

JANUARY 2010

Restaurant Business

STREET SMARTS FOR THE ENTREPRENEUR

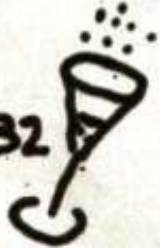
50 GREAT IDEAS



#40



#32



#2



The **new rules** of hiring

The pros and cons of
green certification



A piece of burlap fabric is draped over a white surface. A hand-drawn lightbulb with radiating lines is sketched on the fabric. A black marker with a white cap is positioned at the bottom left of the fabric.

50 GREAT IDEAS

BY PATRICIA COBE, DEBORAH
GROSSMAN, JOAN M. LANG,
MARISA MUSTO, TH STRENK AND
MARGARET SHAKESPEARE

IF NECESSITY IS THE MOTHER OF INVENTION, THEN COULD 2009 HAVE BEEN THE MOTHER of necessity? With the mountain of great ideas we dug through this year to come up with only 50 of the best, one could make the argument. Guess a down economy will do that. Whatever the case, the creative juices were flowing throughout the industry last year, and here are some of the results.



A penny saved

2

"We're a value brand—our customers are the type of people who would stop to pick up a penny on the street, and we wanted to honor that," says Tom Koenigberg, CMO of CiCi's Pizza. That was the reasoning behind the highly successful Penny Picker Upper promotion that the Coppell, Texas-based chain ran for six weeks last March.

CiCi's managers dropped one million specially stickered pennies around their 650 units nationwide—pennies that could be redeemed for everything from a free drink to a free meal. The added kicker: every penny redeemed would be donated at face value to Big Brother Big Sisters Club of America—a fact well-documented in advertising, POS and other communications.

Net-net, says Koenigsberg, the promotion generated significant sales bumps, as well as brand awareness and a \$26,000 check for Big Brothers Big Sisters. It also created one valuable realization for future promotions: "Managers really got into going out and depositing pennies, but that took them out of their stores too much."

1

Leftovers take the prize

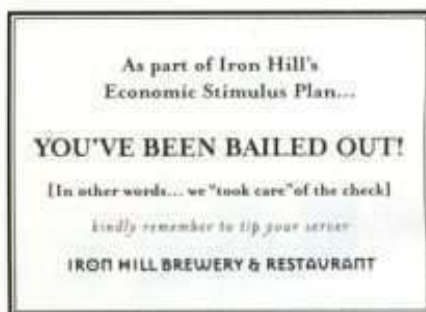
Jim Monroe had some leftovers lying around... so he created a prize-winning burger. "One night, I had a lot of shrimp and Cajun sausage I hadn't sold," says the owner of The Chopping Block in Eureka, Montana. "As a small business owner, I can't afford to just 'eat' those leftovers." In fact, Monroe was close to giving up on the restaurant and he did end up eating the sausage and shrimp because he was hungry—using them to garnish a mesquite-grilled burger. He topped it off with cheddar cheese and chipotle sauce. One thing led to another, and the newly christened "Eureka Burger," below, ended up in the Ultimate Hometown Grill Off, sponsored by "Live! with Regis and Kelly." Eventually, the Eureka was named #1 burger in America. The prize brought national exposure and kept the restaurant from closing.



3 Bail me out

The federal government's bank bail out inspired Iron Hill Brewery & Restaurants to offer a bail out of their own. "Around the time Congress was voting on TARP, our managers voted to give out one bail out card [in lieu of the check] each night in each of our seven restaurants," explains Kevin Finn, president of this brewpub concept with locations in Delaware and Pennsylvania. "There were no restrictions on check amount or party size. It was up to each shift manager, with input from the floor staff, to pick recipients. But I know that sometimes it did go to someone who had just lost a job," he says of the free meal ticket.

And that was the point. Finn can't attribute any particular uptick in business to the bail out plan, which took off quickly by word of mouth and stayed in effect for a few months. "But it helped with goodwill. We like to give back to the community—that's our culture. And we did get a lot of media attention."



Charity begins at the bar

Not only does Sbicca Bistro's Guest Bartender program boost business on usually slow Wednesday nights, "it's good karma," says restaurant manager Denise Beattie.

Since the Del Mar, California, restaurant opened, it has turned over its downstairs bar area and patio to local charitable groups two, three and sometimes four times a month. A member of the group plays mixologist behind the bar, shaking up drinks for their friends—aided, of course, by Sbicca's regular bartenders. Tips earned by the guest bartenders are donated to the charity.

The groups themselves promote attendance, often introducing new customers to Sbicca Bistro. Then there's all that good karma. "Hosting the charity events creates a better relationship with the community, too," notes Beattie.

4



6 The buzz from above

Last May, over 100,000 Italian honeybees were brought to live on the rooftop of The Fairmont Washington, D.C. The bees have moved in as a response to the nation's honeybee shortage and as part of the hotel's environmental stewardship program.

The roof has three hives that contain one queen bee and about 33,000 worker bees each, and are expected to accumulate over 300 pounds of honey within the first year.

Executive sous chef Ian Bens and executive pastry chef Aron Weber share the responsibility of Bee Keeper and use the harvested honey in a variety of culinary creations at the hotel's restaurant, Juniper. "We began serving an Artisan Cheese Plate [right] with our own rooftop honey, honeycomb and homemade preserves in August," says Diana Bulger, spokesperson for the Fairmont Washington D.C. "Guests find it fascinating, appreciate the environmental initiative and love learning about the bees."



Bread rises to stardom

Josh Allen's Companion Bakery is recognized as a top local source for artisan breads in St. Louis. To help support his city's independent restaurants and bring bread to the forefront of the dining experience, Allen came up with CollaBreadTive—a collaboration between Companion and eight St. Louis chefs. Together, they created eight custom breads, which each restaurant spotlighted for six weeks in a special menu item.

Vito Racanelli, chef-owner of Onesto and one of the participants, chose Roasted Garlic Fougasse, a ladder bread, for his "Panzanella" Bread Salad. "I requested tomato season to feature my dish," he recalls. "This rustic, earthy bread works perfectly to absorb the juices of all the summer tomatoes I buy from the Farmers' Market." Racanelli toasts the bread, then tosses it with olive oil, balsamic, fresh basil and multi-colored tomatoes. Interested consumers can pick up both the recipe and bread at area grocery stores during each six-week promotion.

"This is a unique opportunity for local restaurants and shops to work together, rather than in competition," affirms Allen. "When we team up, we get much further [in our marketing] than on our own."

7 Wet dry bar

How do you make money on cocktails in a dry town? Chilmark Tavern, in a liquorless section of Martha's Vineyard, offered its guests house-made "elixirs" to mix with their BYO bottles. Created by chef Paul O'Connell, the four elixirs sell for \$5 each and include a Faux Mojito and the Bee's Knees—patrons just add their rum or vodka.

The program worked so well that next season, owners Paul and Louise Petersiel plan to expand to garnishes and glassware. Additionally, the restaurant will rent out 60 liquor lockers and wine fridges where regulars can stash their stuff. Chilmark will also charge a nominal fee for glassware and fixings and the wine corkage fee will be \$7; a cold pilsner glass, \$2. "There's no other place around here like it," observes Paul Petersiel. "Otherwise people have to drive to the other end of the island."



8 Drive me to the moon

Michael Tourville, managing partner of Four Moons Restaurant in Orangeburg, South Carolina, made an investment to literally drive business. He kicked the tires and bought a 10-passenger luxury van, custom outfitted down to a 20-inch flat-screen TV, and launched his Lunar Shuttle service. "We have no public transportation here, not even reliable taxis. Now we can bring in customers from Columbia or Charleston, both about 45 minutes away," he says. "And DUI penalties are tighter, so we're doing our part to save lives."

To get things rolling, Tourville approached local hotels, offering free transportation to the restaurant for their guests. For others, one-way rates are \$5 per person within a 10-mile radius; farther away, the fee is based on mileage. "The van has pretty much paid for itself in a year," he contends. "And there is no typical customer—ladies' night out, business groups, anniversaries...you name it."





9 Globetrotting fries

"We are about upscale global cuisine," says Francesco Roccato, director of culinary arts at the InterContinental Montelucia Resort & Spa in Scottsdale, Arizona. "But I wanted to present fun food at the pool."

For the poolside Kasbah Bar, he created a dozen variations on French fries, spiced up with an array of flavors and ideas from around the world "so it's not boring food." From Roccato's native northern Italy, Idaho potatoes get drizzled with white Alba truffle oil and flakes of Parmigiano Reggiano. From Spain, piquillo peppered fries are served with aioli. And, for dessert, unsalted fries get dipped into chocolate fondue. Most people share a trio for \$18.

"It's a fresh take away from burgers-and-fries, a topic of conversation for guests and definitely a marketing tool," Roccato adds.

12 Restaurant roommates

An ambitious chef might be willing to share a parking lot or a party wall with a neighborhood bar, but a kitchen? That's exactly what Matt Gordon of Urban Solace in San Diego does, with True North Tavern.

Flash back two years, when the owners of both establishments were buying and refurbishing contiguous properties. "They approached me and asked if I'd be interested in doing their food," says Gordon, "but by the time they got through the permit process, we'd become too popular to tie up our line with more production." So Gordon annexed some of True North's kitchen space where he prepares a simple menu of appetizers, salads and sandwiches. It's win-win: Urban Solace gets a weekly influx of cash from True North, and the bar gets a better caliber of food.

10 Teens brew up a business

Pam Chmiel operated Klatch, a popular coffee bar in downtown New York City, for six years until she was forced to close in 2009 after profits fell 25 percent. Instead of lamenting the loss, she turned her lessons learned into a hands-on Teen Entrepreneur Boot Camp last summer, charging \$650 for two weeks. During each session, 12 15- and 16-year olds plan and launch an espresso bar, doing everything from researching the competition and naming the concept, to creating a logo, designing the store layout, making equipment lists and developing a business plan. Chmiel brought in a business consultant, architect, accountant, marketing pro and other experts to lead each module. On the last two days, the coffee bar opened to the public in a donated storefront.

"As the mother of teens, I feel passionate about helping this age group develop an entrepreneurial mindset," explains Chmiel. "The campers became innovative thinkers, resourceful and proactive. Most of all, the store opening took them past the fear of entrepreneurship."



11 Using your noodle

Macbar, a tiny eatery in New York City's Soho neighborhood, offers a menu of 12 macaroni-and-cheese variations—and that's it. "We're basically a take-away place, so we needed packaging to keep the food warm and stable. Mac and cheese shouldn't slide around," says owner Mark Amadei. He also conceived Macbar as a brand and wanted his food containers to make a strong, extended brand statement.

It took a year for designer Ran Lerner to develop the perfect packaging—a taxicab yellow, pasta-shaped, heat-resistant plastic container that is reusable and recognizable. "We were dealing with people in China and the U.S., plus many types of molds and materials," says Amadei. "And I wanted to keep the price under a dollar." Mission accomplished!





13 Wipe your smile clean



Red wine lovers often pay for a night of imbibing with a nasty telltale mark—purple teeth. Now they can save themselves the embarrassment of a “dirty mouth” with Borracha Wine Wipes. These oral stain removal pads are designed to get rid of the unavoidable red film referred to by some as “tannin teeth.” Just a quick swipe over teeth, tongue and mouth and Wine Wipes’ blend of baking soda, salt, hydrogen peroxide, calcium, glycerin and orange blossom gets to work without deadening the palate.

Wine Wipes come in packs of 20 in a handy compact, complete with mirror. With style and functionality, the product is quickly catching on. “Once word began spreading, we couldn’t keep them in stock,” says distributor Pogos Wine and Spirits in Dallas.



14 Let there be lighted menus

The dim lighting at two Miami restaurants—Wish in The Hotel of South Beach and Blade, the sushi bar in the newly renovated Miami Beach Fontainebleau Hotel—creates a desirable late-night lounge atmosphere but also a practical problem: how to read the menu. “Everybody does penlights,” says Blade’s chef Sean O’Connell. “And a waiter holding a flashlight makes you uncomfortable.” So both Blade and Wish turned to a more modern solution—an LED-display design. “We found Asap, a company that makes daily specials lists with LED,” explains O’Connell. Our menu is printed on translucent paper and placed on top of the display. An inside trigger turns the lights on when the menu is opened.”

Let’s make a deal

When chef David Burke found himself with a surplus of high-end wines in his cellar, he decided to auction the bottles off to his customers. His goal was to move such prizes as a 1999 Dom Pérignon and a 1998 Petrus rather than have them languish in inventory.

Diners get to bid on these prestige wines at both Fishtail and David Burke Townhouse restaurants in New York City.

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Once seated, guests receive a card listing the day’s wine auction selections with a minimum price for each. Then follows a tableside bid and counter-bid between customer and sommelier until a price is negotiated. “People are walking away with some really great deals,” says Fishtail wine director Branden McRill.

WINE AUCTION		
SPARKLING	BID 1	BID 2
CHAMPAGNE MOET & CHANDON Blanc Réserve	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Blanc	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
CHAMPAGNE LAURENT PONSARD Grand Réserve	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Blanc	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
CHAMPAGNE JULIE SANDRE Cuvée	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Blanc	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
WITTE		
CHAMPAGNE SAFFORD 1991 Blanc Réserve	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Blanc	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
CHAMPAGNE MOET & CHANDON Blanc Réserve	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Blanc	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
CHAMPAGNE WINDMILL Blanc Réserve	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Blanc	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
CHAMPAGNE ALDO BIANCHI Blanc Réserve	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Blanc	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
CHAMPAGNE JULIE SANDRE Blanc Réserve	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Blanc	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

WINE TO BE OPENED BY THE BUYER
ALL WINE MUST BE OPENED BY THE BUYER
WINE MUST BE OPENED BY THE BUYER
WINE MUST BE OPENED BY THE BUYER

FISHTAIL
BY DAVID BURKE



16-18

Truckin'

In the last year, fleets of food trucks have hit the streets in cities across America, satisfying foodies' palates with the likes of Swedish meatballs, Asian dumplings and crème brulee. The three highlighted here not only offer topnotch food, they are capitalizing on the trend to drive up the value of their brand.



Burgers do wheelies

The "Nomad" is a new mobile kitchen launched by Burgerville—the first of the concept's restaurants on wheels. Traveling within Burgerville's current service area and extending south to Salem and North to the Seattle/Tacoma area, Nomad provides burgers, fries and seasonal shakes to communities not currently served by the regional chain's 39 locations.

"Nomad will replicate the same best practices as our restaurant operations," says CEO Jeff Harvey, "only now, they are on the road." Guests can track Nomad's locations on Twitter.



Taking the show on the road

Organizers of dineLA Restaurant Week teamed up with RoadStoves, the outfitter of the city's famous Kogi truck, and cruised around the streets of Los Angeles prior to the launch of last fall's restaurant week. Each day, the executive chef from a different restaurant manned the truck, offering complimentary tastes from his menu.

"People were really intrigued by the idea of fine dining chefs hitting the streets in a food truck," reports Carrie Kommers, director of dineLA. "What better way to make sure that locals know the program is happening in their own neighborhoods?"

The truck stops here

The Washington, D.C.-based Sweetgreen put its concept on wheels last June with the launch of Sweetflow Mobile. The truck dispenses the same farmer's market-inspired salads, fresh wraps, tart frozen yogurt and green mindset that created a cult following in its three stores. But Tim Noonan and his drivers are looking to do more than feed their fans as they park the truck at lunchtime. "We're scouting locations for future stores, testing the waters in neighborhoods where we can capture a big lunch crowd," he says. "It helps us look for vacant properties and eventually land a permanent space." In the first half of 2010, Sweetgreen plans to open stores in spots initially "discovered" by its truck.

19

All aboard

In an era of tweets and text messages, it's refreshing to find restaurant information transmitted via a real train board—complete with the accompanying clicking noise as the data rolls over. At Michael Mina's new RN74, his upscale, San Francisco brasserie, the train board is linked by the POS system to the last bottle in a select group of wines chosen by Wine Director Raj Parr and his staff.

The Italian-made board has quickly become Parr's iconic invitation for guests to journey through his rare collection of wines, priced from \$30 to \$600. "It's amazing to see people eagerly order wine just to watch the board change. Sometimes two tables see the new 'last' bottle and vie for it, urging their servers to quickly enter their order," says Parr.



Lunchboxes for grownups



20 Rather than a thermos emblazoned with characters from a favorite TV show and a PB & J, the old-school metal lunch boxes at The Walnut Room lounge in Philadelphia are packed with the fixings of a fun, unconventional approach to bottle service. Unhinge the cover for "lunch box bottle service"—ten .5ml mini liquor bottles along with extra shots and mixers, candy and throwback toys such as slap bracelets and magic eight balls. It even comes with a "note from Mom," offering comical advice like "Not every boy is Prince Charming, dear. That's what God made Jose Cuervo for."

This witty approach helps reach demographics that wouldn't typically opt for a bottle over an individual drink, explains GM Leah Matoney. "We wanted to offer bottle service/VIP options that are a bit more accessible and not so serious," she adds. The menu offers six different varieties to choose from, ranging in price from \$85-\$115.



21 Hot beans

If the sight of cacao beans being roasted and ground into chocolate in Xoco's front window in Chicago doesn't entice passersby, the sweet aroma of scratch-

made hot cocoa certainly will. "Bean-to-cup chocolate contributes to the unique experience," says Xoco chef Shaw Lash.

Xoco, slang for "little sister," was inspired by the chocolate y churros served at El Moro in Mexico City's historic district, according to Lash. "We took that experience and put our own spin on it." The cacao beans are sourced from Tabasco state in Mexico and retain highly acidic cherry and berry notes," says Lash, "almost like wine." Per order, chocolate is frothed with a steamer and poured tableside by Xoco's baristas.

Customer response has been incredibly positive, notes Lash. "It's the most unique hot chocolate experience available, period."

22 Drinks a'blooming

A manmade iron tree blossoming with an assortment of flavorful cocktails can be delivered to the table for thirsty patrons at all Sushi Samba locations. Priced at \$70, it provides 12 flights of up to three different drinks from the restaurant's signature cocktail menu. Company spokesperson Joanna Cisowska explains that customers are "immediately inclined" to order the festive cocktail sculpture when they see it. And the tree is not just a great seller by itself, it has also helped introduce customers to new drinks that they tend to order at their next visit.

Offering the example of the chu-cumber cocktail made with cucumber and Shochu, Cisowska says "many people are at first intimidated by that cocktail...however, once they try it, they realize it is very refreshing, smooth and light."



23 Take a blackberry break

After putting in a hard day's work, busy digital bees and their BlackBerries need time apart to slow down and recharge—literally. Which is why last January, The Ritz-Carlton Chicago introduced "The Blackberry Break," allowing meeting attendees to do just that.

"It's important to refuel our bodies as well as our tech toys," says the hotel's director of food & beverage Mohamed El Banna. For \$22 per person, BlackBerry devices get checked at the door and are powered up on the hotel's charger while patrons do the equivalent, with a stimulating blackberry-themed menu that includes blackberry lemon smoothies and blackberry filled donuts.



24

Light a torch to it

When Jeff Wind used a mini-blowtorch to caramelize sauce on an order of sushi, he had no idea that he was creating a new menu signature. "It was an accident, really," says the executive chef at The Colony Restaurant at Hyatt Regency Waikiki. "The fish got a little

cooked on the surface and I thought, "hmm... what does this taste like?" Torched Hamachi (yellowtail) with garlic miso glaze went on the menu and was so well received Wind created Miso Glazed Maguro (tuna) and Cream Cheese Flamed Smoked Salmon for a complete Torched Sushi menu section.

With their mayo-based sauces, the technique "gives the sushi a smoky flavor that is really unique and has helped create a memorable specialty," adds Vince Brunetti, food and beverage director at the hotel. "I could bang my head against the wall for a month trying to create a signature menu item," notes Wind, "but this one happened on its own."

25 Scrambling up a deal



To drum up its weekend breakfast business, Pacci Ristorante in Atlanta's Hotel Palomar introduced the Scramble Gamble. Under the direction of executive chef Keira Moritz, the kitchen baked sunnyside-up cookies (above) and delivered them to area residents and businesses. Patrons who came in ordered off a special menu, featuring items like Ricotta Pancakes (\$9) and Mushroom Frittata (\$11). When it came time to pay the check, the "gamble" came into play.

"The server flipped a coin and the customer called 'heads or tails.' If the table won the coin toss, the breakfast was on the house," Moritz explains. "We had lots of fun with the promotion and it built local buzz."



26

Opening remarks

Everyone would agree that starting a restaurant is a big challenge, but a new microsite, *Making Your Restaurant*, is easing the way. Aspiring operators can become "Arcoroc Originals" by submitting their restaurant plans; winners—those with the most interesting plans—get professional guidance from sponsoring tabletop company, Arcoroc, and earn up to \$15,000 worth of tableware. The four winners will share their experiences via various social media tools on MakingYourRestaurant.com. In addition, the site features experts who blog about all aspects of the foodservice business.

Restaurateurs Ben Daitz and Saul Bolton (pictured), who recently opened The Vanderbilt in Brooklyn, New York, were the first winners. "Making Your Restaurant is an excellent opportunity for us to share our experiences with others who aspire to create their own projects," says Daitz. "Hopefully, they will be able to learn from both our nightmare and success stories."



27 Alcohol on a stick

What do you get when you freeze a fruity shot and serve it on a stick? A Popsicle cocktail! The spiked version of the cool snack debuted at Counter Vegetarian Bistro and Organic Bar in New York City this past summer. The frozen pops that transform a kid's treat into a not-so-innocent adult rendition are the creation of Counter owner Deborah Gavito who says that customers love them. "They make people smile and very, very cheerful. It's the same kind of reaction that my 8-year-old daughter has when she receives a lollipop."

The popsicles are served as a trio and come in a selection of fruit flavors created by pastry chef Elena Balletta; favorites include strawberry-mint daiquiri with Cuca Fresca Cachaca, raspberry Prosecco and peach-saffron with Tierra tequila (right).



28 10 thousand reasons to train

Chipotle Mexican Grill can already boast that 80 percent of its management positions are filled internally, according to spokesman Chris Arnold. But to make sure managers are staying focused on nurturing talent, the Denver-based chain decided to sweeten the pot—substantially.

Every time a manager successfully promotes one of his or her employees into a management position, the promoting manager gets a cool \$10,000. As Arnold says, it's a win-win. The manager focuses more on making sure new hires are competent, but the program also keeps costs down.

"Not only does this give Chipotle a solid pipeline of talent as we expand our locations, we believe it's a less expensive way to recruit and train managers," says Arnold, referring to overall costs incurred with headhunters and training programs.



facebook

Rubio's is on Facebook

Sign up for Facebook to connect with Rubio's.

Rubio's

WE WANT YOU

Share an ALL-AMERICAN MOMENT and help end childhood hunger!

Upload your photo and you'll donate 25¢ to Share Our Strength, and we'll send a FREE TACO to you.

Get a BIG GROUP TO FEED!

29 Share a photo for Share Our Strength

These days, uploading photos to Facebook and Twitter is as easy as pie—or an All-American taco. Rubio's Fresh Mexican Grill asked patrons to upload their photo to the chain's Facebook page. In return, Rubio's donated 25 cents to Share Our Strength—a nonprofit that fights childhood hunger—and the guest received a coupon for Rubio's All-American taco.

The promotion was wildly successful, says Larry Rusinko, SVP of marketing for the Carlsbad, California-based concept. "We donated \$25,000 while our guests enjoyed connecting with Rubio's. Average traffic on the Web site increased by 30 percent and we doubled our Facebook and Twitter followers."

30 I'll have what you're having

Most restaurateurs would agree that staff meals not only provide employees with dinner—they're a good way to build camaraderie and morale. But there's another fringe benefit when you have a kitchen full of different nationalities—exposure to some terrific ethnic home cooking.

At Petite Maison in Scottsdale, Arizona, chef James Porter, right, felt it was a shame not to share some of the amazing staff meals created by his line cooks and sous chef. So Thursday through Saturday, he features a late night menu called "Staff Meal." "It's an ode to the exceptional talent of my kitchen—guys and gals who cook from their hearts—and gives guests a chance to sample new dishes," he says.

Staff Meal goes for \$10 from 10 p.m. to midnight and potential diners don't know what they'll be eating until it's posted on Twitter that day. Recent plates include Roasted Bone Marrow with Fennel Salad and BBQ Frog's Legs. "The idea has really taken off; both regulars and industry people are packing the place," Porter adds.



31

Stolen endings



Want to offer up some profitable nostalgia with your dessert? Eastern Standard in Boston rebranded its cookie offering as the "Copyright Infringement Plate" and cranked up dessert sales by 20 percent when it appears on the menu. This cookie plate, says owner Garrett Harker, steals from the childhood cookie box and upgrades it big time.

"Our 'Thin Mints' are robed in Valrhona chocolate, our 'Fig Newtons' are filled with homemade fig puree, and our 'Nutter Butters' are made with our own peanut butter," he explains. And another thing—if you want to increase sales, listen to your servers. Harker's young, foodie-centric waitstaff with "hip attitudes" named the dessert and pushed to see it on the menu more frequently.

32 My personal cocktail

Osteria Marco in Denver, Colorado, prides itself on a bar menu that reflects its culinary philosophy. "We had planned to pair cocktails with food," explains chef-owner Frank Bonanno, "but what's really taken off is the notion that a patron can approach any bartender and say 'make me a cocktail.' After questions such as 'sweet or savory?' or 'up or tall?' the tender makes a drink crafted to the guest's palate."



Bonano reports that the \$9 to \$12 cocktails have increased customer loyalty and check averages. "Lots of folks who would be purchasing wine with dinner no matter what are now beginning with these unique drinks."

33 The hearth of the class

Kendall College in Chicago, has a hot new piece of equipment: an outdoor wood-fired bread oven installed in the courtyard. "It's been a terrific teaching tool," says Melina Kelson, a master baker/instructor and the driving force behind the project; she helped build it along with students.

Since the dawn of baking leavened bread, a centralized oven was often constructed to serve nearby villagers. "We're bringing the ancient methods back, but we're also preparing our students for their careers, as more people become interested in this style of cooking," adds Kelson. The oven is not only used to teach bread baking—Kelson has students cook half a batch of

dough indoors and half outdoors, for example, so they see the difference in crumb, crust, texture and flavor—other instructors use it as it cools, for everything from roasting meats and baking pastries to drying herbs.

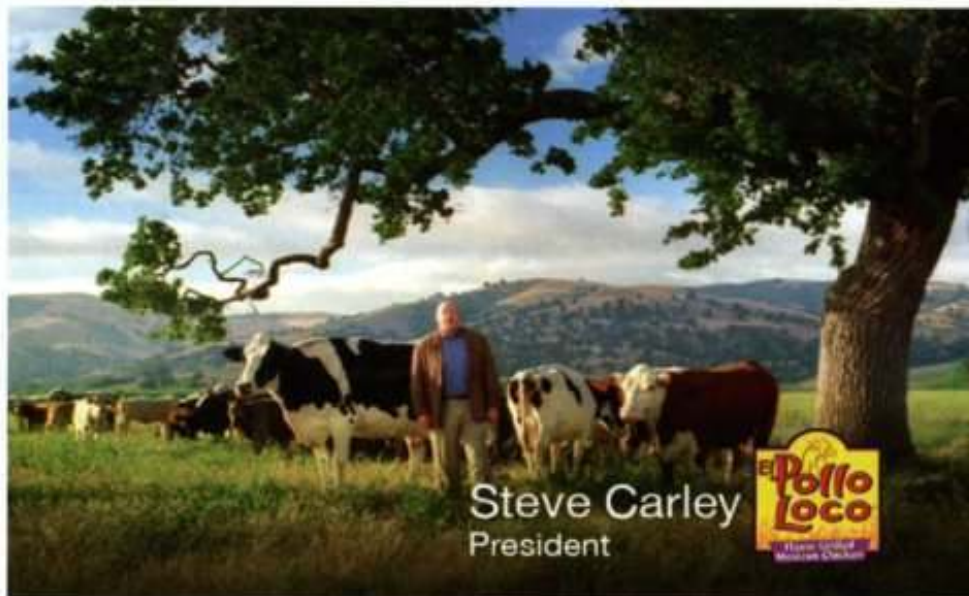


The screenshot shows a Twitter post from user 'rick_bayless' dated November 25, 2009. The tweet includes a photo of a large, multi-topped pizza. The caption reads: "Hideaway Pizza's Tweetza (winner of Twitter contest for diners' fav combos) at my fav PKC pizza joint". The tweet has 377 views and a 'Login to leave a comment' button. Below the tweet, there are smaller photos and a 'More photos by rick_bayless' link.

34 Pizza + Twitter = Tweetza

An annual tradition at Hideaway Pizza is the employees' pizza design contest in which the winning pie has the potential to become a permanent menu item. For a change of pace, co-owner Brett Murphy took the contest to Twitter, inviting followers of the 10-unit Tulsa, Oklahoma-based pizzeria to submit ideas. Virtual pizza makers had to build their creations from Hideaway's current ingredient list and enter on its Web site.

"We received 400 submissions," notes Murphy. After taste-testing eight entries, "the Hideaway Sub-Committee on Pizza Taste Perfection" (aka management) picked the winner: A pie topped with pesto, garlic, mozzarella, Parmesan, sundried tomatoes and artichokes and finished off with fresh basil and feta cheese. It went on Hideaway's specialty menu insert under the name "Tweetza" and made it to the top 10 in sales, earning the pizza a spot on the regular menu.



35 Taking on the big guys for fun and profit

David and Goliath stories are pretty common in this industry. But what makes this one so great—and such a great idea—is that David decided to have a lot of fun with it, all at Goliath's expense.

The bantam in this case—weighing in at just over 400 restaurants—is El Pollo Loco, which took on the heavyweight KFC—with over 5,000 U.S. stores—and its new grilled chicken.

Aware that KFC had been testing a grilled product for several years, El Pollo Loco had studied the competition and was prepared to face the threat. "It was a direct and uncompromising shot over our bow of what we've been doing for 30 years," recalls CEO Steve Carley, referring to Pollo's signature fresh citrus-marinated, flame-grilled chicken. "KFC was using what I would call 'weasel language copy' to give consumers the impression that this was a grilled product—which it wasn't." In fact, KFC's chicken is baked.

When KFC launched its grilled chicken last April, Pollo triggered a multi-pronged strategy that included pre-launch "hot deals" to build market share, prime-time commercials featuring Carley as a spokesperson, an array of social media activity and a Taste the Fire Challenge with a toll-free number for customer responses. "Then came a number of serendipitous gifts from KFC, which we turned back on them to great effect," relates Carley. The first was a bunch of taste-test challenge calls traced back to KFC headquarters, presumably from KFC execs; recordings of which Pollo turned into snide YouTube videos.

Then when KFC was unprepared to meet demand from Oprah's national coupon giveaway for a free KFC grilled chicken meal, Pollo offered to accept its rival's coupons. Pollo also publicly pointed out that KFC's coupons weren't redeemable on Mother's Day, asking with humorous provocation what the chicken giant had against mothers.

On the free grilled chicken giveaway front, the bantam also upstaged the heavyweight by giving away two pieces of flame-grilled chicken, tortillas and salsa—vs. KFC's single drumstick.

Pollo further fanned the flames with news, contests, trivia and coupons via a Web-based interactive news release, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and blogs. One blogger fan brought to the company's attention that KFC's marinade ingredients included beef powder and rendered beef fat. Pollo responded with a quickie "beef in chicken" TV spot shot in a cow pasture.

"These weren't lucky breaks so much as we were paying attention," notes Carley. "They dropped the ball so we picked it up and ran with it."

Pollo's 12-week campaign garnered the chain a record high market share. "We did a good job defending our turf. We delivered our message in a self-deprecating, tongue-in-cheek manner that resonated with consumers." But, says the CEO philosophically, "it was a one-time deal to counter their launch. Now we're back to focusing on our core brand equities."

36 Multi-tasking pizza box

About 2.37 million pizza boxes are manufactured annually and each uses 16.5 square feet of paper. Enter the Green Box, brainchild of William Walsh and his team at e.c.o. Incorporated. Not only is it made of recycled material, the top breaks down into serving plates; the bottom converts to a storage container.

Walsh, who has a mechanical engineering background, came up with the idea in college. "I thought everyone tore up the top of a pizza box into plates," he says. It took him 10 years to refine and patent the packaging, but now the Green Box is being reviewed by Papa John's, Little Caesar's, Pizza Hut and Domino's. Next on the drawing board: eco-boxes for donuts, burgers and sandwiches.



A bloody good birthday

The legendary Bloody Mary was introduced at the King Cole Bar in the St. Regis New York 75 years ago. Last October 5th, each St. Regis location celebrated by serving its signature version. New York offered up the original Red Snapper made with tomato juice, vodka, salt, pepper, Worcestershire and lemon.

38



At the new St. Regis Atlanta, director of food and beverage Megan Gray gave the cocktail a Southern spin. "Pickling has always been big in the South, so I added pickled okra juice. To garnish, I selected tomlives—tiny pickled green tomatoes that are a regional favorite."

On the drink's actual birthday, the West Paces Mary, as it is called in Atlanta, went for 99 cents, but the usual price is \$12.



37 Save, SOW and savor

Native Seeds/SEARCH collects, preserves and plants ancient seeds indigenous to the Southwest—a mission dear to restaurateur Janos Wilder, left. "Many of these crops were becoming extinct," says this chef-owner of Janos & J Bar in Tucson, Arizona. "Now there are over 1,600 unique seeds in the seed bank, some of which date back 4,000 years."

Throughout the year, Wilder incorporates heirloom beans, herbs, dozens of varieties of corn and chilies and other native fruits and vegetables into his farm-to-fork menu. This autumn, he pulled out all stops with a Native Seeds/SEARCH Benefit Harvest Dinner. The multi-course menu featured such items as Canela (cinnamon) Roasted Big Cheese Squash with Ajo Rojo, Mrs. Burns Lemon Basil, Candied Cranberries and Spicy Prickly Pear Syrup and a Succotash of Tepary Beans, Corn and Green Beans paired with a Salad of Briggs and Eggers Apples, all accompanied by Arizona wines. Guests paid \$150 each, \$75 of which was tax deductible.

39

Polished bar service

Would you like a manicure with that martini? This \$17 beauty-and-booze deal happens every Monday night from 5:30 to 8 at the Living Room in the W Hotel in Minneapolis. While patrons sip in the lounge, manicurists from nearby Denny Kemp Salon clip and polish. Men can opt for a massage with their martini.

"Monday night traffic is typically slow, and with fewer people traveling now, we took it upon ourselves to create an event," says Kip Clayton, VP of business development and marketing for parent company Parasole Restaurant Group. "It's an experience that goes beyond the usual happy hour. Women come in with their friends to socialize and the energy level attracts more men."

Since Martini & Mani Mondays started last June, the quietest night of the week became one of the liveliest. "We intended to do the promotion for just one month, but it took on a life of its own," notes Clayton.

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Build up your complexion and collagen and take up for a massage and manicure in the Living Room every Monday night from 5-8 PM at the W Hotel.

Get something that gets you a martini from the bar and a manicure or massage from Denny Kemp Salon and Spa. It's fun, it's fancy. And it's a great way to get your nails on and hangouts off.

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BEING YOURSELF BEAUTIFUL
GROOM YOURSELF 5-8 PM

40 Smile and say "local"

When Jerry Pellegrino, chef-owner of Corks, renovated and repositioned to better serve his Baltimore neighborhood, he chose cheese as a menu focus. "It goes with wine—we were already known for our list—and it's comfortable for most people." The cheese table sits smack in the middle of the restaurant, "where you bump into it" and features local artisanal products such as Camembert-style goat cheese from Firefly Farms (Maryland) and Meadow Creek Dairy (Virginia) cow's milk cheeses.

"Unlike wine, it used to be impossible to do all-American cheese. But now artisans are popping up all over, although it can create problems when the small producers run out," says Pellegrino, who likes making the house fondue with Firefly's soft goat cheese. "Many customers order cheese for a first course—and [at \$12 for three cheeses, \$19 for five] it's actually the most expensive appetizer on the menu."



41-44

App attack!

Phones are getting smarter; so are marketing strategies. Mobile phone apps are a relatively low-cost, low-risk way of reaching potential customers. Among the top genres, 15.8 percent of apps are used to access restaurant, food and wine information, according to market researcher comScore Inc. Here are a few stand-outs.



Touch to taste

New Yorkers craving anything from Kobe beef to lychee martinis to sepia can find it with a touch of the Tastrix, the Taste Menu Search from TasteSpace.com. "Whether they're in desperate need of the most convenient place for chicken parmigiana or in more patient pursuit of gourmet rarities, the free text search feature makes this possible," says founder Ajay Rajani.

This taste-profile search engine accesses a database of almost 8,000 New York City restaurants and bars, with profiles featuring menus, photos, highlights, user reviews and events. And the hungry can order food or make reservations directly from many of the venues.

Find a farmer

Chefs looking for the freshest local products will find the Locavore app from Enjoymentland invaluable. Chef Michael Scelfo of Temple Bar in Cambridge, Massachusetts, for example, uses the app for a quick market refresher on what ingredients are in season near his restaurant.

Locavore automatically detects in which state you're located, maps nearby farmers and markets and gives details on the local bounty. Chefs can browse all 50 states and 234 produce categories, with links to Wikipedia, Epicurious and Facebook.



Drink smart

Need a smart sommelier on the move? You can get drink and food matches quickly with the Drinks Matcher app from Nat Decants. Wine and cheese pairings are a Drinks Matcher specialty, with over 292 wines and 219 cheeses to select from. But the comprehensive app can also pair beer, spirits, cocktails, liquor, coffee or tea with more than 380,000 appetizers, main courses, and desserts. There are matches for difficult-to-pair Asian and Indian cuisines as well as burgers and chocolate. New combos are added daily by award-winning author Natalie MacLean from her Web site, nataliemaclean.com/winepicks.



Dial with dolphins

Disney World-bound foodies can plan their vacation meals with a new restaurant app. Menus, descriptions and photos for all 17 restaurants and lounges at Disney's Swan and Dolphin Resort in Lake Buena Vista, Florida, can be accessed. Reservations are just a touch away at such restaurants as Todd English's bluezoo, Shula's Steak House and Il Mulino New York Trattoria.





45

Food follows fashion

Don Evans, managing director of Compass Restaurant in New York City, noticed the falling price of lobster and figured that could help his bottom line. Taking a page from the fashion world, Compass held a lobster "sample sale," promoting it as such to its trendy clientele.

"We agreed to buy a certain quantity from a Maine vendor, and he agreed to hold the price," says Evans. In turn, he passed along the savings, something the competition was not doing. A three-pound lobster arrived with three dipping sauces at table after table, for \$39. The theme continued with lobster-rabbit cavatelli, BLTs, and more.

"The sample sale promotion drove people into the restaurant," says Evans. "And 18 percent of our covers have been three-pounders."

47 Meat me at home

What makes Pera's Meats-to-Go program unique is that the items are prepared, flash-frozen and vacuum-packed in the kitchen of New York's Pera Mediterranean Brasserie. The restaurant dedicates one line to lunch and dinner orders; a second to preparing mail-order meats.

"We attract diners from all over, and while some would purchase their favorites and pack them for travel, others asked why we didn't ship." Now the Pera Online Store does—offering Chicken Shish, Lamb Ribs, Pera's signature Adana Kebabs and three more items for \$6.95 to \$13.95. Each package comes with tips from the culinary team for outdoor grilling and broiling.



46 Efiscent butchering

The term "whole animal cooking" usually refers to nose-to-tail prep of a pig or lamb, but for Chris Pandel, chef of The Bristol in Chicago, the concept also applies to fish. "We try

to get in whole fish whenever possible, and when we have one of the fattier, oiler species—like hamachi, tuna or salmon—we'll butcher it for multiple uses," he explains.

"We'll take off the filets for premium entrees, and leave a little meat on the spine, then cure the trim quickly with herbs, lemon zest and capers and serve it with a split grilled fish head. It's for those customers who really like to dig in for the most succulent meat." Other specialties have included grilled hamachi collar and even wood-grilled "fish ribs" from a larger skeleton.

"I can't afford to buy a whole blue fin tuna, but a four- or five-pound Kona Kampachi is a perfect example of a fish you can get several different dishes out of." Pandel's purveyor knows he'll try just about anything, including a 22-pound, six-foot-



long squid that was cut into big steaks to pan-fry and serve with sorrel aioli and chickpeas; the tentacles and other trim went in for a 90-minute braise. "You just have to be willing to work with it," claims Pandel.



Best bar none

48

Bartenders are busy enough without having to police seats for customers who have stepped away to smoke a cigarette or use the restroom. That's where the Seat Saver comes in—a hip, easy and multi-functional way to say, "this seat is taken."

The Seat Saver works like a standard coaster when placed under a drink; when a customer wants to hold their place, they simply slip the coaster's martini-olive-sized hole over the swizzle stick or the neck of a bottle to tell the bartender and other customers that they'll be back. Besides that message, the Seat Saver can be logoed with the restaurant, bar or brand name for an effective merchandiser.

"Top of the glass, top of mind," points out Eric Tecosky, who came up with the idea with partner Danny Lane while tending bar in Los Angeles. "Bartenders love it; customers love it," adds Lane. Pricing is competitive with standard coasters and can be ordered from TheSeatSaver.com.

49 Upgraded rations

The National World War II Museum in New Orleans drafted star chef and Desert Storm Marine veteran John Besh for its restaurant, The American Sector. "The concept had to be inclusive of multigenerational diners and fun, with gentle price points," says Besh. "I wanted to keep it real, with throwbacks to remind people of an era, not a Disney show."

Besides researching 1940s NOLA menus, he importantly consulted with his own four children. They voted for hot dogs—which

Besh "cheffed up" into made-from-scratch corndogs for kids' meals, served in vintage lunchboxes. Each includes a mini-paratrooper, and maybe Sector Jacks (Besh's version of Cracker Jacks) or Peppermint Patties.



Table talk is cheap

50 Psssst. Wanna save on a meal at O'Mally's? Take that bad table over there. "I had one table I could never move—small, cramped and up against the back wall," says Phil Mannino, owner of the 40-year-old American restaurant in Southold, New York. "So we put up a sign over it that says "Worst Table in the House" and offer a 10 percent discount. It cracks everybody up."

In fact, it's become an in-joke kind of thing; one man proposed to his girlfriend at that table—no doubt showing her what she could expect from their life together. "You do have to be careful to offer it to people who look like they have a sense of humor," quips Mannino. But the tactic also gets press coverage and raises O'Mally's profile in this seasonal seaside community. □



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