


# Today's Restaurant

THE FOODSERVICE INDUSTRY AUTHORITY


VOLUME 30

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Exclusive to TRN

# The revolution of restaurants and AI: Why the industry must adapt now

By Paul Segreto

The restaurant industry is no stranger to transformation. From the rise of fast food to the farm-to-table movement, restaurants have continuously evolved to meet customer needs. Today, however, the industry faces a transformation that could dwarf all others in its potential impact: the adoption of artificial intelligence (AI). While some restaurant owners view AI as an optional innovation, akin to how social media was perceived 15 years ago, the reality is that AI will reshape the industry in ways far more profound than any technology before it. Failure to adapt now risks leaving businesses behind.

### The "Why" of AI

**Enhanced Customer Experience** AI is revolutionizing how restaurants interact with customers. Personalized dining experiences, driven by AI-powered algorithms, can cater to individual preferences. For example, digital menus using AI can recommend dishes based on dietary restrictions, previous orders, or even weather conditions. Chatbots and voice assistants provide seamless communication for reservations, order tracking, and menu inquiries, enhancing convenience and customer satisfaction.



Paul Segreto

*AI is not here to replace human workers but to augment their capabilities.*

**Operational Efficiency** AI can streamline back-of-house operations by automating inventory management, optimizing kitchen workflows, and predicting demand. Machine learning algorithms can analyze historical data to anticipate peak dining times, ensuring the right staffing levels and minimizing waste. Restaurants leveraging AI in this way achieve higher efficiency and profitability.

**Data-Driven Insights** AI transforms raw data into actionable insights. For restaurant chains, analyzing trends across locations becomes simpler and more precise. This can inform decisions on menu changes, promotional strategies, and market expansion. Additionally, real-time feedback analysis can help restaurants stay agile in meeting customer expectations.

**Cost Management** AI-driven automation reduces labor costs and increases accuracy in tasks like food preparation, reducing waste. Smart kitchen systems can monitor energy usage and suggest optimizations, leading to lower utility costs. Over time, these savings become significant competitive advantages.

### The "How" of Adopting AI

**Embracing AI Tools** Restaurants can start by incorporating simple AI tools

See **REVOLUTION** page 11

# Artistry Restaurants continues aggressive growth with acquisition of casual dining concept Hickory Tavern

Adds seventh brand with 20 locations to Artistry portfolio while expanding footprint into the Carolinas

Winter Park, Florida – Artistry Restaurants announced the acquisition of the 20-unit casual dining concept Hickory Tavern.

With locations throughout North Carolina and South Carolina, Hickory Tavern first opened in 1997 and grew in popularity due to its neighborhood atmosphere and reputation for carefully crafted dishes featuring premium ingredients.

The addition of Hickory Tavern marks Artistry Restaurants' entry into the Carolinas while adding a seventh brand to the company's growing portfolio, bringing their total number of restaurant locations managed to 50.

"Hickory Tavern has a long history of serving the community, with each location a cherished gathering spot for locals," said Bryan Lockwood, Chief Executive Officer, Artistry Restaurants. "Hickory's concept and its reputation for uncompromising



service make it a perfect fit within our portfolio of brands as we continue to expand our footprint within the industry."

To lead the Hickory Tavern team, Artistry has named Paul Zito as President. Zito, who will report to Artistry

Restaurants' Chief Operating Officer, Jason Brooks, is an industry veteran with an enviable record of optimizing operations, workforces, food, and facilities while growing restaurants' year-over-year sales, revenue and profitability.

"Paul Zito's best-in-class approach and impressive track record revitalizing and building establishments and cultivating high-performance teams will help elevate Hickory Tavern's position in the market," said Jason Brooks, Artistry Restaurants.

Zito was President of Z Team Consulting, a Myrtle Beach, SC hospitality consulting firm. He also served as Director of Operations of Mandola's Italian restaurant and catering chain; and held the position of Director of Food & Beverage Operations at Founders Group International, a leading golf management company with 21 golf courses and six banquet facilities in South Carolina. Zito was Founder & CEO of the top-rated Z's Amazing Kitchen, a premium fast casual restaurant. Early in his career, Zito rose through the ranks at

See **ARTISTRY** page 11

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## Appell Pie Doing it wrong?

Howard Appell ♦ Today's Restaurant Publisher

Running a successful restaurant business requires careful planning, execution, and ongoing adaptation to industry trends, but what if you are doing it all wrong?

Recently Terri and I along with friends decided to go to dinner at a restaurant that is outside of our usual dining area. We had to drive forty minutes and then had to find the restaurant with the help of our GPS system. Following directions, we saw no signage from the closest main road and after several U-turns we found our way to the road leading up to the entrance. We drove through a gauntlet of cars parked along the road that lead to the undersized parking lot which was alongside the huge outdoor bar area. The bar was packed and it was a Thursday night.

We waited a short time to be seated and were led to our table and presented with menus with an amazing volume of dishes that are served at any diner in New Jersey along route 46. Amazing choices as we realized the chefs, cooks were really talented or our food was going to be pretty bad. Fortunately, the food was terrific, service was good and we all decided we wanted to come back at a later date.

We enjoyed it so much we invited another couple to join us on a Saturday night a few weeks later but judging from the crowd on a Thursday night we decided to call to make a reservation. Called the number listed on their website and got a recording that the number was not in operation. Tried the website with no success.

Our Saturday night couple live in the area if the restaurant so they went over to the location to see what the problem was. They arrived at 3:30PM on Saturday to find the bar full and when speaking with the front desk hostess, they were informed that they have no phone at all. "How do you make a reservation?" she asked. "You need to email us and the owner will respond with a reservation", was

the answer. Holy cow, what a system for failure.

In spite of these "failures" they were doing a ton of business because they did so many things correctly. Here are some features of successful restaurants. Numbers 3,4 and 8 seemed to be ignored.

### 1. Quality food and consistency

- ♦ Serving delicious, high-quality food consistently is key to customer retention.

- ♦ Using fresh ingredients and maintaining standardized recipes ensures customers get the same experience every visit.

### 2. Excellent customer service

- ♦ Friendly and efficient service creates loyal customers and positive word-of-mouth.

- ♦ Well-trained staff who understand hospitality and handle complaints professionally can make a big difference.

### 3. Location and accessibility

- ♦ Being in a high-traffic, easily accessible area can drive more footfall.

- ♦ Adequate parking, proximity to businesses or residential areas, and good visibility help attract customers.

### 4. Effective marketing and branding

- ♦ A strong brand identity and on-line presence (website, social media, Google Business Profile) attract and retain customers.

- ♦ Leveraging promotions, influencer partnerships, and online reviews helps build credibility.

### 5. Financial management and cost control

- ♦ Keeping track of food costs, labor expenses, and overhead is essential for profitability.

- ♦ Using inventory management systems and budgeting properly helps prevent losses.

### 6. Strong leadership and team management

See APPELL page 12



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PUBLISHER ..... Howard Appell

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR ..... John Tschohl

ART DIRECTOR ..... Jim Pollard

SALES MANAGERS ..... Terri Mckinney

William Lagusker

**GET INVOLVED!** Today's Restaurant accepts contributions for our monthly articles and features including Calendar Events, New Openings and What's Going On? Call or email for more info on how you can get your business or product featured in Today's Restaurant!



# What's Going On

## Important new products, corporate news and industry events

With 17 million birthday diners actively looking for the perfect place to celebrate, **The Birthday CLUB is helping Florida restaurants boost traffic, increase average tickets, and maximize birthday-driven revenue.** Founded by Dyson Barnett, “The Birthday CLUB is a turnkey marketing and gifting platform that connects restaurants with local birthday diners through our massive list of birthday diners, personalized birthday mailers, VIP memberships, and prepaid dining experiences.” “Birthdays are a billion-dollar opportunity for restaurants, yet most don’t have a system to capture this market”, said Barnett. “TBC ensures restaurants are top-of-mind when customers plan their celebrations.” Visit [jointhebirthdayclub.com](http://jointhebirthdayclub.com) or call Dyson at 352.565.4307 to learn more.



are already based in Plano, while Taco Bell and the Habit Burger & Grill’s teams are located in Irvine. YUM and the KFC Foundation plan to maintain corporate offices in Louisville. KFC still plans to build a new flagship restaurant in its former hometown.

**KFC is leaving Kentucky.** The fried chicken chain’s U.S. headquarters will move from Louisville, Kentucky, to Plano, Texas, according to owner [Yum Brands](http://YumBrands.com). 100 KFC U.S. employees will be required to relocate over the next six months. The relocation is part of Yum’s broader plan to have two corporate headquarters: one in Plano, the other in Irvine, California. KFC and Pizza Hut’s global teams

program. This year’s recipients, representing diverse nonprofits and community organizations dedicated to advancing reading and learning, each received a \$1,000 grant to support their impactful literacy initiatives. The Bojangles Foundation awarded grants to deserving nonprofits and organizations in 11 states, including California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Michigan, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia, reinforcing its dedication to promoting literacy



◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆  
◆ **Huddle House** the fast-growing all-day breakfast franchise, continues to demonstrate its strong appeal to franchisees. Longtime operator Robert Wiggins

Jr. has signed a multi-unit agreement to further expand Huddle House’s footprint in Georgia. The agreement will strengthen the brand’s presence in the Peach State as Wiggins, a seasoned operator with a proven track record, will add four locations in Douglas, Swainsboro, and Pembroke to his portfolio. Wiggins currently operates successful locations in Hazlehurst, Baxley, Alma, Claxton, and Reidsville. Kayla Edidin is the Senior Director of Franchise Development at Huddle House. [Huddlehouse.com](http://Huddlehouse.com).

◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆  
◆ **The Gate Golf Club, that will include Oakwood Grill**, seating over 150 diners, has recently broken ground on its county-owned site. The community golf course, slated to open in 2026, is being built on the former site at 4150 Golden Gate Pkwy. Plans for the property include a nine-hole, par-35 course. It is being designed by professional golfer Peter Jacobsen. Many other amenities will be offered here as well.



◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆  
◆ As part of its ongoing commitment to fostering education and literacy, **The Bojangles Foundation** announced the 47 winners of its annual literacy grant

and empowering communities across its footprint. The funding will enable these organizations to enhance reading programs, provide critical educational resources and create opportunities for students and learners of all ages. “Empowering organizations that are making a lasting difference through literacy and education is truly at the heart of what we do,” said Ken Reynolds, executive director of The Bojangles Foundation. “At Bojangles, we believe that access to education isn’t just a resource—it’s a pathway to stronger communities and brighter futures.”

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

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# 6 ways to improve communication with restaurant managers

David Scott Peters ♦ Today's Restaurant Contributor

Are you tired of constantly reaching out to your managers for updates, only to hear the same frustrating “I don't know” response? It's time to put an end to this madness and empower your management team to provide you with the crucial data you need. Here are six ways to improve communication with restaurant managers.

**1. Implement a restaurant manager log.** Let's ditch the outdated method of calling or texting for updates. Instead, create a tailored manager log. This tool ensures your managers answer key questions after each shift, covering everything from sales numbers to staffing and ticket times. Say goodbye to frantic phone calls and

hello to immediate, organized updates.

You can use a simple binder with lined sheet paper, create a template you print each week, use one of your restaurant software programs that likely includes a communication tool, or purchase a simple journal where everything is recorded, noting what specifically you want to know each day, each shift.

**2. Proactive text updates from restaurant managers.** Flip the script by having your managers send you updates via text. Rather than asking if the food order was placed, have them text you details like the budget, expenses and order placement time. Set a rule that they must text you at least one hour before the order deadline, ensuring you're always in the loop and avoiding last-minute surprises.

You can keep these instructions in your manager log and make it part of the daily routine.

cup of tea, it does help keep everyone aligned and builds a culture of accountability and transparency. However, be mindful of not hindering their decision-making abilities.

The more you communicate the more likely it is you'll get the information across to each person, rather than relying on everyone to understand your expectations hearing them only once.

**5. Leverage technology.** Embrace project management software apps like Asana or monday.com. These tools, while not restaurant-specific, allow managers to input daily stats and updates, creating a digital trail accessible anytime, anywhere. No more constant calls disrupting your restaurant – gain insights at your fingertips.

These tools are fantastic for automating and sending reminders, so you don't have to do any of it once it's set up.

**6. Reward proactive communication.** Change your culture by recognizing and rewarding proactive communication. Acknowledge and reward managers and staff who consistently provide timely and accurate information. Whether through public acknowledgment, bonuses, or added responsibilities, create a culture that encourages proactive communication and leadership.

In the world of restaurant management, information is power. By implementing these six ways to improve communication with restaurant managers, you're on your way to transforming from a reactive management style to a proactive one. Empower your team, streamline communication and watch as your restaurant efficiency and morale soar.

*David Scott Peters is an author, speaker, restaurant expert and coach who coaches restaurant operators how to stop being prisoners of their businesses and to finally achieve financial freedom. His first book, Restaurant Prosperity Formula: What Successful Restaurateurs Do, teaches the systems and traits restaurant owners must develop to run a profitable restaurant. Thousands of restaurants have worked with Peters to transform their businesses. Get his free 30-minute training video <http://www.davidscottpeters.com>.*

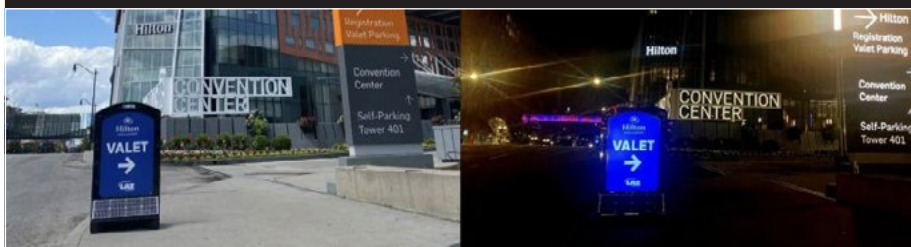
*Acknowledge and reward managers and staff who consistently provide timely and accurate information.*

**3. Simple 3x5 card method.** Equip your managers with a handy 3x5 card that has printed crucial questions. These are the questions you frequently ask, and managers can jot down the answers throughout their shifts. When you do call, they'll be ready with the information at their fingertips, promoting efficiency.

**4. Daily briefing call with restaurant managers.** Consider scheduling a daily briefing call where managers report on crucial numbers and updates. While this might not be everyone's

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# The beverage industry's next big trend? Balancing comfort, adventure, and automation

Changing consumer preferences and technology-driven solutions continue to reshape the U.S. beverage market

The \$112.8 billion U.S. beverage market is undergoing a significant transformation, driven by an emerging trend that blends tradition with innovation. Today's consumers—particularly Gen Z—are no longer choosing between comforting classic flavors and adventurous exotic tastes; they're demanding both, creating a dual-appeal dynamic that's reshaping the industry.

According to recent [market research](#), 66% of consumers are open to trying new, unfamiliar flavors, while a striking 74% actively seek exotic and adventurous taste experiences. At the same time, the growth in traditional categories like lemonade and chocolate-based drinks continues to soar. This seemingly paradoxical behavior has beverage companies scrambling to adapt their offerings.

"We're seeing a fundamental shift in the way consumers approach flavor preferences," said Jason Valentine, Chief Strategy Officer at Botrista, a beverage automation platform provider. "Rather than choosing between comfort and adventure, today's consumer wants both in the same cup. That duality is rewriting the playbook for beverage operators."

Comprehensive analysis drawing from a combination of consumer interviews, market research and consumption data from CloudBar, a sophisticated data-backed intelligence platform

guiding decisions on beverage and flavor offerings, reveals an intriguing paradox. Consumers aren't just choosing between comfort and adventure—they're demanding both. They want the luxury of premium experiences wrapped in the casualness of everyday moments. They crave the familiar taste of childhood memories infused with sophisticated, modern twists.



## The flavors driving change

From classics like strawberry lemonade to trending categories like ube (a vibrant sweet potato native to the Philippines), businesses are finding ways to meld familiar, nostalgic elements with bold, exotic ingredients.

For example, strawberry lemonade—a staple of the \$15 billion lemonade market projected to grow

significantly by 2032—remains a consumer favorite. Yet, its success is being matched by ube-inspired beverages, a category expected to reach \$2 billion by the end of the decade. Together, these offerings showcase how balancing comfort and adventure appeals to a broad audience.

"The success of dual-appeal beverages isn't just about flavor; it's a reflec-

tion of market dynamics," said Sean Hsu, CEO of Botrista. "Operators who can seamlessly integrate innovation with familiarity will come out ahead."

This flavor-first approach aligns with data-backed consumer behavior, where customers are increasingly drawn to menus with versatile options that reflect both their tastes and shifting societal trends.

## The operational challenge... and opportunity

While the comfort-adventure trend represents an exciting growth opportunity, it also presents operational complexities, particularly during high-service periods. Beverage operators aiming to deliver classic offerings alongside innovative drinks face significant challenges in maintaining quality and speed.

"Efficiency is key," Valentine added. "Beverage service today is about delivering creative options without sacrificing consistency. That's only possible with operational systems that balance flexibility and reliability."

To address these challenges, businesses are adopting automation as a strategic solution. Platforms like Botrista's CloudBar and BotristaPro automate the preparation of both traditional and cutting-edge drinks, enabling brands like Jollibee, L&L Hawaiian Barbecue, and Pokéworks to stay ahead of shifting consumer demands.

Additionally, these systems rely on machine-learning-driven consumption data to help operators make smarter decisions about beverage menus, customer preferences, and operational efficiency—enabling rapid scale across high-traffic venues like campuses, theme parks, and quick-serve restaurants.

See **BIG TREND** page 14

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# What's Going On from page 3

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grow and be spread through the ice, and health inspectors often issue violations for excessive mold or slime growth.” For more information, visit them online at useCleanIce.com.

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◆◆◆◆  
**SUPER CHIX has announced the signing of a new franchise development agreement for at least 20 restaurants in the greater Tampa Bay and Sarasota markets.** This new Florida SUPER CHIX market area is owned and will be developed by The Pater Group, owned and managed by Todd Pater and Lorraine Pater, along with their operating team. Darryl Neider is the SUPER CHIX's CEO. There are over 250 future SUPER CHIX restaurant locations coming. Visit them at superchix.com.

◆◆◆◆  
 Recognizing the vital role young professionals play in shaping the foodservice industry, **the National Restaurant Association Restaurant, Hotel-Motel Show®** is introducing the inaugural **Young Professionals Scholarship Program.** This groundbreaking initiative aims to empower rising foodservice leaders



with an opportunity to advance their careers, connect with peers, and gain inspiration at the 2025 Show, taking place May 17–20 at McCormick Place in Chicago. With **60% of food-service employees** under the age of 35, the Young Professionals Scholarship Program reflects the Show's commitment to supporting the next generation of industry leaders. By creating opportunities to access education, build meaningful connections, and explore groundbreaking solutions, the program is designed to help recipients advance their careers and contribute fresh perspectives that drive the industry forward. This new initiative builds on the Show's existing efforts, including its High School Visitation Program, which introduces students to the diverse career opportunities available in foodservice.



successful Zaxby's restaurants in and around Newnan for 15 years before selling them in 2016. “We are all about providing an exceptional experience for our guests and offering guests the ease of picking up their order without getting out of their car is just another step in making the PONKO experience even more convenient and enjoyable,” states Dr. Patrick Sallarulo, PONKO Chicken's Chairman and CEO. “During the past eight years we have grown so much as a company and are excited about the winning combination of working with experienced franchise owners and increasing the accessibility of our business model with this drive thru concept,” Dr. Sallarulo concludes.

◆◆◆◆  
**Welbilt, an Ali Group company and global leader in foodservice equipment solutions, announced the construction of its new Welbilt Experience Center in Coppell, Texas.** Slated for completion in the second half of 2025, this world-class destination will redefine customer engagement by providing an interactive, hands-on environment for operators, dealers, distributors, manufacturers' representatives, consultants and end users. As the industry's leading provider of comprehensive turnkey solutions, the Center will serve as a hub for innovation, showcasing cutting-edge

◆◆◆◆  
**Atlanta-based PONKO Chicken is getting ready for a brand new chapter!** The popular Japanese American Chicken restaurant will be opening their first drive thru location later this year at 125 Glenda Trace in Newnan, GA. Longtime Newnan residents and seasoned restaurant franchise owners, Bill and William Young will be opening the first PONKO Chicken drive thru in their hometown. The Young family owned several

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

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# Brand leverages Miso Robotics to innovate its culinary process for tortilla chips

Newport Beach, CA - Chipotle Mexican Grill (NYSE: CMG) has announced its latest digital innovation, Chippy, an autonomous kitchen assistant that integrates culinary traditions with artificial intelligence to make tortilla chips. Chipotle's culinary and technology teams called on [Miso Robotics](#) to customize its latest robotic solution to cook and freshly season Chipotle's delicious tortilla chips.

"We are always exploring opportunities to enhance our employee and guest experience. Our goal is to drive efficiencies through collaborative robotics that will enable Chipotle's crew members to focus on other tasks in the restaurant," said Curt Garner, Chief Technology Officer, Chipotle.

Chipotle's culinary team guided Miso in tailoring its technology to maintain the culinary integrity of the brand. Leveraging artificial intelligence, Chippy is trained to replicate Chipotle's exact recipe - using corn masa flour, water and sunflower oil - to cook chips to perfection, season with a dusting of salt, and finish with a hint of fresh lime juice. It was imperative that the technique remained the same so customers receive delicious, craveable chips every time.

"Everyone loves finding a chip with a little more salt or an extra hint of lime," said Nevielle Panthaky, Vice President of Culinary, Chipotle. "To ensure we didn't




lose the humanity behind our culinary experience, we trained Chippy extensively to ensure the output mirrored our current product, delivering subtle variations in flavor that our guests expect."

Chippy is currently being tested at the Chipotle Cultivate Center, Chipotle's innovation hub in Irvine, Calif., and will be integrated into a Chipotle restaurant in Southern California later this year. The company is leveraging its stage-gate process to listen, test and learn from crew and guest feedback before deciding on a national implementation strategy.

"When Chipotle challenged us to see if our technology could meet the brand's

high standards for culinary quality, we couldn't wait to flex our engineering and design muscles," said Mike Bell, CEO, Miso Robotics. "This partnership will allow us to move into new territory to help improve back-of-house functions and assist team members with their day-to-day responsibilities."

An innovator in restaurant technology, Chipotle continues to invest in emerging solutions to support its growing digital business and reduce friction in its restaurants. The company believes technology deployed consistently and correctly can improve the human experience. Chipotle already leverages artificial

intelligence with its concierge chat bot, Pepper. Pepper ensures guests have an exceptional experience on the Chipotle app and Chipotle.com. Chipotle customers can select from frequently asked questions or ask their own questions to get a response quickly. Chippy joins Pepper in Chipotle's artificial intelligence suite to improve Chipotle's overall guest and employee experience. 

**About Chipotle:** Chipotle Mexican Grill Inc. is cultivating a better world by serving responsibly sourced, classically-cooked, real food with wholesome ingredients without artificial colors, flavors or preservatives. Chipotle had over 2,950 restaurants as of December 31, 2021, in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, France and Germany and is the only restaurant company of its size that owns and operates all its restaurants. Chipotle is ranked on the Fortune 500 and is recognized on the 2021 lists for Forbes' America's Best Employers and Fortune's Most Admired Companies.

**About Miso Robotics:** [Miso Robotics](#) is revolutionizing commercial foodservice through intelligent automation solutions that solve some of the largest gaps in back-of-house kitchen operations. Ready to make an immediate financial impact on a restaurant's bottom line, Miso's AI-driven platform incorporates robotics, machine learning, computer vision and data analytics to power and develop its breakthrough products, including: Chippy, Flippy 2, CookRight and Sippy.

With real industry knowledge and learnings accrued through brand partnerships over its first five years, Miso's products are constantly evolving to drive consistency, increase productivity, reduce costs and improve the overall dining experience. Online at [misorobotics.com](http://misorobotics.com).

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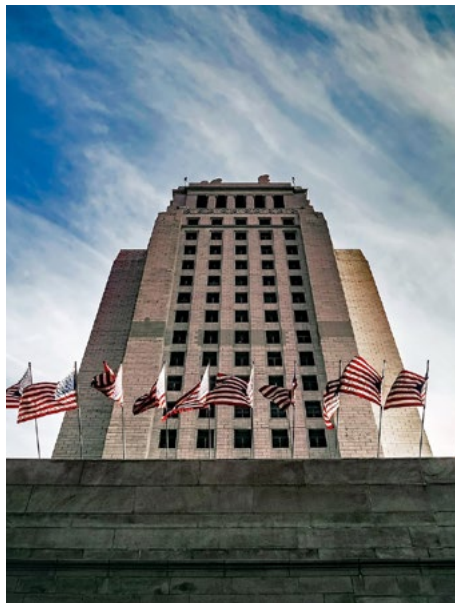
**Featured City Los Angeles**

Japanese bakery-cafe chain Bread, Espresso & has just opened its first U.S. location at 1212 S Pacific Coast Highway in Redondo Beach. The outlet offers its signature mou bread and cafe delights. Founded in 2009 in Omotesando, Tokyo, Japan, Bread, Espresso & has become widely acclaimed for its authentic quality and better-for-you bakery items. The chef's invention of the iconic "mou" bread,

meaning "soft" in French, became synonymous with the brand. They have 37 locations across Japan. The U.S. operations will be managed by Japan Hospitality LLC, a subsidiary of H.I.S. Americas Inc.



After serving at The Original Farmers Markets, Gone Bananas Bread is preparing to open its first brick-and-mortar store at 13016 San Vicente Blvd in Brentwood. The owner is Estee Stanley. Gone Bananas Bread should open by summer. Estee will be serving



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— • Today's Restaurant feature

**Los Angeles restaurants offer free food to**

Several restaurants in the Los Angeles area rallied together to provide relief for surrounding communities as several wildfires destroyed homes, restaurants, businesses and lives.

The local food scene has been hit hard by the fires that have broken out around LA County. Multiple Malibu institutions were destroyed in the Palisades Fire, including Reel Inn, Cholada Thai and Moonshadows.

Companies joined in to help restaurants themselves. InKind, which provides upfront capital purchasing food and beverage credit to restaurants, donated proceeds from e-cards purchased on its site directly to restaurants in its network.

Below is a highlight of just one of the many chefs and restaurant owners affected by this disaster.

**Chef Wes Avila**

An icon of the Los Angeles food scene, Chef Wes Avila began his career with stints at L'Auberge, Marché and Le Comptoir. He is best known for the meteoric rise of Guerilla Tacos, which he started as an experimental street cart. The cart eventually became



Chef Wes Avila

a roving food truck, and subsequently, an award-winning brick and mortar restaurant in Los Angeles' Arts District. In fall 2020, Avila opened Angry Egret Dinette, a genre-bending ode to Los Angeles' street food culture located in Chinatown's Mandarin Plaza. Long revered for his



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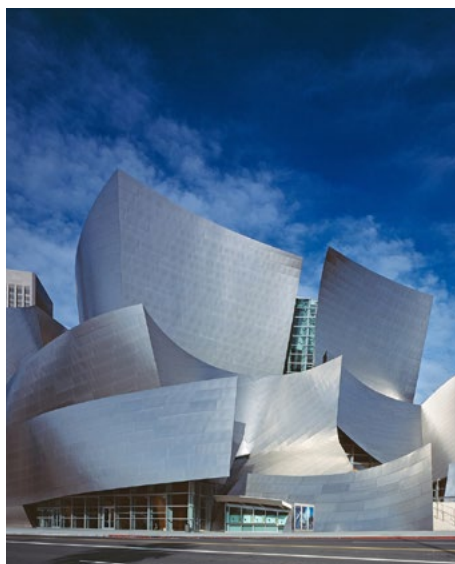
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# RESTAURANT CITY ANGELES

red company of the month

## Restaurants stepped up to be first responders



Chef Avila

distinct culinary perspective, Avila has received recognition from the Michelin Guide and the James Beard Foundation for his nuanced blend of regional California and Mexican cuisine. Ka'Teen is located at 6516 Selma Ave in Los Angeles. Chef Avila opened his most ambitious

*Chef Avila went to City Hall to rally political support for restaurants and other local operations in the wake of the destruction.*

restaurant last September. Named MXO, which means Mexican origins, the restaurant is located at 826 N. La Cienega Blvd. in LA.

Chef Avila went to City Hall in early February, to rally political support for restaurants and other local operations in the wake of the destruction. He also supports the designated driver program and offer complimentary non-alcoholic beverages to guests that are the designated drivers.

**From Today's Restaurant News: Our hearts and prayers go out to all that these California fires affected. We hope for a much better future for all.**



many banana products, including banana bread, banana bread pudding and pastries. The company will continue to operate at The Original Farmers Markets until the brick-n-mortar opens.



BY MOMOFUKU

the main dining room, they will have a wood tunnel that will lead to a vibrant 2,000 sq.-ft. lounge, complete with its own entrance on Melrose Ave, live DJ performances, fire performers and much more. The new location is slated to open in Spring 2026.

A new cafe and bakery concept called **Santa Canela** opened February 24th in Highland Park at the intersection of Figueroa St and Avenue 56 in LA. This is the latest concept from Grupo Apapacho, who also has Maizano/Entre Nos, La Cha Cha Chá and others. Ellen Ramos is the pastry chef who is a part of Grupo Apapacho.

**Today's Restaurant** invites you to submit info for the What's Going On column at any time. Please e-mail your company, product or event information to [terri@trnusa.com](mailto: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!

**Chef David Chang's restaurant group Momofuku, will open his Super Peach by summer, located at 10250 Santa Monica Blvd. in Century City. The restaurant will be seat about 200 diners and is classified as a casual brand.**

**Toca Madera will have their 10-year anniversary, with a new location reflecting the restaurant concept's growth and evolution offering a new and larger West Hollywood outpost at 8151 Melrose Ave. Corporate Executive Chef Martin Heierling will take the helm of the new location. (Just starting construction). From**



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# Top 5 things food delivery drivers are doing wrong — and how to fix them

By Chris Heffernan

Running a delivery operation isn't easy. You've got customers counting on timely service, drivers juggling busy schedules, and a million things that can go wrong along the way. Sound familiar? The truth is, most customer complaints—whether it's late orders, damaged packages, or radio silence from drivers—can be traced back to common, fixable mistakes. The good news? With the right approach and some smart tools, you can turn things around quickly and start seeing better results for your business.

**Let's break down the top five things your drivers might be doing wrong and how you can help them get back on track.**

## 1. Running Late Too Often

Ever get one of those dreaded customer calls: "Where's my order?" Late deliveries are a top frustration for customers and can seriously hurt your reputation. But the issue often isn't laziness—it's poor time management. Drivers misjudge how long a delivery will take, or they get caught off guard by traffic or peak hours.

**How You Can Help:** Start by giving drivers realistic schedules. Use tools that optimize routes and factor in potential delays, like traffic or prep time. Today's app technologies can take

the guesswork out of planning, making sure drivers have a clear, efficient path from A to B. When drivers feel less stressed about timing, everyone wins—including your customers.



Chris Heffernan

## 2. Not Handling Orders With Care

Imagine waiting for a hot meal, only to open a soggy, jumbled mess. Or getting a package that's damaged because it wasn't packed right. Customers notice these things, and they don't forget. The problem? Drivers often aren't trained on how to handle items properly or lack the right tools to secure them during transit.

**How You Can Help:** Invest in training and basic delivery tools like insulated bags, drink carriers, and sturdy containers. Show drivers how to stack and secure items so they

arrive just as they left the kitchen or warehouse. Small adjustments here can make a big difference. Remember, every smooth, intact delivery is a chance to impress your customers and build loyalty.

## 3. Not Having the Right Match Between Driver and Order

Imagine a driver showing up in a tiny car to collect a massive catering

order—or someone new on the team getting assigned a delicate delivery that requires some extra know-how. Awkward, right? When the driver and the order don't match, it's like trying to fit a square peg into a round hole. It's stressful for the driver, slows down the whole process, and leaves customers wondering why their delivery isn't on time or up to par.

**How You Can Help:** AI super software can look at all the important details—vehicle size, driver experience, certifications—and makes sure each order is paired with the perfect driver. It's like matchmaking but for deliveries. No more mismatched assignments, fewer hiccups, and happier drivers and customers all around. When the right person gets the right delivery, everyone wins.

## 4. Keeping Customers in the Dark

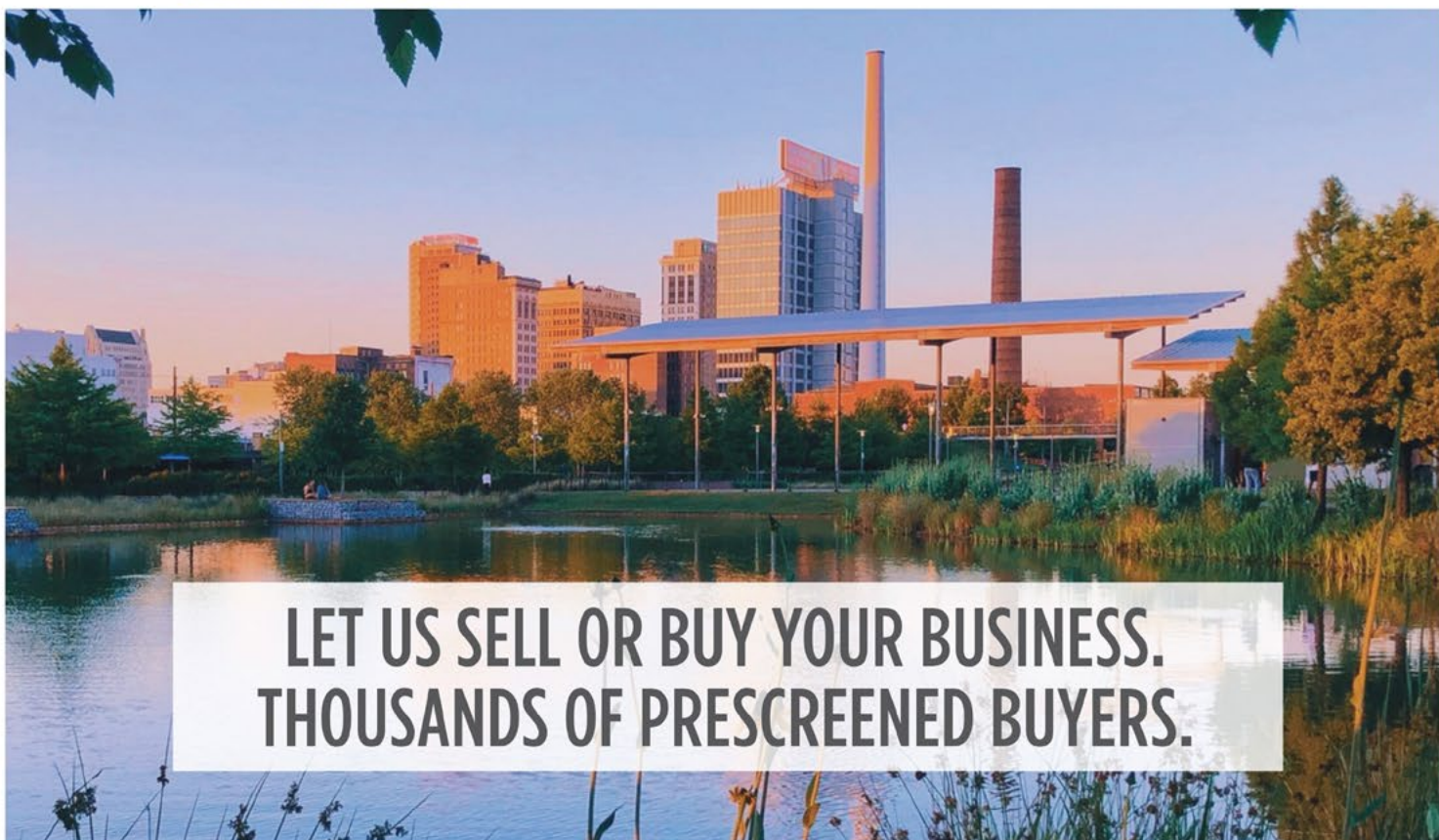
No updates. No ETA. Nothing. Customers hate feeling like they've been forgotten, especially when they're hungry or waiting on something important. Drivers who don't communicate can unintentionally hurt your business, even if they're doing everything else right.

**How You Can Help:** Train your drivers to be proactive with updates. A quick text or call can go a long way in easing a customer's mind. Better yet,

See **DELIVERY DRIVERS** page 14



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# Revolution from page 1

like chatbots for customer service or scheduling software for workforce management. As they grow more comfortable with the technology, they can explore advanced solutions like predictive analytics or robotic kitchen assistants.

**Integrating AI into Point of Sale (POS) Systems** Modern POS systems integrated with AI can provide real-time analytics on sales patterns, popular menu items, and customer preferences. They can also automate loyalty programs, offering personalized rewards based on customer behavior.

**Leveraging AI for Marketing** AI-powered marketing tools enable restaurants to target customers with precision. By analyzing data from social media, online reviews, and customer interactions, AI can craft highly personalized ad campaigns. Predictive analytics can identify trends and seasonality, helping businesses stay ahead.

**AI in Delivery and Logistics** The rise of food delivery platforms has reshaped dining habits. AI is optimizing this segment by improving delivery routes, predicting order demand, and even facilitating drone or robot deliveries. For restaurants, this means faster service, lower costs, and happier customers.

**Staff Augmentation** AI is not here to replace human workers but to augment their capabilities. For instance, smart kitchen assistants can guide cooks in preparing dishes or manage multiple orders simultaneously, reducing errors and stress in high-pressure environments.

## The Pitfalls of Ignoring AI

**Lagging Behind Competitors** Restaurants that fail to adopt AI risk losing their competitive edge. As industry leaders integrate AI into their operations, they set new standards for efficiency and customer experience. Falling behind in these areas could lead to a decline in market share.

**Rising Customer Expectations** Consumers are becoming accustomed to AI-driven experiences in other industries. Whether it's personalized recommendations from streaming services or lightning-fast responses from AI chatbots, expectations are rising. Restaurants unable to meet these expectations may face customer dissatisfaction.

**Inefficiencies and Wasted Resources** Without AI, restaurants may struggle to keep up with demand forecasting, inventory management, and cost control. This can lead to overstaffing, understocking, and wasted resources, all of which erode profit margins.

**Missed Opportunities for Growth** AI opens new revenue streams through enhanced delivery, targeted marketing, and operational insights. Businesses that ignore AI may miss these opportunities, leaving them ill-equipped to scale in a competitive market.

**Difficulty Retrofitting Later** The cost and complexity of implementing AI increase the longer a business waits. Starting small now allows restaurants to integrate AI incrementally, adapting as the technology evolves. Delaying

adoption may require a costly overhaul down the line.

## Lessons of Social Media's Past

Fifteen years ago, many restaurants viewed social media as a passing trend, failing to grasp its potential for brand building and customer engagement. Those that ignored social media initially struggled to catch up as it became a dominant force in marketing. Today, history risks repeating itself with AI. However, unlike social media, AI's impact extends beyond marketing into every facet of a restaurant's operations. Its adoption isn't just a competitive advantage; it's a necessity for survival.

## Preparing for an AI Future

The restaurant industry stands at a crossroads. By embracing AI, restaurants can enhance customer experiences, streamline operations, and position themselves as industry leaders. Those who resist may soon find themselves left behind in a rapidly evolving landscape. The time to act is now. Start small, experiment, and scale as needed—but don't ignore the AI revolution. As history has shown, the cost of inaction is far greater than the investment in innovation. **TR**

**About the author:** Paul R. Segreto is the CEO & Founder of Acceler8Success. He specializes in Entrepreneurship Coaching, Management, Marketing & Development Consulting, Franchise, Business & Product Brokerage and Franchises, Restaurants & Service Businesses. Phone & Text (832) 797-9851 or online at [Calendar](#) | [LinkedIn](#) | [Website](#) | [Blog](#).

# Artistry from pg. 1

Carrabba's Italian Grill, consistently delivering double- and triple-digit revenue growth, leading expansion efforts, and earning recognition for operational excellence.

Artistry Restaurants' acquisition of Hickory Tavern follows the recent announcement of the launch of The Chapman, an original dining concept located in Winter Park, Florida set to open later this month. Artistry Restaurants also operates five previously acquired brands - Oak & Stone, Shrimp Basket, Boca, Atlantic Beer & Oyster, and Sandbar Amelia Island.

In addition to Hickory Tavern and The Chapman, the company has plans to open a third in Lake Mary in 2025, as well as several new Oak & Stone locations including one at The Cove at 47th, Cape Coral, Florida's anticipated mixed-use development; and another in West Grove, McKinney, Texas, which will mark Artistry's entry into the Lone Star State. **TR**

**About Artistry Restaurants:** Artistry Restaurants is a diverse restaurant platform on a mission to spread joy through immersive experiences centered on heartfelt hospitality. Artistry strives to create value through the acquisition, consolidation, operation, and expansion of attractive restaurant brands. Artistry currently owns and operates seven distinct brands comprising 50 restaurants with numerous new restaurants under development. Online at [www.artistryrestaurants.com](#)

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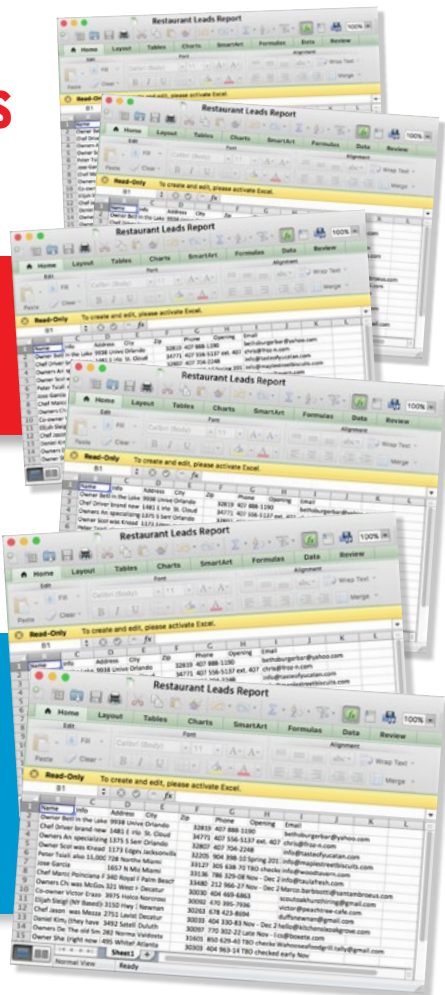
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# What's Going On from page 6

kitchen technology, smart automation and sustainable foodservice solutions. The Coppell site will serve Welbilt's customers and channel partners from around the world. The Welbilt Experience Center will also feature an immersive space which will allow customers and channel partners to experience Welbilt's full range of products in action, operating in settings that closely replicate real-world foodservice environments. The Center will showcase advanced technologies, including fully connected, smart kitchen ecosystems; industry-leading automation; and energy-efficient solutions that address the evolving needs of foodservice operators worldwide. "This project represents a transformative step in how we engage with our customers and partners," said Filippo Berti, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of the Ali Group, parent company to Welbilt. "By offering an immersive, hands-on experience, we're reinforcing our commitment to delivering the industry's most comprehensive solutions, securing our position as the global leader in foodservice equipment and innovation, and showcasing our unique ability to provide turnkey solutions worldwide. "We are thrilled to see the progress on this groundbreaking project."



**Taco Madre Restaurant & Cantina is replacing the old Houndstooth Grill & Bar located at 6323 Grand Hickory Drive in Braselton GA.** Mayra and Ramon Carrillo are the owners and this is their 2nd both in Georgia. The new location is slated for a Spring opening.

◆◆◆◆  
**Better Earth**, a Certified B Corporation specializing in 100% BPI-certified compostable products, has been honored for the second consecutive year on the prestigious 2025 Top Impact Companies list by Real Leaders®. This recognition highlights Better Earth's steadfast commitment to its mission of delivering compostable

packaging that makes sustainability goals attainable and fosters regenerative circularity within the foodservice industry. "We are thrilled to be recognized as a 2025 Top Impact Company by Real Leaders® among so many values-aligned businesses," said Joseph Bild, CEO of Better Earth. "Our commitment to fostering a sustainable future through 100% compostable solutions and supporting a circular economy is central to everything we do. This recognition validates our efforts and inspires us to continue leading with purpose." **TR**

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## Appell from page 2

- ◆ Hiring skilled staff and fostering a positive work culture reduces turnover.
- ◆ Clear leadership and training ensure smooth operations.

### 7. Unique selling proposition

- ◆ Standing out with a unique concept, specialty dish, or themed experience attracts customers.
- ◆ Understanding target demographics and tailoring offerings accordingly enhances success.

### 8. Adaptability and Innovation

- ◆ Offering delivery, online ordering, and seasonal menu changes cater to evolving consumer preferences.

### 9. Cleanliness and hygiene

- ◆ A clean dining area and kitchen improve customer perception and satisfaction.

### 10. Strong customer loyalty programs

- ◆ Rewarding repeat customers through loyalty programs, discounts, and exclusive deals increases retention.
- ◆ Engaging with customers through personalized offers and follow-ups helps build long-term relationships.

By mastering these factors, this restaurant increased its chances of long-term success in a competitive market with less than 100% adherence to the rules. **TR**

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# Big trend from page 5

## Flexibility to keep up with consumption trends is a competitive must

The merging of comfort and adventure in beverage trends is only the beginning. With the U.S. beverage market expected to grow by 1.25% annually through 2029, success depends on operators' ability to meet evolving consumer demands while enhancing efficiency across service programs.

*For those positioned to leverage these evolving dynamics the rewards will be well worth the effort.*

Key success factors in this space include menu flexibility, operational adaptability, and the use of innovative technologies to simplify complex programs. Companies leading the charge, particularly in technology-driven automation, are poised to capture long-term growth.

"For the modern beverage operator, it's about staying nimble," said Hsu. "The businesses that adapt and bridge this comfort-adventure divide are the ones that will not only survive

but thrive." While flavor trends come and go, the underlying dynamics of this shift reflect a lasting change in the way consumers—and the businesses that serve them—interact. The comfort-adventure synergy is now table stakes for staying competitive in a crowded marketplace.

Operators who fail to address this trend risk getting left behind as technology-enabled rivals deliver better-tasting, faster, and more innovative options. For those positioned to leverage these evolving dynamics—armed with both creativity and automation—the rewards will be well worth the effort.

For more insights and detailed projections about the beverage industry's future, download the full [2025 Flavor Trend Report](#). **TR**

*About Botrista:* At Botrista, we're enabling partners to easily serve an array of vibrant drinks in order to tackle dynamic consumer trends. With incredible ingredients sourced from around the globe, consumers are spoiled for choice. By utilizing an extremely detailed data-driven approach to menu development, our program ensures perfection at every pour. Implemented, operated and scaled without any added complexity - Botrista's ever-evolving program delivers on quality, consistency and profit. It's 'out of the box' thinking, just in a cup. *About CloudBar:* Part of Botrista's comprehensive beverage program, CloudBar is a sophisticated data-backed intelligence platform guiding decisions on beverage and flavor offerings. The data-power system tailors drink menus to suit various cuisines and service types, leveraging consumption data to optimize beverage offerings.

# Delivery drivers from page 10

integrate a system that automates updates for them. An app solution, for example, can allow drivers to send real-time notifications. This small change keeps customers informed and improves their experience tenfold.

## Why It Matters

Every delivery is a reflection of your business. When things go smoothly, customers trust you. They come back. They tell their friends. But when something goes wrong—whether it's a late order or damaged package—that trust is hard to rebuild. Addressing these common mistakes doesn't just make your drivers' jobs easier; it strengthens your reputation and builds loyalty with your customers.

If you're reading this and thinking, "Yep, we've been there," don't sweat it. These mistakes are common—but they're also fixable. Start by taking a closer look at your delivery process. Are your drivers getting the tools and support they need to succeed? From route optimization to real-time communication, everything you need to streamline operations and make your customers happier than ever is out there at your fingertips. **TR**

*About the author:* Chris Heffernan is the Founder and CEO of [dliivr](#), a white-label, AI technology-forward food delivery management service using proprietary technology to match strategically placed restaurant, catering, meal kit, e-commerce and other on-demand food orders with an extensive network of independently-contracted drivers across the U.S. and Canada who meet each brand's specific requirements. With Chris having more than 10 years of experience in the rapidly growing gig economy and under his leadership, dliivr has become one of the fastest growing delivery services in America boasting over \$50M in revenue for 2025—and with over 10,000 drivers across 168 markets in the U.S. and Canada. He may be reached at [www.dliivr.io](http://www.dliivr.io).

*Every delivery is a reflection of your business. When things go smoothly, customers trust you.*

## 5. Skipping safety for speed

We get it, everyone's in a rush. But cutting corners—whether it's speeding, skipping safety checks, or ignoring vehicle maintenance—can lead to accidents or broken items. Safety isn't just about protecting drivers; it's about protecting your reputation, too.

**How You Can Help:** Make safety a priority. Encourage drivers to plan realistic schedules so they don't feel pressured to rush. Keep vehicles in good shape and use tools like live tracking to monitor unsafe driving habits like speeding. When drivers feel supported, they're more likely to follow the rules—and customers notice the difference.

# TR Today's Restaurant

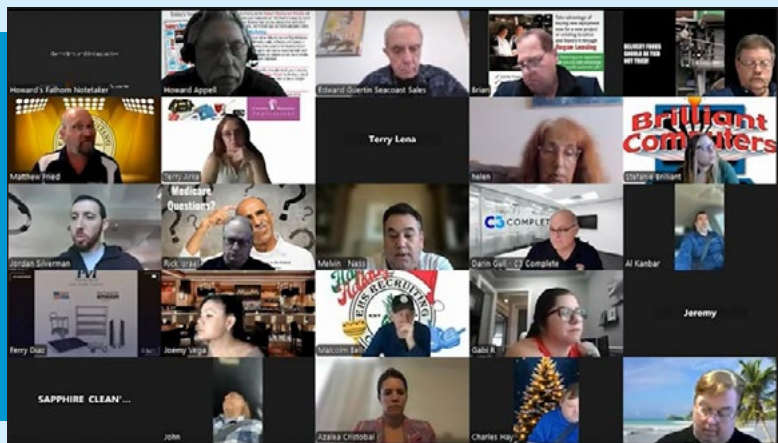
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- ◆ Protected category seat
- ◆ Recognition by industry as a respected vendor
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**MEETINGS FRIDAY at 9AM and 11AM**

**YOUR FIRST MEETING IS FREE!**

*For information on how to join the TRN Networking Group call or visit our website:*

**561.620.8888 ♦ info@trnusa.com ♦ [trnusa.com/network-group](http://trnusa.com/network-group)**

**RESTAURANT OWNERS, MANAGERS AND CHEFS ARE ALWAYS WELCOME AT NO CHARGE!**

# Today's Restaurant

## NETWORKING GROUPS

Two Exclusive Groups of Top Vendors Servicing the Restaurant & Hospitality Industry

### CHAPTER 1 ♦ VIRTUAL MEETINGS ♦ FRIDAYS 11 AM

#### ADVERTISING / MARKETING / PUBLISHING

Today's Restaurant Howard Appell / Terri Appell  
561.870.9663 ♦ 561.620.8888 ♦ www.trnusa.com

#### AI COST ANALYSIS

Starfish Jordan Silverman  
914.844.5775 ♦ jordan.silverman@usestarfish.com ♦ www.usestarfish.com

#### ATTORNEY

Evan D. Appell, P.A. Evan D. Appell  
561.337.5858 ♦ evan@edalegal.com

#### BUSINESS BROKER

Real Estate Sales Force Inc. Azalea Cristobal  
786.457.2796 ♦ Azalea@resf.com ♦ www.restaurantsforsalemiami.com

#### COMPUTER SERVICES

Brilliant Computers Mark Brilliant / Stefani Brilliant  
561.877.1119 ♦ mark@brilliantcomputers.com  
Stefanie@brilliantcomputers.com ♦ www.brilliantcomputers.com

#### EQUIPMENT & SUPPLY

The Restaurant Store Gerry Mangual  
954.415.3040 ♦ 717.823.7866  
gmangual810@gmail.com ♦ www.therestaurantstore.com

#### EQUIPMENT FINANCE

Leasing Solutions Steve Geller  
845.362.6106 ♦ sgeller@leasingsolutionsllc.com ♦ leasingsolutionsllc.com

#### FOOD SAFETY CLASSES

On the Fly Food Safety Charles Hay  
904.923.2577

#### FOODSERVICE DESIGN AND CONSULTING

Marenic Food Service Design John Marenic  
954.817.1183 ♦ Jmarenic@marenic.com

#### FOODSERVICE EQUIPMENT MANUFACTURER

Prairie View Industries PVI Ferry Diaz / Brian Denton  
646.683.8456 ♦ Ferry@pviramps.com  
BDENTON@pviramps.com ♦ www.pvimanufacturing.com

#### FRACTIONAL CFO/COO

Apex Executive Consulting Robert Hearst  
561.512.6234 ♦ robert.hearst@apexbms.com

#### HOTELPORT

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305.209.6244 ♦ fred.bean@hotelport.co

#### ONLINE ORDERING & MARKETING

Ser.Vi Sal Iozzia  
615.663.3663 ♦ sal@ser.vi

#### PAYROLL

Heartland Payroll Randy Pumputis  
585.622.2993 ♦ randall.pumputis@e-hps.com

#### POS

Heartland Payment Systems Jason Christian  
239.357.4286 ♦ jason.christian@e-hps.com ♦ www.heartlandpaymentsystems.com

#### PROMOTIONAL PRODUCTS

Creative Business Impressions Terry Arke  
561.308.1393 ♦ terry.arke@outlook.com

#### PURCHASING CONSULTING SERVICE

Strategic Supply Chain Partners  
John Mulholland / Chris Rodrigue / Kevin Anderson  
jmulholland@yahoo.com ♦ 678.362.7307 ♦ https://ssc.partners  
chris.rodrigue@ssc.partners ♦ 985.778.1515 ♦ https://ssc.partners  
kevin.anderson@ssc.partners ♦ 407.497.9495 ♦ https://ssc.partners

#### RECRUITING

EHS Recruiting Company Matt Fried  
941.586.1793 ♦ 941.926.1990 ♦ mfried@ehsrecruitingcompany.com

#### RESTAURANT INTERIOR DESIGNER

DV-Studio Joemy Vega  
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#### SECURITY AND FIRE ALARM DESIGN

Vector Security Clint Columbe  
954.616.9357 ♦ 1.800.PROTECT  
Cpcolumbe@vectorsecurity.com ♦ guardianprotection.com

#### SOLAR POWERED SIGNS

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800.731.3442 x702 ♦ cliffhoinowski@sunsigncontrols.com

#### S/S EQUIPMENT

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#### TYING MACHINE

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#### UNIFORMS

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Wearstand Linda Bloom  
720.939.9525 ♦ linda@standshoes.com

### CHAPTER 2 ♦ VIRTUAL MEETINGS ♦ FRIDAYS 9 AM

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#### BUSINESS BROKER

Anchor Business Advisors Steve Whitehill  
561.376.7500 ♦ steve@anchorbb.com

#### DISINFECTANT / SANITIZER SPRAY

EpomsByDW Dwayne Wilson  
786.738.2126 ♦ office@epomsbydw.com ♦ www.epomsbydw.com

#### FOOD SAFETY CLASSES

On the Fly Food Safety Charles Hay  
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#### FRUIT PIES / DESSERTS

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Mel: 954.684.6881 ♦ theventure3@gmail.com  
Andrew: 315.651.2684 ♦ andrewnass@gmail.com  
www.theconcordgrapepiecompany.com

#### ICE CREAM MAKING EQUIPMENT DISTRIBUTOR

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#### LEASE/FINANCING

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404.723.7222 ♦ brian@rogueleasing.com

#### MEDICARE AND HEALTH INSURANCE

ARCHI Agency Rick Israel  
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rickbamainsurance@gmail.com ♦ info@affiliated-health.com

#### MANAGEMENT RECRUITER

Restaurant Recruiters of America Chris Kauffman  
912.245.4540 ♦ 404.233.3530  
chris@kauffco.com ♦ www.RestaurantRecruitersofAmerica.com

#### PEO

Worksite Employee Jeremy Carson  
904.295.5110 ♦ 941.677.0110 x124  
Jeremy@worksiteemployee.com ♦ www.WorksiteEmployee.com

#### POS PROCESSING

Sleft LLC Herb Denmark  
215.595.6671 ♦ herb@merchserve.com ♦ www.sleftpayments.com

#### RESTAURANT EQUIP AND SUPPLIES

Restaurant City Joe Leach  
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We are looking for new members! Call for info or to join us at the next meeting!

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