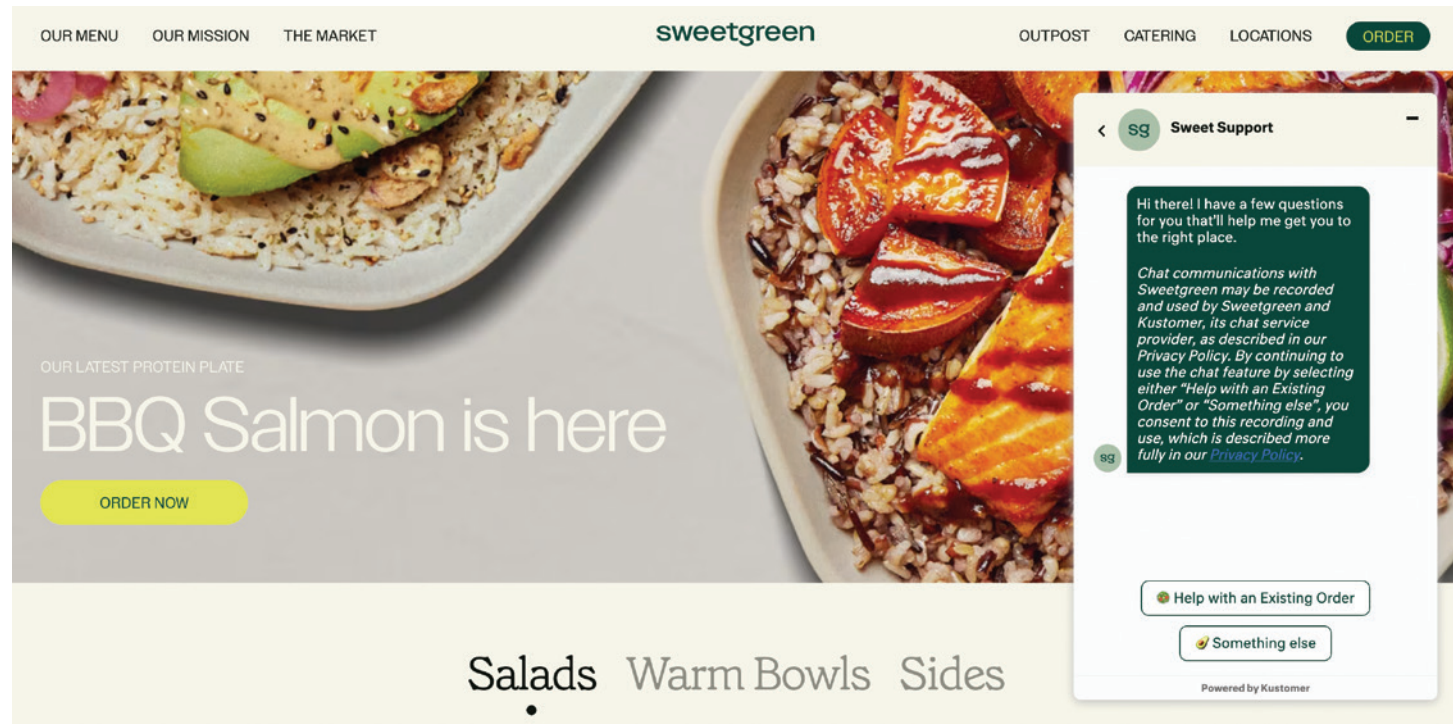
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It's only a matter of time until clunky chatbots become smooth talkers for everyone. Stay tuned to advances in this fast-moving technology.



In 2016, Domino's introduced Dom, its ordering assistant. In those days, Dom lived on Facebook, which had just launched its chatbot function allowing Messenger to transmit orders—fast.

It's not a stretch to say it was magical: placing an order through a relatively new communication channel, not having to talk to a human. Plenty of other restaurants followed Domino's, launching their own Facebook-based bots to help answer questions about the menu and provide other information.

Eight years later, chatting with a restaurant online is decidedly less exciting. Automated chat boxes have become the norm. Getting stuck in an unhelpful loop has also become common—so much that, ironically, users yearn to talk to a real human.

But the fast-changing world of artificial intelligence is honing chatbots that can process language and generate more meaningful and relevant responses. Can advances in text-based chats make them more popular and reliable enough for restaurateurs to allow them to be customer-facing?

"It seems there's something new every week that's 'changing the game,'" says Joe Lawton,

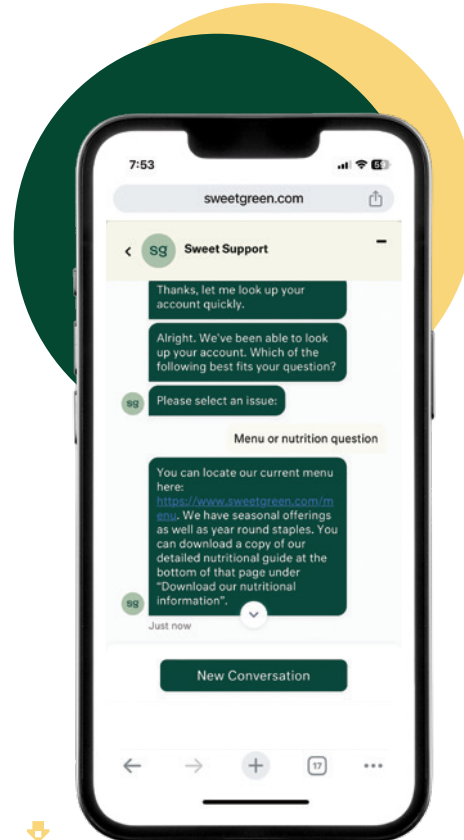
chief operating officer of restaurant tech company Chowly, which uses bots for its own support functions, but is not a restaurant bot provider.

Not all bots are created equal. And as the standards of in-person hospitality extend online, employing a bot that's frustratingly unhelpful is far worse than not using one at all.

"There is a ton of fatigue from unhelpful chatbots," says the CEO of a small salad chain (who asked not to be named because they haven't launched the new tech yet). That means a particularly helpful bot can act as a differentiator for a restaurant, "hopefully a way to get folks to want to order from you again, because they know you can solve any issues that pop up."

The simplest version of a chatbot is programmed manually. Businesses create responses and workflows for the bot to answer, pushing customers toward specific keywords or questions. "Think of it like a flowchart," Lawton says. The result is a tightly controlled experience, but it doesn't always give the customer what they're looking for.

On the other end of the spectrum, an AI-powered bot like ChatGPT that has free license



The ideal chatbot knows when to hand off the customer to a live person to avoid frustration and a negative experience.



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The most helpful bots for restaurants use AI to engage guests, but are trained on a specific set of information. Restaurants can input menus, procedures, frequently asked questions and any other important details that the bot can process and share.

to chat might go off the rails. The chatbot's strangely human-like conversation could give unhelpful or even incorrect information. Plus, a restaurant or other business can't control the subject of conversations with customers.

The most helpful bots for restaurants use AI to engage guests but are trained on a specific set of information. Restaurants can input menus, procedures, frequently asked questions, and any other important details that the bot can process and share. That's where the salad chain landed.

"We were trying to find a partner that could absolutely solve some percentage of message use cases on their own through AI," the salad chain CEO says. "The partner that we're most likely going to go with allows for (customers) to get to a representative right away if that's what (they) want. That's important."

Technically speaking, restaurants can program chatbots to help with customers and operations. On the customer end, bots can book reservations, share hours and location and order food. But the more likely scenario is for support as evidenced by larger restaurants.

Tech-forward salad giant Sweetgreen's bot, powered by a third-party provider called Kustomer, lives deep inside a contact page on its website. If a customer wants to chat about anything besides an existing order, the bot asks for an email address—presumably so a real-life support agent can take over the conversation if it veers outside the lines.

Similarly, a Shake Shack conversational bot in the restaurant's help center directs customers to frequently asked questions, including nutritional information and the procedures to apply for a job. Talking about anything else requires the customer to share



their email address once again. "We'll use this to find your profile and any existing conversations—not to spam you," the website says. For any request other than order status, the bot hands off diners to a live support agent.

That live, human help remains crucial to any restaurant interested in an automated support agent.

"One of my greatest fears was that even one person wasn't going to get the help they needed because the chatbot messed up or pointed them in the wrong direction, and there was no oversight," Lawton says. "We

always want to have people reviewing these messages and workflows."

In other words, a bot isn't going to step in and replace a human helper anytime soon. The salad operator uses a contracted support team outside of the U.S. to handle customer email requests; adding chat support is just another layer of customer service.

"I don't think small restaurants are going to be able to pull this off unless they have some sort of offshore support," the salad operator said, "or someone who's sitting there all day long, able to do this." ■



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Improvements in customer demand forecasting can be used to orchestrate all of the restaurant activities, including ordering and staffing labor.

Better Than a Sixth Sense

How AI can predict needs

By Bret Thorn
Photography by Matt Armendariz
Food styling by Adam Pearson
Prop styling by Amy Paliwoda

Running a restaurant has always been a hands-on business, and the entrepreneurs who start them have often relied on instinct to understand customer desires. Many operators, not surprisingly, have resisted technology, but gradually they're accepting that data analysis can help in many areas, from scheduling and inventory control to loss reduction and marketing. As artificial intelligence brings more powerful analytical tools to the fore, restaurateurs are beginning to see it as a game changer.

"It's a huge competitive advantage," says Peter Newlin, chief vision officer for the

Denver-based Gastamo restaurant group and an early AI adopter. "This is the most disrupting thing that has hit the restaurant industry." Many operators agree: Restaurant software company Restaurant365 recently reported that 41% of its customers were planning to invest in AI sales forecasting and scheduling tools, and 31% plan to invest in AI-driven inventory and purchasing tools.

Here's a look at some of the ways this rapidly changing technology can help operators predict what will happen in their restaurants and ultimately improve the bottom line.

MENU

STARTERS

Onion, hummus, ranch tzatziki, chips, crudite
Cheese-stuffed cheese fries, spicy aioli
Lemony chicken and rice soup

MAINS

ppardelle, spring vegetable, housemade ricotta, herbs
Half roasted chicken, sauteed power greens, ju
Ultimate burger

ENDINGS

Mille-feuille, seasonal berries
Chocolate three ways
at everything cookie



"There are new technologies that understand facial expressions and can read mood and micro-expressions like an eye twitch or raising the corner of your mouth."

—David Lance, head of technical consulting for restaurant consulting firm Bottle Rocket

Customer behavior

It's a rainy, cold Tuesday so it's likely to be a slow day in your restaurant, but orders of soup may be high. But wait. There's a championship basketball game at the nearby high school and hungry teenagers may want burgers and fries. However, fans from the opposing team are vegan and have a penchant for strawberry shakes made with that coconut milk-based frozen dessert, and their parents are heavy post-game decaf drinkers. Also, there's an Elks Club convention in town, and the Filipino contingent staying at the hotel around the corner like plain white rice.

AI can process the information and make highly educated guesses about what guests will order. Operators can use customer demand forecasting to orchestrate all the restaurant's activities and ultimately increase profits.

In addition, AI facial recognition technology can recognize repeat customers as they walk through the door and alert the host, who then knows to welcome them back. AI could also

have recorded that guest's table preference and what they're likely to order. "That already changes the emotional reaction of the customer, and will improve personalization and hospitality," says David Lance, head of technical consulting for restaurant consulting firm Bottle Rocket.

Conversely, if the customer is new to the restaurant, AI can alert the server so they know the guest might need more handholding, he says. "There are new technologies that understand facial expressions and can read mood and micro-expressions like an eye twitch or raising the corner of your mouth," Lance says. AI can then alert servers or management if a table is unhappy.

When locations are in multiple markets, AI can help keep track of customers no matter what city they're in, so operators can have a New York City regular's favorite cocktail ready when she visits one of their restaurants in San Francisco, says Scott Gingerich, vice president of restaurants, bars and events at IHG Hotels and Resorts.

AI can also help with upselling, says Jay Ruparel, co-founder and CEO of VOICEplug AI. Based on past orders, the technology can predict additional menu items a guest may like. "We have built 12 different algorithms for upselling, depending on their food choices of the past and their profile," he says. AI can also factor in the time of day, day of the week and season. For example, customers might be more likely to indulge in dessert or have an extra drink close to the holidays.

Kitchen efficiencies

Ruparel says the technology he uses can calculate the average time it takes customers to order, as well as how they're spending that time, such as looking at the menu, customizing their order or asking questions. That information then helps the kitchen predict workflow behind the line.

Additionally, AI can register how frequently a customer asks for a certain item that the restaurant doesn't have, such as onion rings or espresso martinis. "That really can help the restaurant know some of the items that people are demanding," he says, as well as indicate which items they have removed from the menu that they might consider bringing back.

AI can also monitor the kitchen to ensure the food is made consistently, Lance says. "What if we had an AI that watched the cook and told them they put too much sauce on a dish (for example)?"

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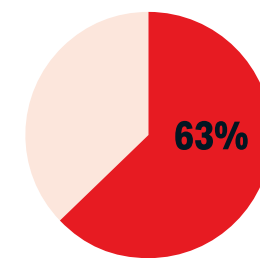
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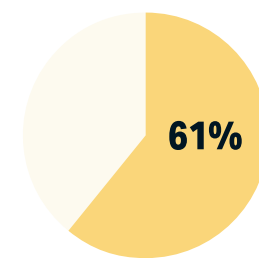


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Operators interested in AI inventory management



Operators interested in AI waste reduction

Source: Datacentral

Inventory

Many in the industry regard traditional AI, not generative AI, as the best tool for labor and inventory optimization. Improvements in customer demand forecasting can help orchestrate all the restaurant's activities, including ordering and staffing labor.

AI can use data such as the weather, holidays or spring break to dial in inventory better, using historical data of individual restaurants or for a neighborhood in real time, Lance says. It can also detect anomalies that can alert operators to fraud early on and more accurately plan for ordering perishable items to reduce waste.

"I can see it being useful in chains and larger operations where you have a collection of data over time and it gives you ideas of what to expect," says Simon Dolinky, director of culinary development and support at Kimpton Hotels and Restaurants. He hasn't used predictive modeling for ordering but expects that technology will trickle down from larger organizations.

Accounting—for the menu

AI can pull product mix, costing each item, calculating its contributions, and recommending prices and portion size, Gingerich says. "It could save our team a ton of time."

The technology can also analyze a restaurant's PMIX (product mix report) and determine which items are not pulling their weight and therefore should be removed, Newlin says.

It's unclear whether AI could assess that such an item might be necessary on the menu to prevent a veto vote from a large

party. For example, a vegetarian item might be necessary to please the vegetarian customer, and therefore encourage that customer's non-vegetarian friends to eat in the restaurant as well, making it valuable even if its sales aren't huge.

AI can also track requests for menu items that it doesn't currently offer, Ruparel says, and be helpful scouting new locations to determine what's popular in a particular neighborhood. But mistakes happen.

AI had recommended that a restaurant for a hotel IHG was opening in Palo Alto, California, should be vegetarian or vegan, a concept that wouldn't work in a hotel and might not appeal to most tech workers. However, the suggestion made it clear that numerous vegan or vegetarian items should be available in that restaurant, Gingerich says.

Staffing

AI can help gauge employee performance, tracking engagement time with customers, upselling and average checks.

"You can use AI to almost coach an employee in real time to ensure that each interaction is optimal," Lance says.

Predictive modeling also can help determine more precisely the staff required for all or part of a specific shift.

The caveat, however, is data. Technology already exists to measure sales and labor costs and determine staffing levels, as well as track whom to schedule or not schedule because they'd qualify for overtime.

"All of this data exists out there ... the restaurant industry just hasn't utilized it for AI," says Gingerich. ■

With solid existing restaurant data, AI can help predict sales that leads to more accurate inventory, less waste and better staffing.

TAKING IT S L O W

By Heather Sennett

5 ways
to dip
into AI
before
diving in



Your POS system is already collecting data, which has enticed more companies to improve and/or integrate AI into the platform. Investigating what this means for your operation can provide a competitive edge, restaurateurs say,





Cloud-based restaurant management platforms like Toast are upping their game by providing AI-powered services.

I Maybe you've buried your head in the walk-in, ignoring all the recent chatter about artificial intelligence, "smart" robots that can flip burgers or fry tortilla chips, or any of the tech advancements promising to revolutionize the restaurant industry.

That's understandable, given the pace of change and the P.T. Barnum-esque level of puffery behind some of these innovations.

Behemoths like McDonald's, Domino's and Chipotle Mexican Grill have been tinkering with AI for years to streamline operations and improve efficiency. But even the smallest operation can leverage the benefits of AI in a variety of ways as a growing number of point-of-sale (POS) systems begin incorporating the technology into their platforms. If you're already collecting data, it's worth investigating what would best help your business, whether it's voice commerce, employee management

or fraud detection. Here are five ways POS systems are streamlining operations using AI.

1 Voice commerce

Wingstop is among the chains working with voice AI firm ConverseNow to automate ordering. Voice orders are processed in the same manner as other online tickets, eliminating the need for staff training while also boosting efficiency, according to the tech company. Plus, the bots appear to be good at upselling: "We think this AI solution is a great catalyst for further expansion where we enjoy and benefit from a higher average check," Wingstop's CEO Michael J. Skipworth told analysts during the chain's second-quarter earnings call. The technology is still in test mode at big restaurant chains with outsized research and development budgets and will need to prove its ROI before gaining wider adoption.

2 Menu optimization

When it comes to menus, AI can lend a hand in a variety of ways: It can write a menu based on a few parameters as well as aid in inventory management. At the granular level, it can suggest personalized menu recommendations based on customer preferences and ordering history. POS operator Square recently added 10 generative AI features to its platform, including menu development. "At some point in the future, AI in restaurants could give a high-confidence answer that a certain dish will rock a diner's world based on data about their preferences, interests, time of day and more," says Ming-Tai Huh, Square's general manager of restaurants. "With this sort of automated personalization, guests might be more likely to enjoy their meals and become repeat customers, and restaurant businesses would be able to provide more customized

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF TOAST

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"At some point in the future, AI in restaurants could give a high-confidence answer that a certain dish will rock a diner's world based on data about their preferences, interests, time of day and more."

— Ming-Tai Huh, Square's general manager of restaurants

and fulfilling experiences." Noodles & Company added a product-recommendation engine on its website and app, driven by machine learning, that has led to a 45% jump in the likelihood of customers adding the suggested items, the fast-casual chain reported in November.

3 Employee management

Not only can AI free up restaurant workers -from ho-hum tasks such as taking phone orders, it also can help with a range of workforce-focused to-dos including scheduling, training and onboarding. Forecasting software Lineup.ai, which integrates with multiple POS systems, examines past point-of-sale data and other factors to predict staffing needs. And restaurants such as Little Caesars are using artificial intelligence for employee training and taking any human error out of the equation by employing both AI and machine learning

to ensure pizza quality. "When we started, lowering the cost of training new employees was a top priority," tech services company World Wide Technology, which worked with Little Caesars, noted on its website. "When we finished, Little Caesars was able to ditch in-person training and provide it virtually because the app was intuitive and easy to learn."

4 Loyalty programs and marketing

Among the enhancements to Square's POS is a feature that uses integrated ChatGPT to generate personalized marketing emails, as well as SEO-optimized website copy. Chipotle is employing AI to generate individualized offers that aim to further build loyalty. "This goes all the way into the cohorts and the journeys that we create," CEO Brian Niccol said in announcing Chipotle's second-quarter earnings. "And we believe when you do this across our 35 million rewards customers, it now has meaningful scale

where the customization results in loyalty that results in obviously additional sales." See page 48 for more details.

Fraud detection

AI embedded into POS systems can detect fraudulent transactions or employee theft more swiftly than a multi-tasking human. POS provider Toast uses machine learning-powered fraud monitoring to "analyze, detect and block" suspicious transactions that could result in chargebacks (customers disputing a credit card charge), the company said.

As with many industry innovations, AI is getting its start among the big restaurant chains. But once those giants work out the kinks—and artificial intelligence increasingly finds its place in the omnipresent POS system—it won't be long before machine learning and predictive technology is commonplace at independent operations. ■

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Awaywrite

AI can craft a message—fast

By Lesley Balla

When creating clever, original, on-brand messaging for restaurant promotions, newsletters and website copy, it's easy to get stuck, especially with so many other responsibilities.

That's where AI comes in. Bard, ChatGPT, Canva and other AI tools can make a world of difference when creating content. Among the ways artificial intelligence can help restaurants, these chatbots arguably are the easiest entry point. Create an account for free in most cases, type in a prompt and get a response.

To get a worthy answer, however, requires some effort. It's smart to have a solid strategy to harness the technology so it works for you. It's also important to remember that any information plugged into a chatbox is owned by the company behind the technology. It's used to improve the database, but that also means you have no say in how it's used.

Here are some best practices for creating content with AI, from the prompts to tweaking copy so it sounds like your own brand.

Define brand and voice

Without direction, AI will produce generic messaging for social media posts, newsletters and website copy. Understanding the nuances of your brand's personality, tone and style will help AI customize your content so your business stands out in a crowd.

Start by defining your brand and voice, says Stefany Elliott, president and founder of The Same Paige. Her firm works with various restaurants on the East Coast, including New York City's The Richardson and Upside on Moore in Washington, D.C.

Use brand-specific terms, phrases and references when writing prompts for AI-generated content. For instance, if you

use ChatGPT to help write social media captions for holiday programming, train it to understand your restaurant concept, location and target audience along with menu items.

"These tools don't know your brand, your story, your clientele," says Elliott. "Use as much detail as possible."

Be specific with prompts

"Restaurant operators should master the art of crafting prompts that clearly convey the desired tone, style and content focus," says Phyllis Hong, CEO and founder of Privileged Insights, a boutique consulting firm that specializes in ChatGPT, guerrilla marketing and social media. "Specificity will significantly impact the relevance and accuracy of the generated content."

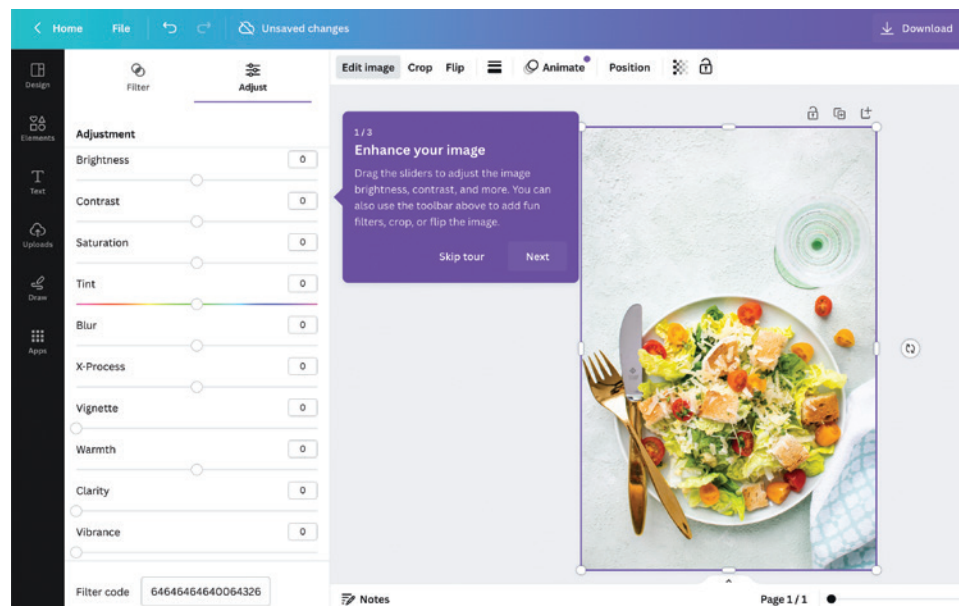
That's to say: AI-generated content is all about what you put into it. To produce language for a new menu promotion on social media, create a prompt about the menu item, words or colors you don't want to use and even the restaurant's location.

To create newsletter copy to help drum up new brunch business, fashion a prompt around the most popular dishes and drinks and mention outside seating or any other points of difference.

Hong also recommends using the same window for all related queries to ensure consistency. For instance, don't use the same AI window to plan your family vacation while trying to generate newsletter headlines or a new brunch promotion.

Think outside of the AI toolbox

AI tools exist for just about everything you might need to create content. For social media posts for her restaurant and bar clients, Elliott and her team rely on Canva's AI tools to



generate or clean up photos. For instance, she'll remove unwanted people or items from the background of a photo or use Canva's Magic Edit tool to change the garnish on a cocktail from a lemon to a lime before posting the image.

Photo-generating AI tools can also create designs, color schemes, new fonts and more for content. One of Elliott's clients used AI to create a logo for a rebrand.

For compelling website copy, create a prompt for keyword-rich text that's SEO-friendly. By adding SEO-rich keywords to your website, say on the "about us" page or in a blog post, potential customers can find you more easily on search engines like Google.

Provide prompts about your brand into tools like Grammarly to proofread restaurant-specific text for newsletters, website copy, menus and marketing materials. Typos and misspellings can send customers elsewhere, fast.

Humans still required

"Using AI has been like having an extra team member, but that team member is a super-eager intern who is excited to learn and doesn't quite understand what the company does yet,"

Elliott says. "It is user-friendly, accessible and always available, but it can never fully grasp a unique brand identity or voice."

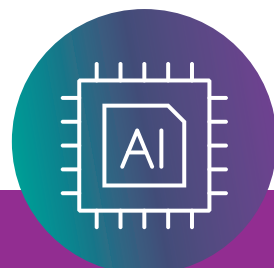
There's only so much AI can do to create content for restaurants. You still need humans to review and tweak AI-generated text, finesse website and newsletter copy, or ensure the social media post is on-brand and timely. Some nuance is still necessary to get the messaging just right—nuance that artificial intelligence doesn't quite have yet but is advancing. For example, Owner offers a platform with a dropdown menu for choosing menu items, holiday or special occasions and tone of voice, such as Yoda from "Star Wars" to craft short messages.

Still, any shortcomings shouldn't turn you off, says Brian Howard, executive chef and owner of Spaghetti on the Wall Hospitality in Las Vegas. He advises embracing everything AI can do for the restaurant.

"Find ways to use this technology to your advantage since the world is not slowing down, especially for our industry," he adds. "Chefs are famous for saying, 'If only I could clone myself, I might be able to keep up.' And now you almost have the opportunity to do just that." ■

"Chefs are famous for saying, 'If only I could clone myself, I might be able to keep up.' And now you almost have the opportunity to do just that."

—Brian Howard, executive chef and owner of Spaghetti on the Wall Hospitality



15-SECOND SYNOPSIS TO WRITING AI CONTENT

Know your brand so AI can support it and produce results that set the restaurant apart from others.

Clearly convey the desired tone, style and content focus. If it's a casual and fun atmosphere, use words that specifically describe it.

Try other tools to improve the reach of the overall message by ensuring the restaurant website has SEO-rich words for people to find the concept.

Think of AI content as a helper. You'll still need someone to review and hone the message to ensure it's on target.



FOCUS

LOYAL TO A

How technology brings customers back—again and again

By Amber Gibson



Jennifer Adams

Visited last month

Vegan

May promotion

Creating and keeping loyal diners has never been so precise. Restaurants can leverage customer data via AI models to understand and market to their patrons. These models can tell operators which customers are returning and which aren't as well as the offers and incentives that convince them to revisit. The data can also reveal the effectiveness of new menu items, and whether they're catering to different audiences and personas, all to help create the most loyal customers. But how?

By staying all-encompassing, laser focused

"We know what people spend on their average check, what they typically order and the drinks they purchase," says Carissa Newton, Cunningham Restaurant Group's vice president of marketing. "We are also able to track frequency of visits along with if they are visiting multiple concepts within

our group." Indianapolis-based CRG operates 42 restaurants across three states (Indiana, Kentucky and Ohio), and Newton has been using POS data for years, but in January 2023, after migrating their systems to Paytronix, she had real-time access to data across OpenTable (reservations), Paytronix (customer loyalty) and Toast (point of sale).

"Since then, we have been able to monitor our sales by every single campaign we implement on email and within our loyalty database," she says. "Prior to Paytronix, it was a very manual and siloed approach to gathering the data. With the Paytronix capabilities and its AI, we can see down to the item level what our loyal guests are purchasing and at what frequency. We can then tailor our campaigns to those audiences based on their spend patterns."

Examples include invitations to special events, new opening announcements to guests that frequent specific concepts the most, or

campaigns to thank guests for visiting or say "we miss you" if it's been longer than usual since a guest's last visit.

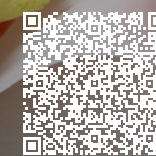
"We achieve much higher open and click rates than any industry I have ever worked with," Newton says. "In addition to the engagement metrics, we get conversions because they are clicking through and making reservations. People connect with brands when they feel a brand understands them. There is no better way to do this than personalization with AI."

Newton and her team use AI for social media captions and design as well as email campaigns, marketing collateral and product descriptions. "To me, AI delivers across the board, and there are so many opportunities to maximize the data in real time," she says. "It can increase incremental spend, which can add up over time and create higher volume spenders in your loyal customer database. And that leads to overall revenue success for an organization."

GET COOKIN' WITH YOUR BEST PICK-UP LINE



EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES

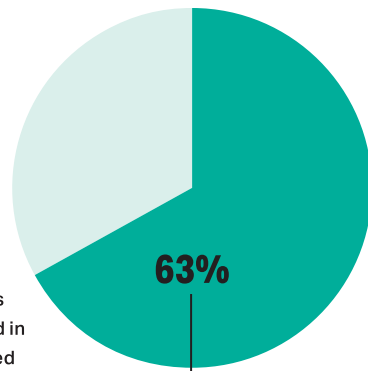
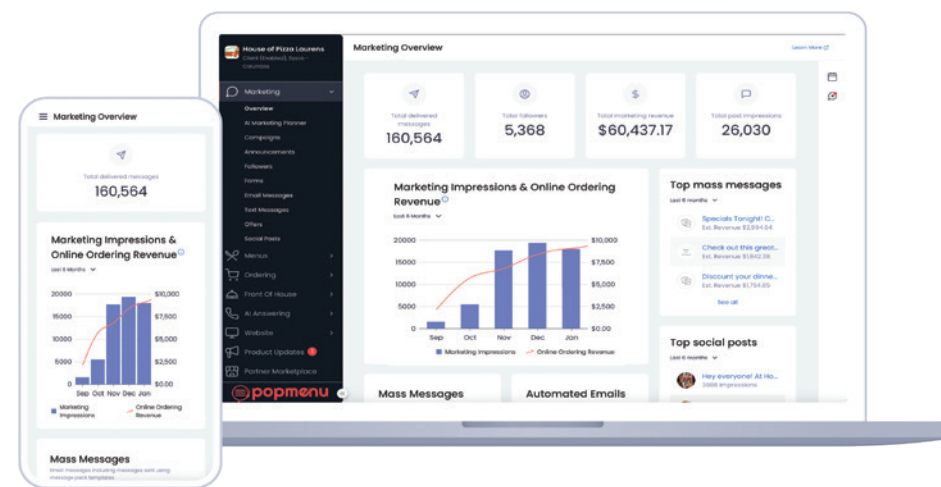
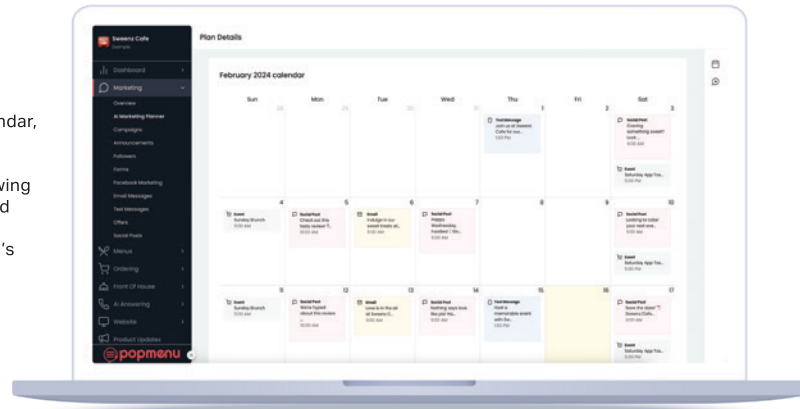


The right kitchen tools are critical for an efficient and successful operation. Properly stock your back-of-house with clear, easy-to-grab containers, stainless-steel tongs, super-durable table pans and more. Gear up from our Core Essentials Brochure which includes best-in-class selection of foodservice equipment and supplies by Superior®, Monogram® and Valu+Plus®.

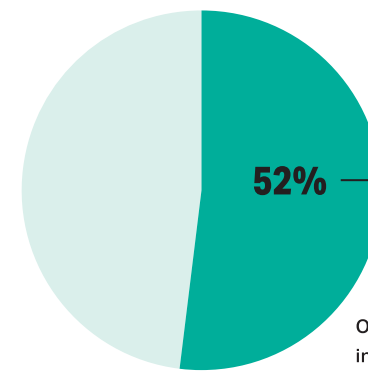


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An example of Popmenu's AI marketing calendar, right. Below, an example of a restaurant growing impressions and online orders using Popmenu's AI marketing technology.



Operators interested in AI-assisted consumer feedback



Operators interested in AI-assisted marketing and promotion

Source: Datassential

By answering every call

In Denver, the Culinary Creative Group is just starting to tap into AI. Founder and CEO Juan Padro is using Popmenu to streamline technology and marketing efforts for all concepts and locations.

"In our industry, we are seeing a focus on efficiency, so this is going to be a huge time saver," he says. "We can control the guest experience by keeping them on our website, ordering directly through our site and texting them direct links to place an order or fill out a hiring form." Padro relies on Popmenu's AI marketing and AI phone answering system across all locations and has already seen a huge benefit.

"Our phones ring off the hook at our restaurants, so we need to make sure we answer every call so we don't miss any revenue opportunities, which historically has been a huge issue for us," he says. With Popmenu, Padro can access a dashboard to see exactly how many calls they are receiving, the top

topics guests are calling about and the resolution rate for calls. "We can customize responses, promote specials and other news, and automatically send callers a link to make a reservation or place an online order."

By watching what customers eat

As for AI-generated automatic emails, Popmenu takes information from their website—including new and popular dishes, reviews, and events—and automatically builds a monthly calendar of emails, texts and social posts that are specific to each brand. "All we have to do is approve or edit the content, which I do find that we need to do, but it helps create a discipline for us," Padro says. "Both tools free up time for our staff while helping to bring in new and repeat customers."

With Popmenu's interactive menu, they can even test the effectiveness of new menu items. "If we see a high level of engagement—likes, reviews and orders—on our website, we've got a fan favorite. The AI marketing tech will

automatically work the new dish into the monthly calendar, so we get more exposure through different marketing channels to gauge guest interest."

When guests like a dish, leave a review or place an online order, each of these is a valuable data point that helps Padro and his team build a more robust profile for loyal guests. "We can automate more personalized marketing that speaks to their preferences," he says. "Not only can we be more targeted with segmented lists by each location, event, etc., but we can also send overarching messaging across all our followers directly through our parent account in the same way."

Although they are in the beginning stages of tapping the powers of AI, Padro believes more personalized guest interactions will lead to a better ROI and set Culinary Creative Group apart from competitors.

"Ultimately, this is all about data," Padro says. "So how can we capture the most data and use it to enhance the guest experience?"

ARTWORK COURTESY OF POPMENU

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Picture This

You can generate photos of menu items with AI

By Frank Lawlor

For restaurant owners, the struggle to create appealing and timely photo content is real. The abundance of professional food photography on social media has raised diners' expectations—turning everyone into instant food critics with every image swipe.

While capturing images with a mobile device is convenient, these snapshots can reflect poorly on the quality of a dish. Professional photo shoots produce attractive content, but they are expensive and time-consuming.

As in many industries, technology is presenting a possible solution for restaurants: images generated by artificial intelligence.

HOW IT WORKS

Since the launch of the first AI image generator DALL-E in 2021, many new products have surfaced, and like any first-to-market, the successors are better. AI image generators have pros, such as better output, and cons, such as the danger of legal issues. While Adobe's Firefly doesn't always produce the best images, it's worth exploring. It

works with text prompts and a simple graphical user interface. Firefly, a part of Adobe's suite of software products that include graphic design, video editing and photography, also is free of the copyright infringement issues on other platforms.

AI generates results by referencing existing data; the output is only as good as the reference data. Firefly references Adobe's entire stock photo library—over 200 million photos—to generate AI images, while other platforms reference the entire internet, but the resulting images can lead to infringement issues.

While it's the safest option (no one wants a legal headache from a social media post of an AI-image that resembles a shot by a professional photographer), Firefly's greatest strength has drawbacks—a copyright-safe image reference library has limitations. Sometimes the generated output won't exactly match your dish or a specific ingredient.

Firefly is included in Adobe's Creative Suite applications Photoshop and Illustrator, but without those services, the first 25 images are free. For \$4.99 per month, users can create up to 100 images.

GETTING STARTED

Create an account on Firefly by accessing Adobe online and start with a free plan. Enter a prompt such as "a bowl of clams." Hit "generate."

The AI images appear on the left, and controls for settings like aspect ratio, style and effects on the right help further refine the images. The generated images match the general nature of the prompt.

The images can be downloaded from the existing options, but they can be further refined with a more specific prompt and adding a reference image from a phone.





Under the prompt, add the specifics. In this case: bowl of Manila clams with fried sausage garnished with kale. Then from the panel of choices on the right, upload the reference image.

The new ingredients listed in the updated prompt and shown in the uploaded reference image on the right are reflected in the latest generated image set below.

The new image set shows the ingredients correctly, but the photos lack the polish of professionally styled photography. Add detailed photographic terms to the prompt to add interest, such as: bowl of Manila clams with fried sausage garnished with kale, depth of field, F/2.8, high contrast, cinematic lighting, ethereal light, intricate details, extremely detailed, incredible details, full colored, complex details, photography, photo shoot.



Scan to watch how to use Firefly for creating AI photos.



This example reflects the final image from the four options available for download at Firefly's maximum resolution—2,000 pixels—not large enough for print resolution, but suitable for a social media post.

The final image represents the dish well enough, but a closer look at the ingredients isn't best of show. Some elements are difficult to discern and some just don't look at all appetizing. The image also fails to capture the correct plating and vibe that comes with professional photography or even a phone snapshot taken by an amateur who understands the basics of a good photo. While Firefly lacks the ability to generate specific complex dishes, it can offer better images of basic food, such as a cheeseburger, fries, a steak or simple desserts such as ice cream or creme brulee.

MORE TO COME
This technology has greatly improved since DALL-E, but there's a long way to go. The amount of progress in AI image generation technology in such a short time is jaw-dropping. There is little risk in getting your feet wet. If nothing else, AI image generation could be an excellent way to supplement the never-ending demand of social media channels. Don't sleep on this tech—start experimenting with AI image generators now so you're ready for the next several years when AI will deliver better photos and even video. Yes, quality AI video is coming soon. ■

A young woman with blonde hair, wearing a black baseball cap, a white chef's jacket, and a black and white striped apron, stands in a professional kitchen. She is looking towards the camera with a slight smile. The background shows various kitchen equipment, including a stove, shelves with containers, and a sink area. The lighting is warm and focused on the chef.

WHAT'S NEXT

Expect more artificial intelligence to solve inefficiency

By Abigail Covington



I As the future of artificial intelligence seems more like the present, a wave of startups touting AI-powered tools promise to solve the restaurant industry's most notorious issue: inefficiency.

Naturally, each company believes its application is superior, but one truth prevails: AI works best with the restaurant's data. No good can come from investing in AI without investment in data. Three CEOs each weigh in on how their company's tech is poised for the future.

The operations management startup ClearCOGS expects its technology to add precision to existing capabilities. Much of a restaurant's inefficiency stems from not knowing "who is going to walk in the door each day," says Matt Wampler, co-founder and CEO. The predictive analytics ClearCOGS sells are powered by a sub-field of artificial intelligence

called machine learning. This technology, which can automatically process and learn from multiple data streams in real time, produces customized recommendations that enable operators to make precise, profitable decisions.

For instance, machine learning can review the amount of lettuce the restaurant used during the previous three weeks; analyze various factors such as how the day of the week, holidays, or the weather may have affected the amount; and recommend a new order size for the week ahead that considers the conditions it previously analyzed. If next week includes a three-day weekend and calls for rainy weather, AI-generated insights may suggest ordering less lettuce based on sales data from previous weeks with similar conditions. Getting little decisions right, like the amount of lettuce to order, adds up—sometimes to thousands of dollars a month.



AI can review the amount of lettuce used during the previous three weeks; analyze various factors such as how the day of the week, holidays, or the weather may have affected the amount; and recommend a new order size for the week ahead.

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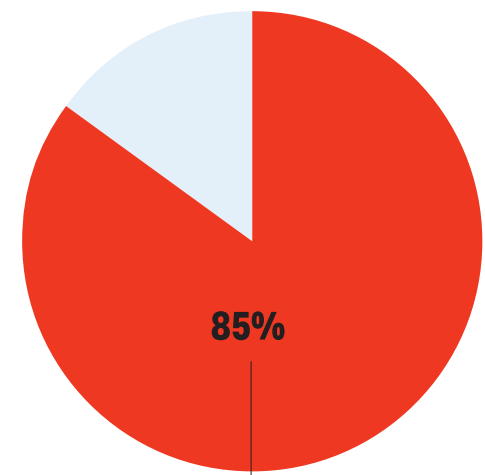
"When you get the pennies taken care of," says Wampler, "the dollars take care of themselves." More precise ordering also helps eliminate food waste and boost sustainability, which Wampler views as another meaningful outcome of AI use in restaurants.

However, according to Luke Fryer, CEO of the employee-experience platform Harri, not all AI-generated outcomes are created equally, and some are more worthy of pursuit than others. Harri targets labor costs, which Fryer believes are most damaging to operators. "The biggest problem to solve is retention of employees," Fryer says, "because turnover cripples operators with costs."

Harri helps reduce some of those costs by using AI to streamline and automate parts of the hiring process. "There's a lot of data available in the hiring process that allows machine learning to play a very valuable role,"

Fryer explains, "because, in this industry, previous behavior is a good predictor of future outcomes." So, for example, machine learning can be trained to identify and automatically eliminate resumes rife with job-hopping or other indicators for future retention issues. The technology can also be taught to look for certain qualities in a server versus a hostess. In both scenarios, machine learning is saving operators time and potentially helping them hire more wisely. If operators can crack employee retention, they could recoup the 20% Fryer estimates operators spend every week on "short-cycle turnover." "It's just this huge area of cost savings that's hiding in plain sight," he says.

Nikhil Abraham, founder and CEO of the culinary AI startup CloudChef, also wants to help restaurants save money and operate more efficiently, but his approach is radically



Operators open to AI's role in foodservice, despite fears

Source: Datassential

CloudChef aims to cut the cost of food production by outfitting kitchens with AI-enhanced appliances and automated burners.



"CloudChef is better than traditional cooking because AI is controlling all the heat inside the kitchen."

—Nikhil Abraham, founder and CEO of the culinary AI startup CloudChef

different. For starters, he's not using data to make decisions. He's using cameras. And his primary area of concern isn't the back office—it's the kitchen, where restaurants accrue most of their expenses, Nikhil says, and, consequently, where AI can have the biggest impact.

CloudChef claims to drive down the cost of food production in independent restaurants by outfitting kitchens with AI-enhanced appliances like sensor-based pans and automated burners so unskilled labor can cook a dish as accurately and consistently as a professionally trained chef. "CloudChef is better than traditional cooking because AI is controlling all the heat inside the kitchen," Abraham says.

In other words, when it comes to knowing how long to roast an onion to achieve deep caramelization, a new line cook doesn't stand a chance against a fry pan festooned with cameras and sensors.

This technology has major implications

for restaurant operators whose businesses run on a shrinking pool of skilled laborers. If restaurants can cook food consistently without the help of skilled labor, they can operate more efficiently. They could even potentially scale up without suffering the loss of quality that often besets restaurants once multiple locations open.

Take this idea to its extreme, Nikhil says, and what you get is "democratized access to culinary intelligence" so that "anybody, anywhere in the world, can recreate a recipe."

A world in which chefs are relying on AI-generated analytics instead of their instincts to place food orders; managers using machine learning software instead of Craigslist to hire servers; and line cooks offloading half of their tasks onto a borderline sentient fry pan may seem frightening to some.

But if the result of AI in restaurants is better margins and improved efficiency, even the most nostalgic chefs and managers may feel like the future can't come soon enough. ■

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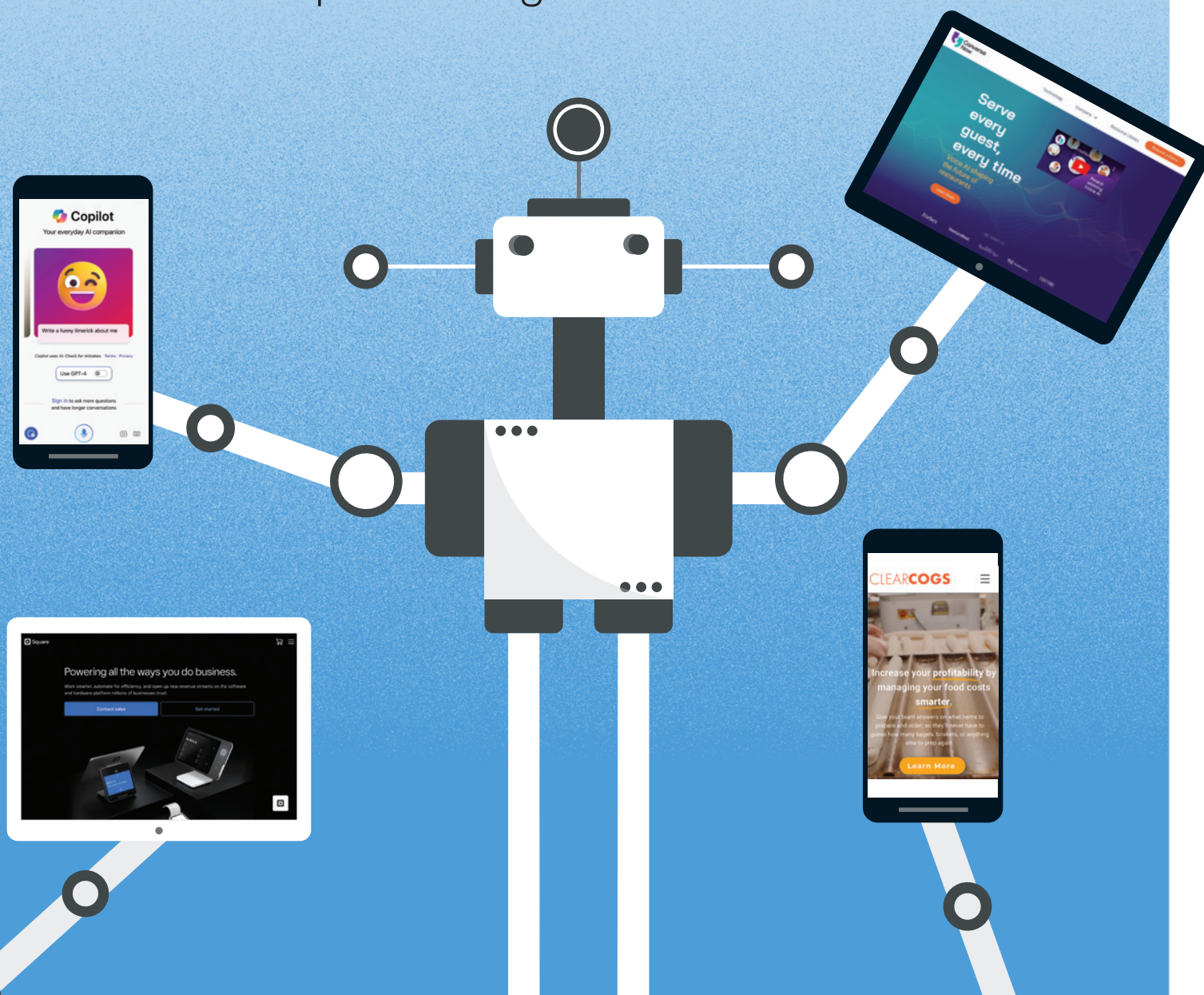


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HELP CENTER

Resources for understanding and implementing AI in restaurants



↓
A variety of tech companies are offering or developing AI services to pinpoint and predict what customers are likely to order.



PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF TOAST

I Chances are artificial intelligence has or will have a role in your points of sales, reservations or any system that helps operations automate. But the quality and effectiveness will only be as good as your own knowledge and comfort level.

Here's a place to start, but remember that the technology is evolving quickly, offering new services, improvements and advances.

● GEMINI

Formerly Google's Bard, Gemini is a new and improved version of its former self: an AI-powered conversational chatbot much like ChatGPT. Unlike ChatGPT, which was last updated in 2023 for paid users and 2021 for free users, Gemini searches the web in current time. Gemini Advance, which Google says "is far more capable at highly complex tasks like coding, logical reasoning, following nuanced instructions, and creative collaboration," is only available for personal Google accounts at this printing. The service is \$19.99 per month.

● CLEARCOGS

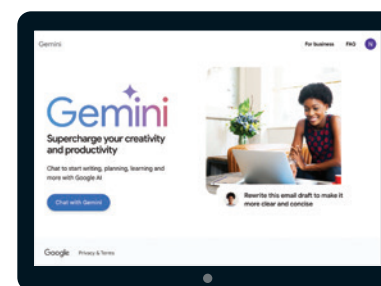
An AI operations management system, ClearCOGS integrates with existing systems to create data-driven forecasts for prep schedules and daily sales so restaurants can cut waste and improve efficiency. Eventually all ClearCOGS partners will be able to hook up their POS system to ChatGPT and ask AI questions that pertain to inventory and sales, such as, "What are the odds that we'll run out of beef tomorrow?" Using inputs like past store data, ChatGPT will be able to produce predictive analysis.

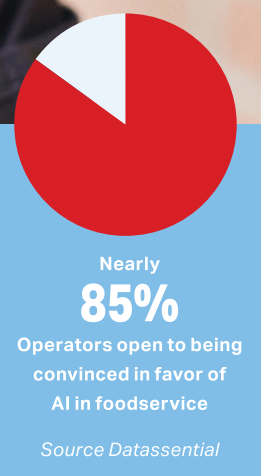
● COPILOT

Powered by Microsoft's Bing, Copilot is the most detailed conversation chatbot, offering categories such as cooking assistant, fitness trainer and vacation planner. Users can choose any of the three conversational styles (creative, balanced or precise) to research topics or write reports from a prompt, such as, "What are some ways to cut waste in a 200-seat restaurant?" Copilot also generates images powered by Open AI's Dall-E, but the text-to-image model is slow and the results of food appear cartoonish. The service is free with a Microsoft account.

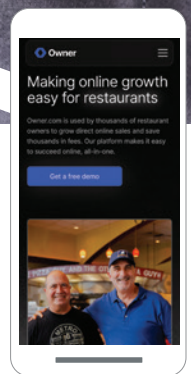
● CONVERSENOW

ConverseNow is a voice AI platform that automates restaurant orders, especially for high-volume channels like drive-thru and phone. These virtual ordering assistants can handle multiple conversations at once, with natural language and emotional nuance. The company also offers data collection and analysis that provide insights and recommendations for improving customer satisfaction as well as profitability, personalization and upsell that increase sales potential and loyalty by remembering customers' names and preferences.





PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF TOAST



OWNER

Owner is a cloud-based platform that helps restaurants manage their finances, operations and marketing using AI. Services include accounting and payroll; inventory with insights to reduce waste; loyalty services management that includes rewards based on customer menu choices; and data analysis from online ordering and reviews to provide insights. It also offers a chatbot for customers and an internal one that can create content using different conversational tones for emails and social media.

Like its competitors, it also has a tool that creates and manages loyalty programs for restaurants, and uses AI to personalize rewards and offers based on customer behavior.

SQUARE

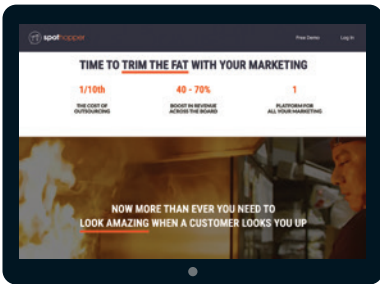
Best known for payment processing, Square recently added 10 AI features to its platform, including a menu generator, a photo enhancement tool, content creation to personalize email, website and product descriptions, virtual ordering assistant and data collection and analysis.

SPOTHOPPER

Spotthopper promotes itself as a platform that helps restaurants increase their online visibility and sales using AI. The AI-powered services include a website builder; online ordering directly from a restaurant's website with upselling and customization; and a content-building tool that generates and posts social media. Spotthopper also handles reputation management with a tool that monitors and responds to online reviews, ratings and feedback from customers, using natural language processing.

TOAST

Considered a leading company in the technology restaurant space, the all-in-one cloud-based point of sales and restaurant management platform offers a marketing assistant powered by generative AI. It allows users to provide information on marketing campaigns and then generates subject lines and copy suggestions. The feature is designed to help businesses save time by crafting work that reflects their brand and marketing goals. ■

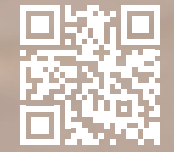


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BY THE NUMBERS

WE ARE THE WORLD

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TOP MENU WORDS

- 50% Authentic
- 38% Unique
- 34% New/on-trend
- 32% Boldly flavored
- 29% Healthy, better for you
- 27% Value

WHAT'S AUTHENTIC

- 66% Knowledgeable servers
- 60% Using imported or culturally specific ingredients/prep methods
- 58% Owner and/or chef are from the same culture/ethnicity as the cuisine
- 55% Restaurant focuses on a cuisine's region or local specialties

NOW

75% Operators with global dishes/flavors on the menu

3 in 4 Operators open to new, unfamiliar flavors/ingredients

LATER

37% Plans to cross-utilize global ingredients

32% Plans to increase global options

21% Plans to increase globally influenced promotions

4% Plans to decrease globally influenced promotions

BOTTOM LINE: WHAT'S IMPORTANT

80% Controlling food costs

63% Minimizing labor, quick preparation

61% Driving traffic throughout the day

60% Adding menu variety

56% Increasing check averages

WHO'S BEST AT AUTHENTIC?

52% Prepared by venues that specialize in it

23% Someone with that background

78% Food just needs to be good

Source: Datassential

WHY EXTRA CRISPY FRIES?



*Study conducted without packaging

Stays crispy for up to 30 minutes so your guests get the best eating experience, no matter if they're dining in or off-premise.



Great for topped and loaded recipes because they keep crispy, regardless of what sauces and toppings are used.



Scan for more recipe inspiration using Lamb Weston's **EXTRA CRISPY FRIES!**

Lamb Weston SEEING POSSIBILITIES IN POTATOES

IT HAS TO BE HEINZ

ESTD 1869



66% OF CONSUMERS ARE MORE LIKELY TO BUY A CLEAN LABEL SAUCE*

71% OF CONSUMERS PREFER CONDIMENTS THAT ARE MILDLY TO MODERATELY SPICY*



NEW AND NOW AVAILABLE

APN	KHC #	DESCRIPTION
1057106	130000145000	Heinz® Jalapeño Ketchup Dip & Squeeze Packet (500 x 27g)
3728391	130000030800	Heinz® Ketchup Dip & Squeeze Packet (500 x 27g)
1038972	130000143800	Simply Heinz® Table-Top Ketchup Bottle (24 x 20oz)



SCAN ME

*DATASSENTIAL; SAUCES, CONDIMENTS AND DRESSINGS, MAY 2023