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Today's Restaurant News Exclusive

How the next wave of the food and beverage industry will be shaped by AI

By Michael Mueller
Vice President of Aperio Consulting Group

Artificial intelligence has already sparked change in the food and beverage industry. But so far, this technology has been focused on the product. For example, AI has made portions more consistent and made the process of sorting produce more efficient.

But there's another possibility for AI. The next wave of AI in the food and beverage industry will be to improve the people, not the product. In today's difficult hiring landscape, people-focused AI can help businesses discover what they truly need—and get creative about how to find it.

What if you could discover the key behavioral traits of a chain manager or a franchise owner? What if you could decode the most helpful habits of a server or use a rewards program to better understand your customer's buying habits? Artificial intelligence, when united with behavioral science, can do just that. We can merge findings from psychology, sociology, and neuroscience with the computing power of AI to make better hiring decisions, lead more effectively, and stay on top of new food and beverage trends.



Michael Mueller

How?

First, let's clarify some terms. Artificial intelligence is a bit of a misnomer—as AI is neither artificial nor intelligent. “Artificial” refers to the fact that it's a computer doing calculations (or running equations) rather than a human. “Intelligence” is used because the computer running these equations or algorithms is trying to find patterns and discover connections—the way a human brain would. So when it comes to using AI to improve decisions about people, it is crucial

that the technology is used in partnership with human reasoning. This is sometimes called “hybrid work.” For any AI to be successful, there must be a human component. Moreover, we need to hold these algorithms to the high standard of transparency—leaders should demand to know exactly how the AI reached its conclusion.

The bottom line?

Humans can use AI to collect and assess data, but they need to be in the driver's seat. People—and the human brain—are still best when it comes to interpreting information and thinking strategically. But with these human strengths come human bias. “If you have a brain, you're biased,” as the saying goes. Enter AI. With the right technology, a hiring manager may consider candidates they might otherwise rule out. Perhaps the candidate didn't have the “right” experience, but an assessment shows they have the growth mindset and acumen needed to succeed in the role.

Let's say you are overseeing the opening of 15 new locations across a geographic region. You have several positions to hire, from managers to cashiers

See **NEXT WAVE** page 11

Today's Restaurant News Exclusive

Post-pandemic shortages, digital orders can create safety risks for employees

By Chris Holbert
CEO SecuraTrac

After the upheaval of the pandemic that forced restaurant closures, left them scrambling to find ways to add outdoor dining space, and transition menus into to-go friendly options, now the industry is facing new challenges. As the country reopens, restaurants are returning to full capacity and hiring, but there are less workers interested in filling those jobs. And now the chip shortage is making it impossible to secure point-of-sale technologies which is leading to restaurants adopting new digital ordering systems that do not require servers.

The sum of all these changes is restaurants are operating with smaller staffs. Employees covering early morning hours or late nights that are not peak business times are more likely to be working alone as a result. Restaurant owners and managers are having to find ways to efficiently



Chris Holbert

manage more, lone workers than ever before. Especially when the increased levels of delivery personnel are factored in as well. One thing the pandemic has taught many businesses is they need a plan to ensure employee and customer safety from a variety of unexpected threats.

Sure, restaurant employees have been making deliveries for decades. And working long shifts at odd hours of the morning and night. But that does not mean that restaurants cannot do more to keep employees safe as the industry recovers and business increase to pre-pandemic levels. Proper training in safety procedures remains crucial and providing employees with the right tools to request and receive help in an emergency situation becomes more important.

According to the Pew Research Center approximately 95 percent of Americans now own a cell phone of some type and more than one-third own a smartphone. While these devices provide many conveniences, in emergency situations they remain highly limited, especially in environments that have poor reception or that limit a user's ability to reach and operate the device.

See **SHORTAGES** page 11

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Appell Pie

25 years in the making

Howard Appell ♦ Today's Restaurant Publisher

The year was 1996 the month was July. The time was right to start a newspaper devoted to the restaurant industry in Florida. There was nothing like it in the state then and today, twenty five years later it still exists, but in a different form.

After 25 years of publishing we still are evolving and will continue to change adding new features and advertising options...

In 1996 cut and paste was a term used by editors and in most major newspapers there could be seen a room full of staffers cutting and pasting together the pages for the next edition. Then the world changed.

In 1996 Nintendo released their newest gaming system the Nintendo 64. The U.S. stock markets, including the Dow Jones Industrial Average, gains at an incredibly fast pace and ends the year over the 6,000 mark. The Summer Olympics are held in Atlanta. Jumbo Jet bursts into flames shortly after takeoff and crashes into the ocean off Long Island. Ebay starts online auction website, IBM's Deep Blue defeats Chess Champion Gary Kasparov, Centennial Olympic Park, Atlanta Nail bomb, Dunblane Massacre, Dolly the sheep becomes the first mammal to be successfully cloned, Mad Cow Disease BSE kills humans in England, In the UK Prince Charles and Diana, Princess of Wales get divorced and Mad Cow Disease hits Britain and Today's Restaurant New was born.

Some of the companies that started in 1996 are household names and some of the events are a part of our folklore and history. Today's Restaurant News has evolved to its present form, a digital newspaper, for the entire restaurant industry, not just in Florida but around the world.

We couldn't have made the journey and the changes we've made without the love and support of our readers, advertisers and staff. Some of our great advertisers have been with us for over twenty years, but I want to single out two people who have been on this journey with us almost from the beginning.

Jim Pollard, our Art Director has been with us for more than twenty years and those of you who advertise with us know of his skill in creating the ads that you want to showcase your products in. Not only does Jim handle the artistic side of TRN he is a trusted advisor and friend. Jim takes our ideas and makes them pop off the page, computer screen or phone and if he doesn't think our ideas are worthy he lets us know and he is right most of the time.

Editor in Chief Terri McKinney also has been with Today's Restaurant News for twenty plus years and the person who works tirelessly to keep the company on an even keel. She heads us the Restaurant Leads Report and is the person who selects the stories we post every month. She is invaluable to this organization and to me and she shares a birthday with Today's Restaurant News, Happy Birthday Terri.

After twenty five years of publishing we still are evolving and will continue to change adding new features and advertising options for our readers and advertisers. It's been a crazy ride to twenty five and we look forward to what is sure to be an exciting and challenging next twenty five years. Thank you all.

Source: www.thepeoplehistory.com/1996.html

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What's Going On

Important new products, corporate news and industry events

A new retail fish market has opened in Ocala. **The Catch of The Day Fish Market** opened last month in the Ocala Center shopping plaza. The market is located at 1745 East Silver Springs Boulevard.

◆◆◆◆◆
The 2022 International Restaurant & Foodservice Show of New York will be held March 6-8 2022. It will give the opportunity to join more than 18,000+ of peers in experiencing the hottest menu trends, state-of-the-art design and décor, and the best in business education, all while in the presence of 570+ exhibitors in the restaurant and foodservice community. It will be held at the the Javits Center in New York and will co-located with the Healthy Food Expo and Coffee Fest. For all details visit internationalrestaurant-showny.com.

◆◆◆◆◆
Crown Bakeries, a baker of fresh and frozen bread, baked foods, and dough products, has acquired **Michel's Bakery**, a Philadelphia-based baker specializing



Duke's® is supplying solutions for the restaurant industry with inspiring flavors in portion control sizes. The iconic, Southern brand has rolled out a line of single use dipping sauce cups and salad dressing pouches, using quality ingredients and convenient packaging for consumers. The new products are now available in businesses across the country. "Innovation is a pillar of our company and we are constantly thinking of new opportunities to infuse our Duke's southern heritage into convenient products for restaurants and food operations alike," said Maria McAllister, "The Wrangler" / Marketing Operations Manager for Condiments, Sauces and Dressings at Sauer Brands, Inc. Duke's offers a full portfolio for foodservice operations including mayo, sauces, dressings, and other condiments, available for front-of-house and back-of-house. For more information about Duke's foodservice or for sample's in your operation, reach out to first-call@sauerbrands.com.



in large-scale, private label baking for distributors and quick-service customers nationwide and throughout the world. Founded in 1898 and owned by the Liss family for generations, Michel's will continue to operate out of its existing manufacturing facility in Philadelphia. The company's products include brownies, cakes, cupcakes, muffins and pastries. Its services include contract baking, co-packing, custom baked foods and private label baking. Jon Liss will still be

the helm of the company as general manager. Visit michelsbakery.com for more info on their products and private labeling.

◆◆◆◆◆
In Texas news, **Hawaiian Bros** featuring authentic Hawaiian cuisine is in expansion mode. Hawaiian Bros has just opened its first couple of Texas restaurants at 2220 S Loop 288 in Denton, and at 2301 N. Tarrant Parkway in Ft. Worth. More are opening in Texas this month. They are also opening in New York and



other states. Visit the website @ hawaiianbros.com, or contact Cameron and Tyler McNiem, the founders for more information on upcoming locations.

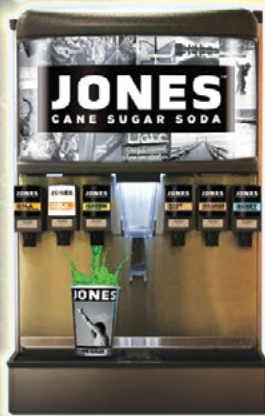
◆◆◆◆◆
86 Repairs — an innovative platform that automates equipment repair and maintenance for restaurants has released its annual **State of Repairs Report**, a comprehensive look at industry-wide trends and data-backed insights pulled directly from a sample of more than 500 customer locations and their service history throughout the 2020 calendar year. From manufacturer reliability and service provider performance to top equipment incidents and average cost per service, the report details

never-before-seen insights to help restaurant operators take actionable steps for strategic R&M planning. "Equipment repairs and maintenance cost the restaurant industry \$26 billion annually. It's a huge line item on the P&L that can be controlled," said Daniel Estrada, co-founder and CEO of 86 Repairs. 86

See **WHAT'S GOING ON** page 6

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Two food cost myths hamstringing your restaurant's recovery

David Scott Peters ♦ Today's Restaurant Contributor

There are two myths you must bust before you can start any journey to lowering your restaurant's food cost.

Myth number one: the price I'm paying for my products is the real problem.

One of the things I've learned coaching independent restaurants since 2003 is that most restaurants run seven to

nine points above their ideal food cost.

What is ideal food cost? Ideal food cost is if everybody ran perfectly, portions went out perfectly, there was no waste, no theft, no spoilage, if you ran a perfect restaurant, based on what your customers order, you would hit your ideal food cost. But the average is just that – a number somewhere in the middle of all restaurants combined. If you're

a pizzeria, maybe you have a 24 percent ideal food cost. A steakhouse could have a 35 percent ideal food cost.

Just using those two numbers as an example, imagine most restaurants are running seven to nine points above that. Why? Because they're making mistakes in the kitchen. It's not the price you're paying for your products. It's not because of outside factors. It's coming from the inside.

So how do you deal with this? How do you stop making those mistakes? Here is a short list of items you can put in place to help you gain some savings on food cost.


thing is in the right place, that you have the right portion controls, so everything tastes right.

♦ **Time-temp checklists:** check the temperatures of your coolers on a regular basis so you're not throwing away product because it's going bad.

Fallacy number two: you're supposed to operate based on an industry average food cost target. There is an assumption that food cost can or should be generally at 34 percent. To understand why that average is probably not your restaurant's target food cost, you have to understand prime cost, budgets, ideal food cost and menu engineering.

Prime cost is total cost of goods sold, plus total labor costs, including taxes, benefits and insurance. I teach restaurant owners to shoot for a 55 percent prime cost – not the national average of 65 percent – and that you can run a higher food cost, lower labor costs, or a higher labor cost with a lower food cost. It doesn't matter how you get to those 55 points.

Using a budget allows you to set your plan in progress for how you're going to lower your food cost to where your food cost needs to be. For example, you can put the Key Item Tracker, Waste Tracker and the Restaurant Checkbook Guardian in place to reduce your food cost by three points right out of the gate. You do need to train everyone one month and then hold them accountable the next because it's not a post-it-and-forget-it set of systems. But these three simple systems start working right away.


Now that we've busted these two harmful myths, you can create a plan and use this short list of systems to be on your way to a profitable restaurant. 

About David Scott Peters: David Scott Peters is an author, restaurant coach and speaker who teaches restaurant operators how to take control of their businesses and finally realize their full potential. His first book, *Restaurant Prosperity Formula: What Successful Restaurateurs Do*, teaches the systems and traits to develop to run a profitable restaurant. Thousands of restaurants have worked with Peters to transform their businesses. Get his three principles to restaurant success at <https://dsp.coach/three-key-principles>.

Online at www.DavidScottPeters.com

Allow your managers to place orders within a budget. And then they can't go over budget without asking you for permission.

- ♦ **Key Item Tracker:** tracks five to 15 items on a shift-by-shift basis to make sure they're not stolen. This is high protein items, high movers, things that are important to you, things you don't want stolen.
- ♦ **Waste Tracker:** tracks what you're throwing away such as that half a case of tomatoes every Thursday because you're over ordering on Monday. Or a cook is burning steaks and needs to be retrained.
- ♦ **Restaurant Checkbook Guardian:** give up ordering without giving up your checkbook. Allow your managers to place orders within a budget. And then they can't go over budget without asking you for permission.
- ♦ **Portion controls:** make sure every dish goes out the same every single time, which controls costs and helps with sales because you give your guests the same experience every single time.
- ♦ **Line checklists:** make sure every-



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What's Going On

from page 3

Repairs is an innovative platform that automates end-to-end equipment repair and maintenance for restaurants and provides actionable insights to improve back-of-house operations. Since its launch in 2018, 86 Repairs has partnered with hundreds of customers, saving them an aggregate of \$2.1 million and counting. The company's repair and maintenance solution is used by growing, multi-unit restaurant groups including: Castellucci Hospitality Group, 4 Rivers Smokehouse, Peas and Carrots Hospitality, and brands like McDonald's, Jimmy John's, Sonic Drive-Ins, and many others. Learn more at <https://www.86repairs.com>.



Jay Spungin

◆◆◆◆◆ **Mac's Hospitality Group (MHG) has announced that Jay Spungin has joined its team as Director of Operations**, overseeing operations and beverage for the eight Carolinas locations of the Group's flagship brand, Mac's Speed Shop. Spungin is also responsible for operations at the four other brands under the MHG umbrella - SouthBound, The Music Yard, BackStage Lounge and The Studio, all in the South48 Complex on South Blvd. in Charlotte.

◆◆◆◆◆ As hospitality operators continue to scale their operations to meet the sustained demand for takeout/delivery and accommodate dine-in experiences for guests, restaurant commerce platform **GoTab** rolls out innovative features designed to set them up for further success. The smart tipping model is devised to replace a routinely complicated and time-consuming task and make tip distribution among staff a fairer and easier process. With ingredient prices proving to be as volatile as ever, GoTab also introduced a dynamic pricing tool that allows operators to swiftly and seamlessly adjust menu items and their associated prices. "We implemented the smart tipping model after listening to our savvy operators, who wanted a modern system that incentivized FOH staff to engage the guests," said GoTab CEO Tim McLaughlin. "With our innovative technology, we were able to create a more balanced system that is based on that server's sales (not who owns the table), and reflective of the new hybrid service model — in-person ordering blended with QR-code ordering — we've seen emerge over the past few months."

◆◆◆◆◆ Coravin, Inc., the premier global wine technology company, announced the launch of its new **Coravin®**

Professional wine preservation kits that can help drive wine revenue and improve the bottom line of restaurants, bars and wineries as they re-open and look to rebuild following the pandemic and COVID closures. The Coravin Pro Reserve, Coravin Pro Select, Coravin Pro Premier Cru and the Coravin Pro Grand Cru kits offer a variety of devices and replenishment items to enable on-premise partners to cost-effectively expand and enhance their by-the-glass offerings, helping drive revenue and profit improvements. "We know the long stretches of lockdowns devastated many in the restaurant and hospitality industry," said Greg Lambrecht, founder of Coravin. "Coravin can be an essential asset to assist our on-premise partners to bounce back as quickly as possible. These new Pro Systems make it easier than ever to expand a venue's wine program, adding greater variety that increases top-line revenue while significantly reducing wine waste." To learn more about Coravin and how to bring the new Coravin Pro systems to restaurant, bar or winery, visit Coravin.com.

Hotel Happenings

The former Park Inn By Radisson Celebration has been successfully converted into the full-service **Wyndham Orlando Resort & Conference Center, Celebration Resort** following a series of multimillion-dollar renovations, major brand agreements and major improvements to the Disney-area property. "This is an excellent hotel and it's perfect for groups, weddings and family reunions," said General Manager Rob Pici. "We have more than 30,000 square feet of modern meeting space offering award winning food and beverage service." The food and beverage departments are commanded by **Jorge Aguilar, who was a Winner of 'Chili Cook Off at Central Florida'** (First Place Restaurant) and has won the People's Choice Award four consecutive years at Central Florida's Hospitality and Lodging Association's "Chef Heat Competition."

◆◆◆◆◆ As pandemic-related restaurant restrictions lift across the U.S., chefs and foodservice operators are refreshing their menu offerings and recipes. Plant-based proteins are one of the food categories they're using to help update, reports **The NPD Group**. Shipments of plant-based proteins from foodservice distributors to commercial restaurants increased by +60% in April 2021 compared to the same month a year ago, when the category realized declines because of pandemic

See **WHAT'S GOING ON** page 12



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CRISP & GREEN rolls out hiring program

Managers in top performing stores earn \$100k+



Photo by Steele Brands


Offering noteworthy and unique benefits, CRISP & GREEN believes in a team-oriented environment where employees are empowered, and hard work is both noticed and rewarded. CRISP & GREEN is rapidly expanding in Minnesota and nationally. The company is actively hiring more than 1,000 motivated and outgoing professionals for positions ranging from store management to kitchen and service crew. CRISP & GREEN offers all employees significant career advancement opportunities, as well as compensation and

benefits well above industry standard. CRISP & GREEN, an innovative, wellness-driven fast-casual brand that blends nutritious foods, community and fitness, has announced its expansion into the Florida market with 10 stores set to open in Tampa

and Orlando (with more being announced soon). Started by CEO and Founder Steele Smiley, CRISP & GREEN - the first grab 'n go salad shop and part-time fitness house - opened in Wayzata, Minnesota in 2016 and has since grown to become one of America's fastest growing fast casual franchises with the help of Steele's expertise. CRISP & GREEN currently has eight locations open across the Midwest, with several under construction, and Florida is the second largest market CRISP & GREEN is heading into. Expansion into the Florida market is a key part of Steele's goal of taking CRISP & GREEN national. Through his business ventures, Steele is looking to offer healthy and convenient options to a mass audience beyond the typical wellness "hubs" like LA, NYC and Miami. A leader in the plant-based space, Steele has a knack for building national and international lifestyle and wellness brands dedicated to creating healthier, happier and stronger communities. Managers at the highest performing restaurants have \$100K+ earning potential and all operating partners have the opportunity for ownership at both the franchise and corporate levels. Restaurant teammates are offered an unparalleled benefits package, making CRISP & GREEN a highly desirable employer in a fast-growing industry. This includes:

- ◆ Highly competitive compensation package (average starting wage of \$15/hour)
- ◆ Attitude of Gratitude program -
- ◆ Wellness bonus, offering all managers a stipend toward a gym membership of their choice; additionally, full-time employees receive free classes at a variety of local fitness studios in the area
- ◆ Monthly stipend for employee recognition
- ◆ Referral bonus program (\$250+)
- ◆ Anniversary bonus
- ◆ Medical and dental benefits
- ◆ Retirement plans with company match

It is known to have a following in every market it enters with 20% of customers visiting 3x a week or more to savor the chef-crafted menu featuring salads, grain bowls and smoothies. With an annual unit volume per store at \$1.8+ million, CRISP & GREEN is on track with the top fast casuals in the country. The company is also on track to triple in size this year, while providing hundreds of jobs in the communities it operates in.

CRISP & GREEN: currently eight locations open in the Twin Cities and Dallas, with 60+ under development in MN, TX, FL, NE, IA, AZ, ND, and SD with more locations announced soon. 

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Under the Toque

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Author of The 420 Gourmet: The Art of Elevated Cannabis Cuisine



JeffThe420Chef and his Hazy Thai Wings.

Hazy Thai Wings

This recipe is an ode to Pok Pok, Chef Andy Ricker’s renowned Thai street-food restaurant. The first time I had authentic Thai wings was at Pok Pok Noi in Portland, while visiting Chef Adrian Hale of Communal Table—and I fell in love! For days, all I could think about was how to re-create these awesome wings with one (or two) added ingredients. And here you have it! You’ll never look at wings the same way again, guaranteed.

- Number of servings: 4 (5 wings per serving)
- Preparation time: 30 minutes
- Cooking time: 30 minutes
- Approximate THC per Serving*
 - 10%: 7.6 milligrams
 - 15%: 11.4 milligrams
 - 20%: 15.2 milligrams

Ingredients

- 1/2 cup raw cane sugar
- 1/2 cup Asian fish sauce
- 3 tablespoons ketchup
- 1-1/2 tablespoons chili garlic sauce (Sambal sauce)
- 1 tablespoon fresh lime juice
- 1 teaspoon rice vinegar
- 1 cup cornstarch
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 2 pounds chicken wings, rinse and pat dry
- Extra-virgin coconut oil for frying
- 1 tablespoon canna-coconut oil plus 3 tablespoons extra-virgin coconut oil
- Toasted peanuts and garlic (see below)
- 4 tablespoons cilantro, chopped

Steps

- Place sugar in a food processor and grind until very fine.
- In a medium bowl, Combine the fish sauce, ketchup, sugar, chili garlic sauce, lime juice, and rice vinegar. Set aside.
- In a shallow dish, sift the cornstarch and garlic powder. Toss the wings in the cornstarch mixture to coat.
- Heat a large skillet on the stovetop for 1 minute on high. Add enough coconut oil to fry, about 2 inches from the bottom of the pan. Fry the wings until golden brown. Remove with slotted spoon and drain on brown paper.
- Preheat oven to 340°F.
- Place the fried wings on a lightly greased baking sheet and drizzle each wing with 1 teaspoon of canna-coconut

This recipe is an ode to Pok Pok, Chef Andy Ricker’s renowned Thai street-food restaurant.

- oil mixture. Bake for 7 to 8 minutes.
- In a clean skillet, add the sauce and heat on medium until syrupy, about 5 minutes.
 - Remove the wings from the oven and toss with the sauce until evenly coated. Toss in the toasted garlic and peanuts.
 - Garnish with cilantro and serve alongside a cup of carrot sticks and celery curls.
- Toasted Peanuts and Garlic**
- 1/4 cup raw peanuts, crushed
 - 4 cloves garlic, chopped
 - 1 teaspoon coconut oil
 - Dash of salt
- In a small bowl, mix peanuts and garlic with coconut oil and a dash of salt. Spread evenly on a small pan and roast at 325°F for 30 minutes, until toasted and browned. Remove, let cool, and voilà!

Celery Curls

- Cut celery into 6-inch pieces, slice in half lengthwise, make lengthwise cuts almost to center and repeat to create slivers. Refrigerate in ice water until slivers curl.
- *Approximate dose per serving is based on infusing 5 grams of cured/dried/decarbed cannabis into 5 ounces of oil.
- About JeffThe420Chef:** JeffThe420Chef is a Cannabis Chef residing in Los Angeles, California. He is the author of The 420 Gourmet; The Art of Elevated Cannabis Cuisine cookbook. He is also the inventor of Culinary Cannabis, odorless pre-rolls cannabis flower and "tasteless" canna-oil and cannabutter. For more information visit his web-site at www.jeffthe420chef.com.
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Epic Wings signs 39 franchise agreement

Locations to open in LA County, Dallas, Houston & Las Vegas

San Diego, CA - San Diego based Epic Wings has signed a 39 store franchise agreement with an experienced multi-unit franchisee with plans to open locations in LA County, Dallas, Houston and Las Vegas.

Kevin Davis, of Phenomenal Wings, is an experienced multi-unit owner-operator with over 30 years of experience in franchising. Throughout his career, he has opened nearly 200 fast-food restaurants including Dunkin Donuts, Papa John's Pizza, Popeyes Louisiana Kitchen, Subway and Phenix Salon Suites nationwide. He has a proven track record of success opening an average of 10 Phenix Salon Suites per year over the last 8 years to become the largest franchisee of Phenix Brands with 73 total units.

customers will find award-winning recipes including traditional and boneless wings, best-selling tenderloin strips, pizza sticks, fries and salads in addition to homemade breadsticks and dressings. Taste and quality are never compromised as the brand only uses the freshest ingredients. Customers will not find freezers, heat lamps or microwaves at any Epic Wings locations.

"The experience and knowledge that Kevin and the Phenomenal Wings Team is bringing to Epic Wings is immeasurable," said Rob Streett, President of Epic Wings. "This level of experience and support will allow us to grow in these targeted markets. Kevin's expertise and depth of multi-unit development will provide Epic Wings with a significant advantage as we expand our national footprint."

Founded by the Sacco Family in 1982 in San Diego, California, Epic Wings available franchise growth markets include California, Nevada, Colorado, Texas, Arizona and Florida.

Independently owned and operated since 1982, Epic Wings, formerly known as Wings N' Things, was the first to bring Buffalo Wings to the West Coast. The menu features award-winning family recipes including fresh, never frozen traditional and boneless wings, tenderloin strips, pizza sticks, fries and salads in addition to homemade breadsticks and dressings. Epic Wings has been named San Diego's Best Wings for the past 8 years in the San Diego Union-Tribune's Readers Poll, 2019 and 2020 Entrepreneur Magazine Franchise 500 Top New Franchise and Top Food Franchises in addition to the 2020 QSR 40/40 List: Hottest Startup Fast Casuals. 

Epic Wings plans to increase their footprint significantly over the next several years with the addition of 100 locations.

"Epic Wings has been a leader in the fast-casual space in Southern California for almost 40 years," said Kevin Davis of Phenomenal Wings. "I believe that my experience in franchise development will help take Epic Wings from an emerging brand to a nationwide leader in the industry."

Epic Wings plans to increase their footprint significantly over the next several years with the addition of 100 locations. The brand stands out from competitors with a simple, approachable menu and easy operations making for a better, consistent experience for their customers. On the menu,

*This figure represents the average unit volume for all locations opened for a full year at the end of 2019 as published in the May 12, 2020 franchise disclosure document.

Fajita Pete's inks 10 store Dallas deal

Operator group brings 30+ years experience in multi-unit brands to the fast-growing fajita delivery chain

Fajita Pete's, the "fresh off the grill" fajita catering and delivery concept, continues its fast-growing momentum with a major new franchisee signing. G&S Business will open 10 more Fajita Pete's locations in Dallas' northern suburbs beginning in late 2021.

The G&S team, made up of David Howell, Richard Howell and Pat "Wheels" Smith, has deep experience with powerhouse brands. The company is a multi-unit franchisee of Zaxby's, and David Howell has served as an executive leader of Hat Creek Burger Company. Richard Howell is a former board member of Red Robin Gourmet Burgers.

G&S Business decided to partner with Fajita Pete's after Smith picked up an order of fajitas for dinner during a family visit to Dallas.

When he returned to Austin, he told David and Richard Howell about the concept and was emphatic about finding a way to franchise with Fajita Pete's.

"Fajita Pete's is poised for incredible growth because the concept embodies authentic quality while keeping maximum efficiency, from the menu to the build-out," said David Howell. "Further, it is ahead of its time in focusing on off-premise sales channels in a scaled-down box — it is truly innovative and will continue to be so."

The first G&S-owned and -operated Fajita Pete's location is slated to open in Plano in December 2021, followed by Frisco in March 2022 and McKinney in June 2022. Others will follow in Allen, Prosper and Richardson, bringing the total number of Fajita Pete's restaurants in greater Dallas to 22.

"G&S Business came to us after they experienced our food and service model

in Dallas and immediately wanted to be part of the brand," said Fajita Pete's founder and CEO Pedro "Pete" Mora. "They are the ideal franchise partner because they are experienced, successful multi-unit operators who understand and are passionate about the Fajita Pete's brand. Coming off of our highest-ever sales day on Cinco de Mayo, where we did \$134,000 across 20 units, we could not be more excited about the future of our brand, and G&S will play a big part in that future."

Fajita Pete's, which opened its first location in 2008 in Houston and began franchising in 2015, is a fast-growing, delivery-centric concept that features a simple menu with just a few key items, including its award-winning fajitas and margaritas. It also offers curbside or in-store pickup, catering for any size group and limited dine-in from its small-footprint stores, making the concept attractive to franchisees because of lower rent, construction and maintenance costs.

Fajita Pete's currently has 21 locations open, with agreements in place for nearly 50 new restaurants. The company is pursuing additional development deals with qualified teams in Texas, Oklahoma, Colorado, Arkansas, Arizona, Mississippi, Alabama and New Mexico. 

About Fajita Pete's: Fajita Pete's is a Houston-based "fresh off the grill" fajita concept focused on a simple menu with premium-quality, handmade menu items. Founder Pete Mora envisioned a better way to serve guests by focusing on delivery and pickup, a model that has proven successful over the past 13 years. Follow Fajita Pete's on Facebook @fajitapetestx and Instagram @fajitapetes. Find them online at franchisefajitapetes.com.



Next wave from page 1

to line cooks. Each position requires a different set of skills, behaviors, and experience. Typically, an employer would hire candidates based on previous experience and an interview. But behavioral science research shows that humans tend to hire people like themselves. You're smart enough to know that you don't need a bunch more yous—what's needed is a mix of skills. Furthermore, research shows that interviews are deeply biased: for instance, they favor people who are tall when all other factors are the same.

Here's where AI blended with behavioral science can help. Using behavioral science assessments called psychometrics, a profile can be created for each position. Our firm creates these profiles by benchmarking positions. For example, a profile would indicate which behaviors, motivators, and habits are best for someone in charge of stocking ingredients.

Another might detail what psychological traits are needed for someone to manage the branch well. Then, assessments can be used in hiring to find the right fit for the right position. Think of it as a recipe for hiring. People-centered AI can look for someone with a big dose of problem-solving and a dash of sales ability. It can look for someone who is inherently social for front-facing roles and someone who is meticulous and process-oriented to place orders. The key—and this is essential—is for

the algorithm to be explainable by design. This means the decision-maker knows how the algorithm came to its decision: they can see that one candidate ranked higher than another because of, for instance, their perseverance score.

This transparency is essential to navigating sensitive decisions and mitigating potential legal risk. AI cannot give a "take-it-or-leave-it" answer. Instead, it must assess fit and the likelihood of success. Explainability by design gives owners the confidence they need to hire and manage employees. Because at the end of the day, the human makes the decision.

Recent tectonic shifts in the food and beverage industry have only accelerated the need to adapt—especially when it comes to hiring. Tomorrow's leaders will understand that it is the people, alongside the product, AI can supercharge. The most productive, most beneficial AI tools will give leaders the ability to make clear, data-driven decisions in real time. That's the power of a technology that's here to stay. **TR**

About Michael Mueller: Michael Mueller is Vice President of Aperio Consulting Group. He leads the development of Decoding Performance, a tool that blends behavioral science and AI to tackle to hiring and leadership challenges. Michael is passionate about data-driven, human-centered decision-making and loves working with leaders who understand the value of their people. He holds a degree in biochemistry and an MBA. You can find him on LinkedIn.

Shortages from page 1

In emergency situations there is a better solution than traditional cell phones or smartphones. These situations are good candidates for easily worn devices (i.e., wearables or wearable devices) that automatically report changes that could indicate an emergency. Or, a device that a worker could easily utilize to express the need for help without having to speak or make much of a movement.

Mobile Personal Emergency Response System (mPERS) devices, similar to those used by seniors for years, are like an enhanced, smarter cell phone. mPERS devices are small and lightweight. They provide state-of-the-art location technologies, and also offer built-in fall advisory capabilities. mPERS devices can also eliminate the need for the worker to

initiate a call for help. Instead, they can trigger one automatically. And cloud-based technologies make it possible for Central Stations to immediately respond to the call for help.

Whatever wearable device makes the most sense for a particular company, the most important factor is that business owners and managers take advantage of these new technologies that could save lives and improve the safety and health of their employees. **TR**

About Chris Holbert: Chris Holbert is the CEO of SecuraTrac. As the CEO, he is responsible for leading the company's vision of developing, marketing, and selling a suite of mobile health and safety solutions that bring families closer together and improve employee safety through state-of-the-art location-based services and mobile health technology. He is a dynamic business leader with a proven track record of building companies through the integration of business and technology.

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Blaze Pizza appoints Johnny Jones as Senior Vice President of Development

Leading fast casual pizza concept welcomes franchise development veteran amid rapid expansion in Texas & Southeast

Los Angeles, CA - Blaze Pizza, the nation's leading fast-casual franchise pizza concept, announced that Johnny Jones has joined the executive leadership team as Senior Vice President of Development. Jones has spent more than 20 years in the franchise industry leading real estate development, market planning, property negotiations, and asset management for nationally recognized restaurant brands. In his new role with Blaze Pizza, Jones will utilize his depth of experience to support the brand's ambitious growth plans for 2021 and beyond.

will undoubtedly fuel our ongoing efforts to rapidly expand Blaze's footprint across the country," said Mandy Shaw, chief executive officer and president of Blaze Pizza. "Blaze has cultivated an exceptional leadership team led by industry veterans, and we have no doubt that adding Johnny's expertise will be a tremendous asset as we accelerate our unit growth and welcome new franchisees to the brand."

Prior to joining Blaze, Jones served as Vice President of Real Estate and Development for SONIC Drive-In and Inspire Brands, a top-tier holding company for popular franchise brands such as SONIC Drive-In, Jimmy Johns, and Buffalo Wild Wings, among others. In this previous position, Jones led all aspects of real estate development and construction management, including executing profitable franchise development deals and growth strategies, and real estate negotiations. Under his leadership, the fast-food restaurant chain grew to over 1,000 units. Additionally, Jones held positions at SONIC Drive-In as senior director of real estate and development and manager of graphic information systems, working closely with the real estate team to identify potential restaurant locations, strategic placements and optimize market penetration.



Johnny Jones

"In the restaurant industry, you rarely come across a brand like Blaze Pizza that appeals to the masses, delivers on their promise to only use quality food products, and provides a selection of menu items that will appease the array of dietary preferences we see in today's world. When

I had the opportunity to join the team in charge of growing this trail-blazing concept, it was an easy yes for me," said Jones. "After fourteen months of navigating a pandemic, now's a great time to accelerate the momentum Blaze has built and expand the brand's footprint in markets nationwide."

This latest new hire announcement comes at an exciting period for Blaze Pizza. The popular franchise pizza concept recently announced a surge of franchise development with new deals signed to expand across Texas, Florida, and Tennessee, among other key target markets. With dozens of new locations under development, Blaze Pizza is in the midst of aggressive expansion. Franchise opportunities remain in markets across the U.S., including the Northeast and Texas.

About Blaze Pizza: Founded in 2011, Blaze Pizza is the nation's leading fast-casual pizza franchise concept with more than 340 restaurants across 38 states and 6 countries. Headquartered in Los Angeles, Blaze Pizza is committed to delivering a one-of-a-kind customer experience and unparalleled high-quality products. Known for its savory artisanal pizzas and customizable made-to-order menu featuring fresh, natural ingredients free from artificial colors, flavors, preservatives and sweeteners, Blaze is a leader in the industry in menu innovation and product excellence.

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What's Going On

from page 6

restrictions. Shipments are up +16% compared to April 2019, according to NPD's **SupplyTrack®**, which tracks every product shipped from leading distributors to more than 700,000 U.S. foodservice operators, capturing detail on over 80% of the broadline foodservice sales channel.



◆◆◆◆◆
◆ **Wow Wow Hawaiian Lemonade**, known for its healthy food menu items with a focus on the environment, has signed a multi-unit franchise agreement with the entrepreneurial husband and wife team of Andrew & Anju Lynn, current owners of XPLOR Inc, to bring five gourmet lemonade stands to the Sunshine State. This franchise agreement marks the first in Florida for Wow Wow. The Lynn's XPLOR Food Division plans to bring a Wow Wow location to Sarasota by the end of 2021, and will then expand the brand's Florida footprint with locations in Tampa, Saint Petersburg, Bradenton and Lakewood Ranch. While also bringing the first Wow Wow locations to Florida, the duo will also own and operate a Wow Wow food truck which is set to visit events up and down the West Coast of Florida beginning in August 2021. "We are excited to welcome Andrew and Anju to our Wow Wow O'hana (family) and cannot wait to see their businesses blossom," said Tim Weiderhoft, CEO of Wow Wow Hawaiian Lemonade. "The state of Florida is in for a treat and there's no doubt in my mind that the Lynn's will experience tremendous success with the Wow Wow brand in Florida."

◆◆◆◆◆
◆ **Jolt Software**, a leading operations management and digital food safety platform for deskless workers, announced its release of the new turn-key Jolt Print Station (JPS) solution. **The Jolt Print Station**, combined with the Jolt cloud based Jolt Label Printing Application, is a fast, reliable solution for label printing, offering a wide variety of label types, such as expiration dates, nutrition facts, grab-and-go, and more. The JPS uses thermal printing, which doesn't require ink and can hold up in hostile environments like a kitchen. The JPS includes a digital display that provides easy access to multiple label templates. Employees can print perfectly accurate labels within seconds, ensuring compliance with brand standards as well as food safety requirements. Go to the website at jolt.com for more info.



Menufy, a commission-free, online ordering system for independently owned restaurants and small chains in the U.S., has teamed up with Uber, a solution to help businesses meet the increased customer demand for delivery. Through this new partnership, Menufy's restaurant clients now have access to Uber's expansive driver network, shortening delivery times and making food delivery possible for its more than 11,000 restaurants across the U.S.

◆◆◆◆◆
◆ **Wooster Products' NITEGLOW® Emergency Egress System** includes high quality photoluminescent (glow in the dark) products to illuminate stair treads, handrails, door handles and door frames, and obstructions, so that occupants can evacuate safely in a darkened environment. NITEGLOW® is well suited for either new construction or retrofit code compliance upgrades. Heat treated corrosion resistant aluminum substrate and a nearly diamond-hard aluminum oxide filler assures long tread life under heavy pedestrian traffic. Bright, long lasting photoluminescent epoxy filler is free of hazardous and radioactive substances, extends uniformly throughout the filler. Photoluminescent technology is also available with other Wooster Products offerings, including Flex-Tred® anti-slip tape products, for use on handrails, door handles and frames, and around obstructions to comply with the code. Visit www.WoosterProducts.com for more information.



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◆ **The Great Greek Mediterranean Grill**, an award winning and expanding Mediterranean concept, is expanding in South Florida as it continues to grow across the United States. "The Great Greek Mediterranean Grill continues to be a huge success and our franchisees and customers quickly see why we are growing," says Co-Founder Nick Della Penna, recently appointed President of Great Greek Franchising, LLC. "We want to continue our expansion throughout Miami, Ft Lauderdale, and across the state of Florida."

◆◆◆◆◆
◆ **Today's Restaurant** invites you to submit information for the What's Going On column at any time. Please e-mail your company, product or event information to terri@trnusa.com and try to keep the word count at 50-75 words or so. Get free publicity for your company, product or service!



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