

Today's Restaurant

THE FOODSERVICE INDUSTRY AUTHORITY

VOLUME 30

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Creating a customer experience to keep restaurant guests coming back



By Paul Segreto

Creating positively memorable experiences in a restaurant, especially with the omnipresence of review sites and foodie groups, is not only possible but essential in today's competitive landscape. While the challenge may seem somewhat impossible, some establishments consistently garner excellent reviews. How do they do it? It involves meticulous attention to every aspect of the dining experience, from the quality of the food to the warmth of the service. Here's a detailed exploration of how restaurants can achieve and sustain a consistently outstanding environment, whether it's a full-service establishment, a fast-casual concept, or a QSR.

To begin with, high-quality food is

at the heart of any successful restaurant experience. It's not just about the ingredients, but how they come together in crave-able dishes that guests look forward to again and again. High-quality ingredients must be selected with care, emphasizing freshness and seasonality. The preparation, presentation, and attention to detail are crucial elements that elevate a dish from "good" to "great." Whether the restaurant serves gourmet entrees or simple burgers, the dishes must appeal to the senses—taste, texture, aroma, and even the visual appeal on the plate, or even in the take-out container. The most successful restaurants ensure that each menu item is executed to perfection consistently, which requires a well-trained culinary team that knows how to achieve the same level of excellence every time.

Beyond quality, creating dishes that people crave is what brings them back repeatedly. Signature dishes should evoke emotional connections—comfort, nostalgia, or adventure—and offer a unique twist that can't be found elsewhere. Constant innovation, seasonal specials, and staying in touch with culinary trends are great ways to ensure that guests are always excited to see what's next on the menu. Crave-able dishes are also about listening to the customer and understanding what resonates with them.

Exceptional service is the second pillar of an unforgettable dining experience. In an age where customers have plenty of options, personalized service can make a huge difference. From the moment a guest enters the restaurant until they leave, each interaction with the staff should be genuine and accommodating. Greeting guests warmly, providing helpful recommendations, and quickly addressing any concerns can create a positive impression that lasts well beyond the meal. Great service also means anticipating needs—refilling drinks before they are empty, offering refills, or checking on a meal without being intrusive. Consistent training on empathy, communication, and the nuances of customer service ensures staff can

See **CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE** page 14

Ford's Garage national expansion to open six new franchise locations in 2025

Vintage-inspired full-service restaurant grows national footprint with strong plans for expansion in 2025

Tampa, FL – Ford's Garage – the burgers and craft beer restaurant inspired by the heritage of The Ford Motor Company, is revving up for significant expansion in 2025 with six new locations opening across the United States. Building on its established presence in Florida, Kentucky, Indiana, and Michigan, the brand will be opening additional locations in each of these states by the end of 2025, further solidifying its place as a leader in the growing full-service restaurant industry.

Ford's Garage is ramping up for a busy year ahead as they introduce the brand to new communities including: Boynton Beach, FL, Sanford, FL, Tampa, FL, Avon, IN, Utica, MI, Lexington, KY.

The brand offers a unique franchise opportunity that blends an expansive menu of American comfort



food and vintage automotive nostalgia. With a menu that features their famous burgers, wings and a tower of onion rings, comfort foods, and irresistible

desserts, there is truly an option to fit everyone's preferences. As the only restaurant brand with an official Ford licensing agreement, Ford's Garage stands out

in its design, with cars hanging from the ceiling and vintage-style décor, paying homage to classic car culture while still delivering a family-friendly dining experience.

"We're thrilled to announce the six new locations set to open this year and even more excited to introduce Ford's Garage to new communities," said **Billy Downs, President of Ford's Garage**. "Our concept resonates with guests of all ages, combining an engaging atmosphere with a menu that has something for everyone. With food, beverage, and service that are best-in-class, we see great potential for continued growth."

A Recipe for Success

Ford's Garage franchisees benefit from a multi-daypart model that includes brunch, lunch, dinner, and

See **FORD'S GARAGE** page 11



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Appell Pie

Tips for a new restaurant

Howard Appell ♦ Today's Restaurant Publisher

How to market and promote your new restaurant business

Is this your first and only restaurant or is it part of a chain? The tips given here have to be used differently in each specific case.

Marketing and promoting a new restaurant is all about creating buzz, attracting customers, and keeping them coming back. It requires a mix of digital strategies, community engagement, and traditional advertising.

Here's a step-by-step guide to effectively market your restaurant:

1. Develop a strong brand identity

- ♦ Choose a unique and memorable restaurant name.
- ♦ Design an eye-catching logo and consistent brand colors.
- ♦ Create a compelling brand story (e.g., what makes your restaurant unique?).

2. Create an online presence

- ♦ **Website:** Ensure your website is mobile-friendly, includes your menu, hours, location, and online reservation options.
- ♦ **Social media:** Set up Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and Twitter. Share high-quality food photos, behind-the-scenes content, and promotions.
- ♦ **Google my business:** List your restaurant with correct details to appear in local searches.

3. Leverage influencers and bloggers

- ♦ Invite local food bloggers and influencers for a free tasting.
- ♦ Encourage them to share their experiences on social media.
- ♦ Partner with influencers for giveaways or discount promotions.

4. Offer grand opening promotions

- (use caution to not overwhelm your staff)
- ♦ **Soft opening:** invite family, friends, and local influencers to test your service.
- ♦ **Grand opening event:** Offer live music, free samples, or discounts

- ♦ **Limited-time discounts:** Provide "Buy One, Get One Free" or "First 50 customers eat free" deals.

5. Engage with the local community

- ♦ Collaborate with nearby businesses for cross-promotions.
- ♦ Sponsor local events or sports teams.
- ♦ Join local food festivals and farmer's markets.

6. Implement a loyalty and referral program

- ♦ Offer a digital or physical loyalty card (e.g., "Buy 5 meals, get 1 free").
- ♦ Provide discounts for customers who refer a friend.
- ♦ Introduce a rewards system for repeat customers.

7. Utilize online advertising & SEO

- ♦ **Google ads:** Target local customers searching for dining options.
- ♦ **Google ads:** Run search and display ads for people looking for restaurants nearby.
- ♦ **Social media ads:** Run geo-targeted ads to attract local foodies.
- ♦ **SEO optimization:** Use keywords like "best [cuisine] restaurant in [city]" to rank higher in searches.
- ♦ **Facebook & Instagram ads:** Target local demographics with promotions and engaging visuals.
- ♦ **Geotargeting ads:** Use location-based advertising to attract local customers.

8. Encourage online reviews

- ♦ Ask happy customers to leave Google, Yelp, and Facebook reviews.
- ♦ Respond to both positive and negative reviews professionally.

9. Offer online ordering & delivery

- ♦ Partner with UberEats, DoorDash, or GrubHub.
- ♦ Provide discounts for first-time delivery customers.

10. Maintain excellent customer service

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!

Important new products, corporate news and industry events

Developer Related Ross has filed a rezoning application for the K Park site in Wellington, Florida with plans for a large mixed-use development. The site is currently designated for commercial and community uses. The proposed development will include 600 multi-family units, a 250,000-square-foot shopping center, a 150-key hotel, over 82,000 sq-ft of restaurant space. Community amenities on the 66.3-acre site, which includes a reservoir, will include a pool, tennis courts and pickleball courts.



Eco-Products® and OZZI® are partnering on a new multipronged initiative to make reusable foodservice containers more accessible to businesses, colleges, hospitals and other institutions — an effort that could help foodservice operators meet their sustainability goals, help keep waste out of landfills and reduce costs. This multipronged initiative features several innovative solutions. The initiatives include Veda™, which was introduced in October, a new line of durable and reusable containers from Eco-Products; free guidance from the company's Product & Zero Waste Specialists on how to convert to reusables; and collection and tracking solutions for reuse systems provided by the team at OZZI. "We're committed to making reuse practical and accessible for businesses, campuses and other institutions," said Wendell Simonson, Director of Marketing at Eco-Products. To learn about OZZI's reusable system, go to OzziReuse.com.

◆ **Currito**, a fast-casual franchise with globally inspired menus, celebrated a record year in 2024 as they announced nine signed development deals that will bring 16 new locations to communities throughout the country. Now, the brand looks to build upon this momentum in 2025. Currito has seen much success at their current restaurants, and is coming to new cities this year through their latest franchise development deals and expansion efforts. The concept was founded in 2005 by brothers and restaurateurs Joe and

◆◆◆◆ **On The DL Roadside Grill food truck** has opened in Palm Bay and is on the road. Owner/operator Darrell Powell has a menu that features an elevated take on roadside dining, offering steaks, pork chops, shrimp, quail, frog legs, ribs, pulled pork, burgers, and sandwiches. Everything is made to order. The truck locations are at Walmart and Sam's Club in Palm Bay for now, but he also looking at additional locations.

50 Years of a remarkable vineyard — Vecchie Terre di Montefili is Anfiteatro. This wine has always been the deepest expression of the estate, a symbol of a journey that began in 1975 with the planting of its first vineyard.



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altitude of 500 meters above sea level, the Anfiteatro vineyard is a place of rare beauty. The vines thrive in Galestro-rich soils, a stony, well-draining composition that encourages deep root growth, enhancing complexity and structure in the wine. More than just a vineyard, Anfiteatro is a living ecosystem, the beating heart of Montefili. Societa' Agricola Vecchie Terre Di Montefili Societa Telephone +39 055 853739 or Fax + 39 055 8544684. Email them at: info@vecchieterredimontefili.com.



John Lanni. The also do catering. With 23 locations open and operating in Florida, Ohio, Illinois, Kentucky and other states, they are seeking franchisees to further grow. Online at curritos.com.

◆◆◆◆ **Cut Fresh**, a supplier of pre-cut, pre-packaged, custom fresh produce in the Midwest, announced at the Wisconsin Food & Hospitality Expo 2025 it has rebranded the Cut Fresh brand. The rebranding is expected to enhance recognition and reinforce the value of Cut Fresh as a brand that streamlines food preparation, reduces

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

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Hiring and firing

Critical steps in building a successful team

John Tschohl ♦ Today's Restaurant Contributor

What are the elements of a successful team? In a nutshell—whether it's an athletic team, a dance team, or a business team—the critical elements are people who are knowledgeable, committed, dedicated, productive, work well with others, and constantly seek to improve their skills.

Hiring the right people and firing

the wrong people are equally important. You know what you want in your employees—and you would do well to know what you don't want.

When you are ready to hire, write a job description that will identify the skills necessary to do the job. Employees need to know exactly what you expect of them. A job description

is also important for you when you are evaluating an employee's performance, because it provides you with specific items on which to base your evaluation.

Develop a pool of potential employees. Ask your best employees for referrals for people they have worked with in the past, because they will recommend others who share their work ethic. Don't overlook retirees and disabled people. They take great pride in their work and will be among your most valuable assets.

That includes training them, motivating them, and recognizing and rewarding them.

It's also critical that you fire employees who aren't doing the job for which they were hired. I estimate that every organization has at least five to 10 percent of their workforces that should be fired. The cost of keeping those employees on your payroll is high. I'm speaking from experience. Several years ago, I had an employee I should have fired, but I waited to do so for five years. During that time, she embezzled \$340,000 from my company.

As managers, you need to realize that your job is at risk when you're unwilling to terminate employees who aren't dedicated and productive and aren't willing to grow in their jobs. Those people are a cancer to your company.

You cannot let a non-performing employee's attitude or actions infect your other employees. If you don't take the appropriate action and fire them, your other team members will start to question your ability to lead and to make decisions. They will resent you for relying on them to pick up the slack.

Firing an employee involves several steps. Proper documentation and decisive action are essential. Conduct performance reviews on a regular basis. Give the employee an opportunity to improve and deliver on your expectations. This will give you a road map to either provide more coaching or to let that employee go.

My advice in six words is this: Hire well and fire when necessary.

About the Author: John Tschohl is the founder and president of the Service Quality Institute—the global leader in customer service with operations in more than 40 countries. He is considered one of the world's foremost authorities on all aspects of customer service and has developed 18 customer service training programs—including *Coaching For Success: Motivating and Managing* and *Even Firing For Improved Employee Performance*—that are used by companies throughout the world. His monthly strategic newsletter is available online at no charge at www.customer-service.com. He can also be reached on Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. For more information on John Tschohl and the Service Quality Institute, visit the website at www.customer-service.com.

You cannot let a non-performing employee's attitude or actions infect your other employees.

Conduct in-person interviews. As you do so, pay attention to personalities. Does the applicant smile, make eye contact with you, and actively listen to what you say? Keep in mind that you can train for skills, but you can't change people's attitudes. Look for characteristics such as friendliness, professionalism, and enthusiasm.

Ask open-ended questions. What are your strengths? What are your weaknesses? What are you most proud of accomplishing? What are you hoping to achieve here if I hire you?

Make your company and its jobs as appealing as you can. That might include offering flexible work hours, commissions, and job sharing.

Once you have identified top candidates, conduct background checks. If someone has lied to you during the hiring process, you won't be able to trust them when they're on the job.

It's also important that, once you've hired the best candidate for a job, you do everything you can to retain them.

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“Talk to the pros: How AI and voice technology are transforming the restaurant industry

Atlanta, GA – If you ever wanted to reach out to a chef or restaurant owner and ask them questions, you now have a place to do so. Atlanta based Coursini just launched version one of its conversational AI platform, which is designed to empower restaurant industry professionals and learners with immediate access to expert advice and mentorship. Combining six-hundred years of industry expertise with cutting-edge artificial intelligence and individual voice agents, the platform offers a transformative, interactive learning experience by some of the top restaurant industry professionals.

Think CHATGPT, but with a face and that person’s knowledge base behind it. Hmmmm? Sounds odd right? The idea of being able to talk directly to professionals became a reality when founder, Cliff Bramble found the technology he had been waiting for. Cliff says, “I basically wanted to create a platform where people without access to professionals would have the opportunity to pick up the phone and learn

from some of the best chefs and business minds in the industry, but at a very reasonable cost.

I mean, consultants cost a ton of money, right? I was thinking back to when I was a kid, and didn’t have the needed guidance. I wish I would have been able to pick up a phone and talk to an expert.” So, since 2020, Cliff had been looking for technology to help him complete the platform. It just wasn’t there yet. But, finally, in August of 2024, he found the technology to pull it all together. Four months later (and three developers from several different countries who thought he was crazy with this idea) assisted him with his idea. Yep, you can now

scroll to a page and talk to an expert!

Cliff says, “Trying to explain to the first experts I called what I was trying to do was difficult because I did not have an example. First of all, it’s a new technology, and then secondly, the responses I received from the would-be experts were like, “how do you talk to

me over web pages? It was daunting, but out of twenty-five experts I called, twenty-two of them said, wow, that’s cool, and I’m in.” The next phase of gathering individual knowledgebases was even more difficult. Think about how busy a restaurant person is and then ask them to provide you with some of their knowledge on specific topics. Cliff says, “I know chefs don’t like to even write a recipe, and restaurant owners are always multi-tasking and stretched thin, and here I’m asking them for their knowledge, which really meant...I need three to five hours of your time.”

A platform tailored for restaurant professionals

The result is Coursini’s innovative platform which brings together renowned restaurant experts to provide immediate feedback and mentorship along with resources for restaurant owners, chefs, managers, pastry chefs, students, and industry professionals. While Coursini features voice cloning, streaming avatars and voice agents, the platform makes accessing the experts knowledge simple, intuitive, interactive, and engaging. You end up talking to the expert just like you were on a phone, but it’s over a web page.

Key features of the platform

- ◆ Expert-Driven Responses: Expert voice clones (from real people) deliver answers rooted in a proprietary

knowledge base developed by the Coursini industry experts, with enhanced precision and context provided by large language models.

- ◆ Streaming Avatars: Engage with real-life avatars delivering concise, under sixty-seconds advice sessions for quick, actionable insights.

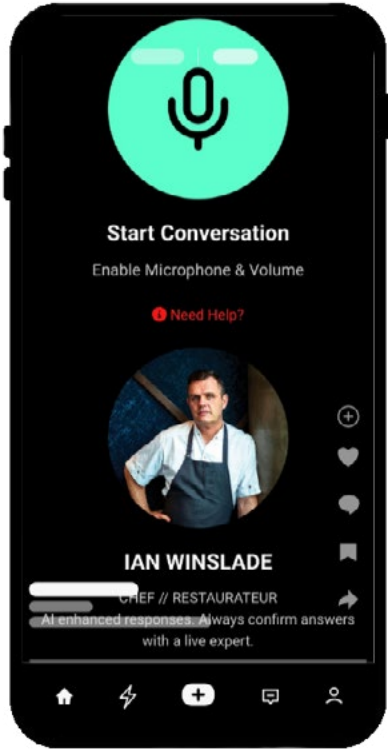
- ◆ Global Accessibility: Voice agents understand and respond in 29 languages, ensuring accessibility for users worldwide, with the one-minute advice sessions offered in English and Spanish.

- ◆ Comprehensive Knowledge Base: Proprietary content created by restaurant professionals, covering all restaurant topics from wine to operations, to beer, and business startup.

- ◆ Interactive AI-Driven Content: The expert AI agents respond to queries on all aspects of restaurant management, kitchen, culinary, human resources and operations.

- ◆ Subscription-Based Access: Exclusive resources tailored for managers, chefs, culinary and hospitality students, independent restaurant owners, and bar professionals at a low cost.

About Coursini Inc. Coursini is online at www.coursini.ai and is an Atlanta-based conversational AI education technology company specializing in solutions for the restaurant industry first, and other industries afterward. By combining the expertise of seasoned professionals with the latest in artificial intelligence, Coursini empowers users to excel through knowledge sharing, mentorship, and innovation. Company Contact: Clifford Bramble 678.488.9918 cliff@coursini.com.



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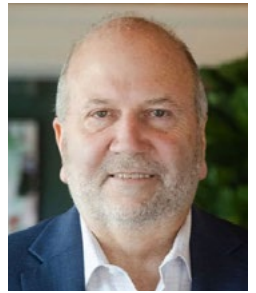


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Ten Tables Hospitality to launch in Florida

A new era of personalized restaurant management and consulting

Monte Silva ♦ Today's Restaurant Contributor



Ten Tables Hospitality, a dynamic new restaurant management and consulting company, is set to make waves in Florida's culinary scene with the highly anticipated opening of its first concept in April, 2025. The company, founded by industry veterans Monte Silva and Mark Bodenstein, is focused on providing tailored, high-touch services to both the restaurants it owns and operates, as well as the select clients it manages and consults with.

With a commitment to creating exceptional dining experiences and fostering sustainable, scalable business practices, Ten Tables Hospitality is poised to become a leading force in the hospitality industry. The company's name, inspired by the desire to create intimate, personalized dining experiences, reflects its philosophy of smaller-scale operations that prioritize quality over quantity.

"We believe that less is more," says Monte Silva, CEO of Ten Tables Hospitality. "By keeping our restaurant concepts smaller, we can ensure that every guest feels valued and every experience is extraordinary. The same goes for our clients—we take on a select number of management and consulting projects so that we can consistently over-deliver and drive real

success. Mark and I have discussed starting a restaurant group together off and on for the last ten years and I'm incredibly excited and honored to partner with my friend chef Mark. He is the best chef I have ever worked with and I know we are going to be successful."

Monte Silva: A Visionary in Restaurant Operations and Coaching

Monte Silva's journey into the restaurant industry began at just 15 years old, when he took his first job as a dishwasher. Over the course of 15 years, Monte worked in various roles, from prep cook and server to bartender, before embarking on a remarkable career as a restaurant operator. He quickly rose through the ranks, taking on management positions at Wolfgang Puck's restaurants and being featured in the book *Beverage Biz is Show Biz* by David Steadman.

Despite achieving tremendous success, Monte's journey also included personal challenges, including burnout and divorce. Determined to achieve a work-life balance, Monte refocused his efforts in Nashville, and his restaurants quickly gained

recognition in local and national publications such as Nashville Wine Press, The Nashville Scene, The Tasting Panel, and Restaurant Business Magazine. Monte's career reached new heights as he successfully operated high-grossing restaurants, including Acme Feed & Seed in Nashville, which ranked as the 31st highest-grossing restaurant in the country at \$18.5 million annually.

In 2020, Monte founded Monte Silva Coaching, offering his expertise to restaurant owners and executives across the country. His book, *Shift Happens: 7 Proven Strategies to Help Your Restaurant Crush the New Economy*, is available on Amazon. Monte's philosophy emphasizes the importance of maintaining a healthy balance while scaling a restaurant business, a perspective he now brings to Ten Tables Hospitality.

Mark Bodenstein: A Culinary Visionary Leading Ten Tables' Culinary Future

Mark Bodenstein, Ten Tables Hospitality's Chief Operations Officer and Development Chef, brings a wealth of culinary experience to the company. Known for his innovative approach to New American cuisine,

Chef Bodenstein has dedicated his career to elevating farm-to-table dining and supporting local farmers.

Chef Bodenstein's culinary journey spans the globe, with extensive travel and experience in kitchens around the world. His approach marries local ingredients with natural cooking techniques, creating memorable dining experiences that have earned him numerous accolades, including two prestigious James Beard nominations.

Previously, Chef Bodenstein helmed several acclaimed restaurants, earning recognition for his inventive use of local produce and sustainable practices. Today, he leads the culinary development for Ten Tables Hospitality, shaping new restaurant concepts and menu offerings that reflect his commitment to creativity, sustainability, and excellence.

A Personal Touch in Every Experience

At Ten Tables Hospitality, both Monte and Mark believe in creating exceptional experiences by focusing on smaller-scale operations. Rather than managing large, impersonal restaurants

See **TEN TABLES** page 11

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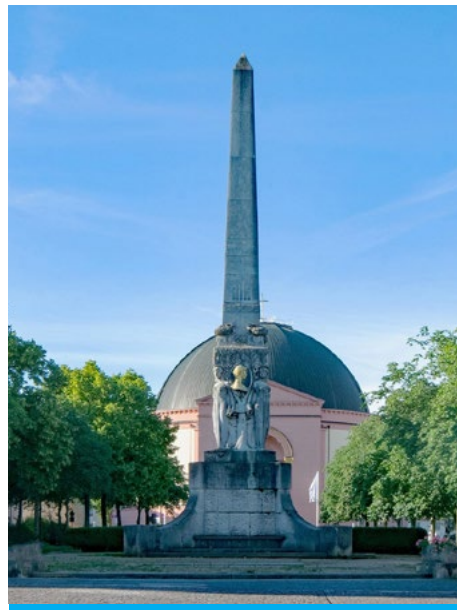
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◆ Restaurateur **Natacha Douglas** is featuring plant-based food from her native France at **La Vie Vegan Bistro** in St. Charles' historic district. The new Bistro opened in March at 524 S Main St. Natacha Douglas and general manager Amaya Jimenez offer 100% Vegan French-Inspired favorites such as Vegan Macarons and Pastries.

◆ **Robin Restaurant** by Chef **Alec Schingel** has opened in St. Louis at 7268 Manchester Rd. The restaurant focuses on serving a small, but elevated Prix Fixe menu sourced from the products of local farmers and purveyors. The cuisine will highlight true sustainability and seasonality, and explore the history and culture of Midwestern Cuisine,

resulting in thoughtfully crafted meals that feel indulgent yet approachable. By opening a fine dining establishment that takes care to create a comfortable, welcoming environment, Chef Schingel looks to craft a "fine comfort" experience that is special and perfect for savoring, without any pressure. "This is a highly personal endeavor, and a vision that has been 18 years in the making," said Schingel, who will serve as both Executive Chef and Wine/Beverage Director of Robin Restaurant. "We put a lot of thought and effort into the details of the experience, but we also want it to be in service of hospitality and warmth -- to make everyone feel welcome. Visit Robinrestaurant.com.



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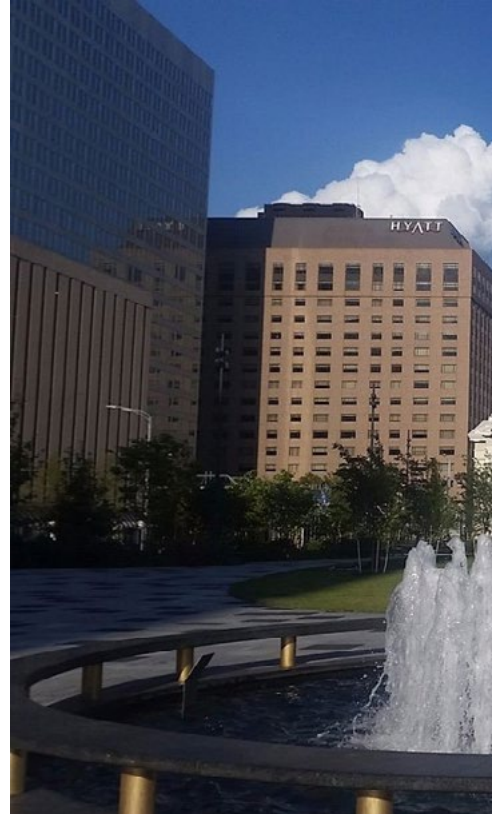
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History of the

Founded by the National Park Service in 1935 to commemorate Thomas Jefferson's vision of a trans-continental United States, the Gateway Arch National Park (formerly known as the "Jefferson National Expansion Memorial") stretches from the Old Courthouse to the steps overlooking the Mississippi River. In between, the Gateway Arch rises high, a bold monument to the pioneering spirit.

Today, the Gateway Arch celebrates the diverse people who shaped the region and the country. The dreamer, [Thomas Jefferson](#), negotiated the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, doubling the size of the United States. The explorers, [Lewis & Clark](#) and their Shoshone guide Sacagawea, scouted the new territory and mapped a route to the Pacific Ocean. The challengers, [Dred and Harriet Scott](#), filed suit at the [Old Courthouse](#) for their freedom from slavery, and St. Louis suffragette [Virginia Minor](#) sued for a woman's right to vote. The artist, architect [Eero Saarinen](#), designed the monument that honors them all.

The monument we know today began in 1935, when President Franklin D. Roosevelt designated property along the St. Louis riverfront to be developed as the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial (now known as Gateway Arch National Park). While the land



was cleared for construction, the City of St. Louis deeded the Old Courthouse to the National Park Service to be incorporated into the Memorial. In 1948, a nationwide design competition determined what shape the Memorial would take, and in 1963, construction began on architect [Eero Saarinen's](#) design for a stainless steel arch. **Completed in 1965**, the Gateway Arch stands as a symbol of



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Gateway Arch



national identity and an iconic example of mid-century modern design.

Anchoring the west end of the Park, the Old Courthouse is a prime example of mid-19th century federal architecture. Built in 1839, the Courthouse served as the site of a number of landmark civil rights cases, including the [Dred Scott decision](#). In the 1830s, the enslaved Scott was taken to free territory in Illinois and Wisconsin before

being brought back to Missouri. In 1847 and 1850, under Missouri's "once free, always free" doctrine, Scott sued for his freedom at the St. Louis Courthouse. In 1857, the U.S. Supreme Court decided against Scott and his wife Harriet, ruling that African-Americans were not citizens and had no right to sue in court. Dissent over the decision helped to speed the start of the Civil War four years later. 



The Brass Tap will be opening this summer for their 1st location in Missouri. The location at Olive Crossing will bring the concept into the state. The Brass Tap, a national craft beer bar chain has another four locations planned in the St. Louis area.



the upper level. The new location is at 9514 Olive in Olivette.

◆ Helena and John Valentine have mixed German brewing techniques with Alpine hospitality to create a community space in Olivette. **Great Heart – Beirhall and Brewery** which recently opened, offers classic European beers with an Alpine-inspired menu of soups, salads, and burgers, created by renowned chef Jim Fiala. Seating options include communal tables, booths for quieter gatherings, and a fireplace lounge on

◆◆◆◆
A 6th location of **Salt + Smoke** is opening early Fall in St. Louis. It will be located at 110 S Kirkwood Rd. The menu features slow-smoked BBQ, fresh and flavorful sides all homemade from scratch, and an extensive list of whiskey and beer. Restaurant owner Tom Schmidt offers nationwide shipping. Visit saltandsmokebbq.com for all information.



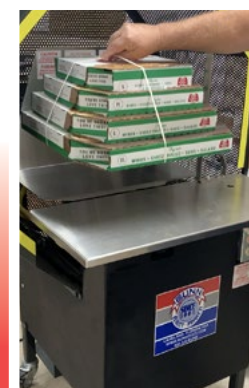
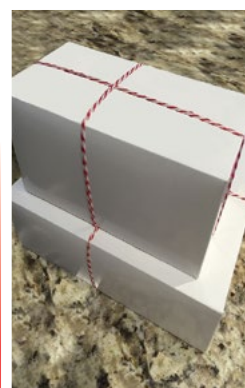
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◆ **Sonny's Pizza Den** has recently opened at 12527 Bennington Place in St. Louis. Visit Sonnypizzaden.com to learn more.

◆◆◆◆
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Wine of the times: AI now predicts your perfect pour

By Merilee Kern, MBA

Imagine having a seasoned sommelier at your fingertips—one who understands your personal taste, predicts your preferences, and guides you to the perfect bottle of wine every time. This is no longer a fantasy. BetterAI, the Silicon Valley disruptor in artificial intelligence, has launched VinoVoss, an AI-powered sommelier that is not just shaking up the wine industry, but redefining how we discover and enjoy wine.

VinoVoss—available as an [app](#) and on the [web](#)—represents a paradigm shift in wine selection, leveraging cutting-edge AI and natural language processing to deliver highly personalized wine recommendations. From novices to connoisseurs, users can now easily navigate the vast world of wine with a virtual sommelier that adapts to their unique tastes, delivering recommendations that feel tailor-made.

But VinoVoss isn't just about convenience—it's about enhancing the wine experience. The tool picks the perfect wine for any occasion courtesy of a highly advanced artificial intelligence architecture. It leverages advanced artificial intelligence to act as your personal sommelier, providing tailored wine recommendations based on your unique taste preferences, occasion, and budget.

VinoVoss understands that the process of selecting wine can be



Merilee Kern

Enhance your palate and knowledge with detailed tasting notes that elevate your wine appreciation.

overwhelming. The breadth of viniculture is challenging to navigate without a skilled guide, and the subjective nature of taste has long stumped traditional search engines. The VinoVoss platform provides a solution, combining the power of AI with the knowledge of sommeliers in a pocket-size package. The app's signature feature, Smart Somm, is an AI-powered chatbot trained by world-renowned sommeliers, ready to answer any wine-related questions and guide you to the perfect bottle. The interactive Smart Somm chat intelligently assists in wine exploration, answers questions, and provides educational insight. The database is continually updated and monitored by the VinoVoss team of wine experts and sommeliers to keep up-to-date with today's wine trends. From beginner to seasoned devotee, this search engine is a powerful and streamlined tool to help users build knowledge and shop, sip, and savor.

With an intuitive interface, VinoVoss allows users to search for wines by grape variety, region, or price, and offers detailed tasting notes to enhance your wine appreciation. On iOS, Android, and Desktop, users can browse wines using its advanced natural language search bar, which can understand prompts of any length or complexity. The app also includes innovative features like scanning multiple wine bottles simultaneously, comparing expert

and peer ratings, and creating a personalized wine collection. Here are ways VinoVoss differs from other wine apps:

Ask the AI-powered Smart Somm your questions Meet Smart Somm, your personal wine expert who lives in your pocket. VinoVoss' signature Smart Somm takes into account your unique taste, occasion, and budget to suggest the perfect wines, ensuring every choice is a refined selection. Unlike a search engine, Smart Somm can answer any question about wine (no keywords or specific searches needed) and have a conversation with you, just like the knowledgeable and friendly sommelier and your local wine shop or grocer.

Scan multiple bottles at the same time Our innovative scanning feature allows you to effortlessly scan multiple wine bottles simultaneously, unlike our competitors. Quickly access reviews, ratings, and pairing suggestions instantly, making your shopping experience both efficient and enjoyable.

Discover the aromas and flavors of each wine Delve into the intricate profiles of each wine, whether the wine has notes of clove, grapefruit, or even leather. Enhance your palate and knowledge with detailed tasting notes that elevate your wine appreciation.

Separate expert and peer ratings Discover sommeliers' more nuanced

See **WINE** page 12

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Ten Tables from page 7

with several hundreds of daily guests, Ten Tables Hospitality operates with the mindset of a select few—ensuring that each experience is tailored and each detail is carefully considered.

“We don’t want to run massive restaurants,” explains Monte. “We believe that true hospitality shines when you can personalize each experience. That’s why we focus on a small number of clients and concepts, and it’s why we aim to offer a high-touch, hands-on approach to everything we do. We want to make real human connections with people instead of just a transaction.”

“Ten Tables Hospitality is built on a foundation of passion, experience, and innovation.”

A Promising Future for Ten Tables Hospitality

As Ten Tables Hospitality prepares to launch its first restaurant concept in April, 2025, Monte and Mark are excited to share their vision with the world. The company’s

commitment to operational excellence, personalized service, and sustainable practices has already captured the attention of industry insiders and clients alike.

With big plans for the future, Ten Tables Hospitality is poised to become a major player in the hospitality industry, combining Monte’s extensive restaurant operations experience and commitment to hospitality with Mark’s culinary innovation. As the company grows, Monte and Mark will continue to prioritize quality over quantity, ensuring that every guest and client receives exceptional service and support.

“We’ve only just begun,” says Mark Bodenstein. “Ten Tables Hospitality is built on a foundation of passion, experience, and innovation. We can’t wait to show you what’s to come.” **TR**

About Ten Tables Hospitality: Ten Tables Hospitality is a premier restaurant management and consulting company based in Florida. Founded by Monte Silva and Mark Bodenstein, the company owns and operates restaurants while offering tailored management and consulting services to select clients. Ten Tables Hospitality is committed to delivering exceptional dining experiences through personalized service, operational excellence, and a focus on sustainability.

Media Contact:
Monte Silva Ten Tables Hospitality
Phone: 615.934.0261
Email: hashtagrestaurateur@gmail.com
Website: www.tentableshospitality.com
(under construction)

Ford’s Garage from page 1

happy hour, maximizing revenue opportunities and enhancing return on investment. The brand also prioritizes innovation, featuring limited-time offerings to keep the menu fresh and exciting, helping to create repeat visits from guests.

“Ford’s Garage has seen continuous success this past year and we are eager to continue expansion across North America...”

A dedicated leadership team, with extensive experience in both the franchise and restaurant industries, guides franchise partners through every step of their journey, from signing the agreement to launching successful openings. This hands-on support system ensures franchisees have the tools needed to thrive in their respective markets, and makes sure everything is firing on all cylinders.

“Ford’s Garage has seen continuous success this past year and we are eager to continue expansion across North America with a focus in the East of the Mississippi,” said David

Ragosa, VP of Franchising and Development. “With the addition of these six locations planned to open by the end of 2025, we will grow our reach to 36 locations throughout the U.S. As we continue to grow, we’re looking for franchisees who are dedicated to delivering exceptional guest experiences and eager to join the brand.”

As the full-service restaurant industry is projected to grow in the coming years, Ford’s Garage stands out by offering a unique dining experience that transports customers to a 1920s garage. The brand is strategically positioned for heightened expansion while ensuring franchisee success remains a top priority. Specifically, the brand wants to ensure quality is consistent across the board and that they’ll be able to scale responsibility to be able to offer their franchisees continued home office support. **TR**

About Ford’s Garage: Founded in 2012 and franchising since 2015, Ford’s Garage opened its first location in Fort Myers, Florida, less than a mile from Henry Ford’s winter home. Today, as the only official licensee of the Ford Motor Company, operators are able to use the company’s iconic logo and other brand imagery, to resonate with customers looking to have a true experience with their meal at the 1920s garage-themed burger and craft beer restaurant franchise. The brand has expanded to include a total of 30 locations across eight states, and is eager to find qualified franchisees to help bring the brand to more communities East of the Mississippi.

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Plant Ahead partners with DOT Foods

San Ramon, CA. – Plant Ahead USA, a leader in innovative, high-quality plant-based cheeses renowned for their exceptional taste and performance, has announced a strategic partnership with DOT Foods, North America's largest food industry redistributor. This partnership marks a significant milestone for Plant Ahead, as it unlocks nationwide foodservice distribution, bringing its premium dairy-free cheese products to a wider range of customers across the United States.

Through DOT Foods' unique re-distribution model, suppliers can ship in "less-than-truckload" quantities, ensuring weekly distribution to its expansive network of over 5,020 distributors. This streamlined process allows DOT to offer foodservice customers a 2-4 day turnaround on orders, with no minimum case requirements. As a result, Plant Ahead's products will become readily available to foodservice operators ranging from national restaurant chains to independent eateries, large event venues, healthcare institutions, and school districts.

"Partnering with DOT Foods is a game-changer for Plant Ahead," said Jeff Strah, Vice President of Sales &

Marketing. "Their nationwide distribution capabilities allow us to meet the growing demand for delicious, high-quality plant-based cheese options, ensuring our products are accessible to foodservice establishments of all sizes."



This partnership will empower foodservice operators to easily incorporate Plant Ahead's innovative cheese varieties into their menus, offering healthier, sustainable, and flavorful options for their customers. The product lineup includes high-performing mozzarella, cheddar/mozzarella blend shreds, and traditional feta in brine. Additionally Plant Ahead introduces fresh mozzarella in both pre-sliced and Ciliegine forms. **TR**

About Plant Ahead USA: Plant Ahead USA is a pioneer in innovative plant-based cheeses, committed to revolutionizing dairy alternatives with exceptional taste and performance. With an emphasis on sustainability and premium ingredients, the company offers a diverse portfolio including traditional feta, high-performing mozzarella, and creative blends designed for retail and foodservice customers. Driven by innovation and quality, the company is dedicated to delivering versatile, healthier cheese alternatives, setting new industry standards while championing environmental responsibility and culinary excellence. www.PlantAheadUSA.com

Appell from page 2

- ◆ Train staff to be friendly and attentive.
- ◆ Personalize customer experiences (e.g., remembering regulars' favorite orders).
- ◆ Handle complaints quickly and efficiently.

11. Implement email and SMS marketing

- ◆ Collect customer emails and phone numbers to send exclusive offers, menu updates, and event invitations.
- ◆ Personalize messages with birthday discounts or VIP offers.

12. Leverage video marketing

- ◆ Create short, engaging food videos for TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts.
- ◆ Go live on social media to showcase the kitchen, interviews with chefs, or special events.

13. Maintain consistency and monitor performance

- ◆ Track metrics (website traffic, social media engagement, foot traffic) to measure campaign effectiveness.
- ◆ Adjust strategies based on customer feedback and performance data.
- ◆ By combining these marketing strategies, your restaurant can build strong brand awareness and attract a steady flow of customers. Would you like help creating a specific marketing plan tailored to your restaurant's concept and location? **TR**

Wine from page 10

evaluations of each wine and compare that to other people's personal ratings. Make the best decision for you, your friends or family with this unique dual rating system.

Find the perfect match for your occasion. From housewarmings to brunch, VinoVoss helps you find the ideal wine to complement your menu. Use our advanced pairing options to ensure your selections are perfectly suited to the occasion, impressing your guests every time.

Curate your unique collection. Create and manage a personalized wine list with ease. VinoVoss lets you track your favorite wines, organize wish lists, and keep a record of your tasting history, ensuring you always have the perfect wine on hand. **TR**

About the author: Merilee Kern, MBA is an internationally-regarded brand strategist and analyst who reports on noteworthy industry change makers, movers, shakers and innovators across all B2B and B2C categories. This includes field experts and thought leaders, brands, products, services, destinations and events. Connect with her at www.TheLuxeList.com / Instagram www.Instagram.com/MerileeKern / Twitter www.Twitter.com/MerileeKern / Facebook www.Facebook.com/MerileeKernOfficial/ / LinkedIn www.Linkedin.com/in/MerileeKern.

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WGO from page 6

development agreements across the state, including Tampa, Sarasota-Bradenton, Fort Myers-Naples, Broward County, Fort Lauderdale, West Palm Beach, Orlando, Gainesville, Jacksonville, Ocala, and Panama City Beach. STA Management owns and operates several of these.



Honey Baked Ham is making a major move in the Houston Metro area as part of its plan to open 60 new locations across the country. Jerry DeFeo, VP of Franchise Operations recently announced this in a release. The expansion will introduce new franchised stores to add to the 12 corporate-owned locations currently operating in the city. The upcoming locations are expected to open as early as September 2025.



Ellianos Coffee has 85 locations in the Southeast either open or opening soon. The Coffee chain of specialty coffee brand, based in Florida, has opened its newest location in Palm Coast, Florida. The new coffee shop now serves the local community, offering its signature premium coffee and quick-service menu. **TR**



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Customer experience from page 1

adapt to a variety of situations and exceed expectations.

Unparalleled communication with customers is another crucial component in building a reputation for excellence. It starts with clear and enticing menus, available both in-house and online, which make it easy for guests to understand what is being offered, including detailed descriptions and allergen information. Communication should extend to social media platforms and review sites where restaurants can engage with customers, respond to their feedback, and create a sense of community. Online interactions are a key extension of the dining experience, and by being proactive and responsive, restaurants can convert one-time visitors into loyal patrons. Addressing negative reviews with empathy and offering constructive solutions shows a level of care that encourages trust and future visits.

A restaurant that excels understands the importance of measuring progress, using guest feedback to continuously improve. Implementing systems that collect customer feedback—whether through table-side comments, social media, or anonymous surveys—is essential. The data gathered should be used to identify trends, address specific issues, and set goals. When diners take the time to give feedback, acknowledging and acting upon it makes them feel heard, and it shows that the restaurant values their opinions.



Paul Segreto

The staff, as the front line of the experience, must be consistently motivated and informed. Regular meetings, open communication about restaurant performance, and celebrations of milestones help to keep the team aligned with the overarching goals of the establishment. Staff should be made to feel like they are part of the success of the restaurant, which means celebrating wins—like a glowing review or a particularly busy service where everything ran smoothly. Empowering staff to solve problems on the spot, giving them the freedom to make decisions that enhance the guest experience, and recognizing their efforts publicly contribute to a motivated and customer-focused team.

Training is an ongoing process and should be treated as such, with constant reinforcement of standards, refreshers on menu items, and role-playing different scenarios that might arise during service. Equipping staff with the tools and knowledge they need allows them to provide the best possible service to guests. Listening to staff is paramount.


Rewarding employees for their hard work not only ensures they stay motivated but also contributes to creating an environment where guests enjoy themselves. Recognition can take many forms—financial incentives, such as bonuses for great service or excellent sales, or non-monetary rewards like an “Employee of the Month” acknowledgment or a team outing. When employees know their contributions are valued, they are more likely to go above and beyond to create memorable experiences for guests.

Whether it’s a full-service restaurant, a fast-casual concept, or a QSR, the principles remain consistent—quality food, exceptional service, clear communication, and motivated staff working towards a common goal. Full-service restaurants might lean more heavily on personalization and interaction, while fast-casual and QSR settings may focus on speed and accuracy. However, in each model, guests expect value for their money and a positive, memorable experience.

Fast-casual and QSR environments can learn from full-service concepts by ensuring that, despite the need for

speed, service remains friendly, efficient, and attentive. This can be achieved by properly training cashiers and servers to make brief but meaningful interactions with customers, ensuring the dining space is clean and inviting, and making sure any issues are resolved quickly.

Creating a positively memorable experience in a restaurant setting is a continuous endeavor that involves focus on high-quality food, craveable dishes, exceptional service, and effective communication. It requires commitment from all team members, from management to front-line staff. Measuring progress, keeping the team informed, and ensuring they are motivated are crucial elements that make the difference between a good restaurant and a great one. The right approach will help create a restaurant where guests can rely on an excellent experience every time, ultimately leading to consistent positive reviews and a loyal customer base.

Make today a great day. Make it happen. Make it count! 

About the Author: With over 40 years of extensive experience in small business, restaurant, and franchise development, management, and marketing, Paul Segreto is a recognized authority in the entrepreneurial world. As an executive, consultant, coach, and entrepreneur, Paul has dedicated his career to empowering both current and aspiring business owners. His mission is to pave the way to success by connecting entrepreneurs with the right people, brands, and opportunities.

If you're a current or aspiring entrepreneur that needs assistance, guidance, or just someone to talk to, please send an email to Paul Segreto at paul@acceler8success.com.

Today's Restaurant

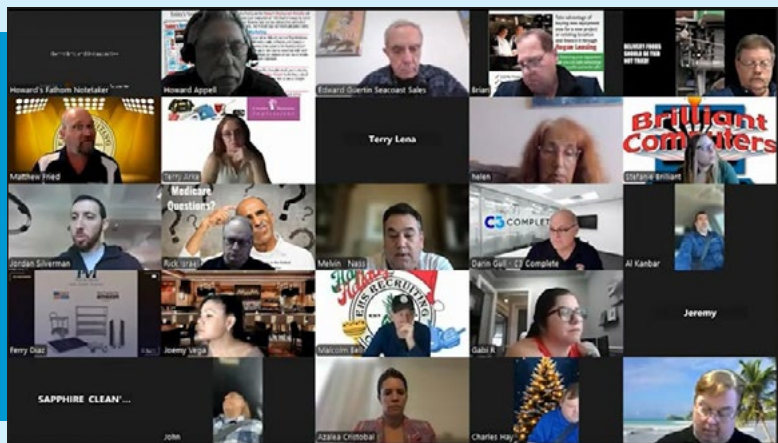
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