

MAGAZINE FOR CULINARY PROFESSIONALS

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# KitchenBiz

*New Opportunities and Solutions  
Addressing Challenges and Paving  
the Path to the Future*

*Want to Create a Greater Experience  
of Wellness? **You're Not Alone and  
You've Got Tools***

*How Can AI Take your Restaurant  
to the Next Level?*

*From the Server's Side:  
Inside the World of  
Fine Dining*

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# INDUSTRY INSIGHTS FOR 2026

NEW OPPORTUNITIES AND  
SOLUTIONS: PAVING THE PATH  
TO THE FUTURE

The restaurant of the future is ready to dive into new restaurant technologies, including AI in a variety of applications to streamline business flows, expand digital presence, increase customer engagement, create smart employee schedules and training programs, customize marketing and loyalty programs, and design top-performing menus. AI will also be more prominent in helping restaurants combat rising costs with inventory management, demand forecasting, and workflow optimization to improve efficiency and reduce waste.

Restaurant managers will continue to focus on new approaches to staff recruitment and on fostering a positive culture, with improved well-being and fewer stress- and burnout-related feelings, leading to long-term loyalty.

Culinary professionals will continue to be creative, resilient, and always ready to pivot to changing challenges and opportunities.

**79%**

of U.S. restaurants are currently implementing or considering AI, for a variety of applications.

**80%**

of restaurant transactions are digital, resulting in heightened cybersecurity priorities.

## The Growth of Food Delivery

Grand View Research projects that the global online food delivery market will continue expanding at a 10.3% compound annual growth rate (CAGR), reaching around \$505.50 billion by 2030.

Third Party Apps will continue to soar in the restaurant food delivery arena, favored for the convenience.

However, recent reports reveal that 58% of customers prefer ordering food delivery directly from restaurants' websites or apps. The shift is driven by lower costs, customization options, and the ability to access personalized loyalty programs.

Consumers who join loyalty programs are heavier restaurant users overall, making 22% more visits per year than nonmembers, according to Circa. AI-driven personalization is reshaping loyalty programs, with 7 in 10 operators citing them as key tools for customer retention.



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# QUICK TIPS FOR MANAGING COST INCREASES . . . .

- ✓ Take a look at technologies, apps, and smart equipment that can automate tasks, analyze data, reduce food costs, strengthen waste-reduction initiatives, support sustainability, and lower utility expenses.
- ✓ Empower your staff to be loyal and confident ambassadors of your restaurant. Provide training and open communication regarding schedules, initiatives, and available opportunities. Provide support and feedback during stressful shifts and create a culture of wellness and togetherness.
- ✓ Be transparent with price increases. Analyze your menu to identify high-cost, low-profit items and make adjustments. Adjust pricing based on demand and cost fluctuations. Create compelling value-added offerings, loyalty programs, and promotions to encourage repeat business.
- ✓ Continue to do what you do best and stay in front of your loyal and potential customers, personalize their experience, provide consistent quality, and create a memorable atmosphere. Engage and promote customer loyalty. Provide incentives, discounts, and special perks. Utilize a simple, easy-to-use digital loyalty app or program to track points and rewards. Increase community connection through events or causes important to you. Solicit customer feedback, use it to make improvements, and show your customers that their opinions are valued.



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# Want to Create a Greater Experience of Wellness? You're Not Alone and You've Got Tools

by Jason Wange, Foodservice Positivity Ambassador,  
Executive Director of Sales at Cal-Mil, and Founder of the  
Foodservice Powerplant Network

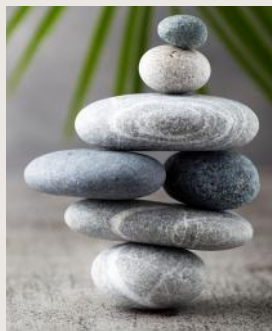
Not long ago, I was chatting with some friends about this nagging pain in my shoulder. One of them suggested I see his orthopedic doc. Fast forward a bit: I got an MRI, and now we're mapping out a plan to get me back to full strength. That whole exchange; sharing discomfort, swapping stories, offering advice felt so familiar. And it got me thinking: we've come a long way in being able to talk about our mental and emotional wellbeing with the same openness we bring to physical aches and pains. That's a win.

Let's be real: life comes in waves. Sometimes we're cruising... energy high, work humming, relationships flowing. And then... there are those other times. The "meh" moments. When we're dragging, procrastinating, feeling off kilter. Maybe our minds are racing, our bodies feel tense, or we're snapping at people we love. Sound familiar? Good. You're human. Welcome to the club.

The beauty of this moment is that we're finally giving ourselves permission to talk about it. Just like I opened up about my shoulder, we're learning to open up about the stuff inside. And when we do, we discover a whole world of tools to help us feel better, think clearer, and live fuller. Here are a few that have been game-changers for me lately:

## Mindfulness

Yes, it's a buzzword. But it's also powerful. I heard an NFL quarterback recently credit his success to staying present; and he's onto something. Studies show mindfulness can be just as effective as medication for anxiety. When we fully tune into the now, without judgment, we're no longer spiraling over last week's mess or stressing about tomorrow's meeting. We're just here. Like me, right now. I'm writing an article, sipping hot coffee in an airplane aisle seat, feeling grounded. That's the magic.



## Movement

Moving your body = moving your mood. When our Cal-Mil team gets together, we love a good walk. Sunshine, steps, and some of our best ideas. For each of us individually, whether it's a gym session, a jog, yoga, or a bike ride, movement gets those happy chemicals, i.e. endorphins, dopamine, serotonin, flowing. The science says yes, cultivate these rituals. Your body and mind say, "thank you".



## Your People

Wellness isn't a solo sport. For me, it's the weekly walks with neighborhood friends, the industry pals I catch up with at shows, and the pros I lean on... coaches, doctors and therapists when I need expert ears. These folks are my chorus of support, cheering me on, sharing their insights and helping me grow. Find your people. Lean in. Share the messy stuff. It's worth it.

## Simple Tools You Can Use Today

We've compiled a wide variety of resources to support your journey at the **Foodservice Powerplant Network website** ([www.fspowerplant.com](http://www.fspowerplant.com)).



Here are a few highlights...

- **Foodservice Powerplant Mise-en-Place:** A starter kit of simple, everyday practices to boost your inner wellness.
- **Podcast:** Over 115 Conversations with Industry Leaders who were willing to share their stories, so that we might incorporate their insights into our own journeys: Head to the Podcast tab at [fspowerplant.com](http://fspowerplant.com).
- **Professional Organizations:** We've got a listing of some incredible Coaches, Organizations and Mental Health Resources designed to support the hospitality professional: Check out the Resources tab at [fspowerplant.com](http://fspowerplant.com).





Here's the truth: we all have room to grow, heal, and thrive. And we're lucky to be part of an industry that doesn't just care about the products we serve—but the people who serve them. So let's keep showing up for each other. Keep talking. Keep walking. Keep growing.

## We're in this together.

### About the Author

Jason Wange is a foodservice professional on a mission to provide his fellow foodservice colleagues with the inspiration, tools, and belief in themselves to create lives they are excited about and proud of.

*Want to be inspired even more? Check out the videos below and prepare to be inspired.*

Watch Jason share his story and host authentic industry dialogue around wellbeing in hospitality.

**Tee Shirts, Tears and Barking Dogs: How Covid Opened the Door for More Authentic Mental Health Conversations.** Recorded at Zoomba Group's 2022 FED Global Thought Leadership Summit in Chicago.



Scan for video

**A Culture of Care: Meaningful Conversation with industry Health Wellness Experts,** moderated by Jason, recorded at the 2025 NAFEM Show.



Scan for video

Jason is the Executive Director of Sales at Cal-Mil Plastic Products, a speaker, and the founder of The Foodservice Powerplant Network, a community of professionals who are committed to positive growth in their lives and organizations.



# How can AI help you take your restaurant to the next level?

A HANDFUL OF EXAMPLES  
IN 3 AREAS OF YOUR  
BUSINESS

## Data Analytics and Intelligent Operations



AI can help with restaurant data analytics: the process of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data across various aspects of a restaurant's operations to gain insights, make data-driven decisions, and turn insights into actions that drive results.

An AI-powered point-of-sale (POS) system can track customer purchase history and preferences, enabling servers to suggest menu items tailored to the customer's tastes.

AI-powered kiosks, chatbots, and voice-activated systems can take orders, reducing wait times and improving accuracy. It can also handle a significant portion of phone reservations and inquiries, freeing up staff for tasks that require a personal touch.

By analyzing data, AI can help identify top-performing dishes, enabling competitive pricing based on demand and time of day.

AI can help manage inventory, preventing over-ordering of perishable items to minimize food waste while ensuring popular menu items are always in stock.

## Marketing and Customer Engagement



AI can be used to target promotions based on customer data and to identify customer groups for targeted email or app notifications, with personalized, real-time promotions and loyalty programs.

AI can be used for social media and website optimization, content creation, engagement trend analysis, and the creation of a posting schedule for maximum visibility.

AI can analyze customer feedback from online reviews and social media to provide actionable insights.

## Team Management



AI can forecast peak hours and busy days enabling managers to create optimal staff schedules, reduce labor costs, and maintain service quality.

AI assistants can be integrated into platforms to provide employees with immediate answers to questions about their schedules, the menu, or company policies, thereby improving communication.

Virtual reality and AI can be used to create realistic practice scenarios for staff, providing real-world training.





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# DON'T LEAVE TAX MONEY ON THE TABLE

## TALK TO YOUR TAX CONSULTANT ABOUT SECTION 179

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The maximum Section 179 expense deduction has been substantially increased and will be adjusted for inflation moving forward.

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# From the Server's Side: Inside the World of Fine Dining



For a server, starting a shift at a fine dining restaurant is like a Broadway show on opening night. When the curtain goes up, the entire cast is ready to perform with freshly polished glasses and all the necessary supplies to create the ultimate experience for their audience, the guests.

**Servers, as the brand ambassadors of your restaurant, tell the story, create the experience, and connect with your guests.**

Recruiting good servers is critical, so how do you attract them? And, when you find a good server, how do you keep them?

To get these answers, we interviewed a top server from a fine dining restaurant. We asked the following questions.

**What attracted you to this restaurant and influenced you to take the position?**

- The food quality and the attention to detail in the kitchen. It's important to me to feel good about the food I present to the customers.
- The ambiance of the restaurant is a blend of comfort and class, creating a feel-good vibe for the team and a landscape that fosters ultimate experiences for guests.
- At the interview, the owners expressed excitement for their restaurant and what I could bring to the table. I felt connected to and included in their visions and goals for the restaurant.
- When I notice that managers value communication and transparency, and are proud of and grateful for their team, I know I am in the right place.

*Working for a restaurant that you can be proud of to the point of being a brand ambassador is the first key step.*

*When the owners proudly share their goals and dreams for the restaurant, it's easy for the team to connect and visualize how they can bring the restaurant's vision to life in their personal role and as a team.*

**What are the key factors influencing your decision to stay long term?**

- Open communication with management, feedback that helps me improve service and promote the restaurant's vision, positive feedback that makes me feel good about what I'm bringing to my role, training updates on menu items and wines, schedule transparency, and inclusion.
- Health insurance benefits and sponsored team building activities outside of work.
- Uplifting team work where we all support each other and have each other's backs.
- Freedom to be creative, including the ability to offer something special to guests celebrating a special occasion.

*Good restaurant managers are very important to servers. Noticeable factors that keep employees loyal include fairness when scheduling higher profit nights, support and grace during stressful or busy shifts, and constructive feedback. A diverse team that works well together is also a key factor to increased happiness and reduced burn-out.*

*The role of a server is not as easy as it looks. You're on your feet for long hours, perfectly timing where you are for your customers at every moment while keeping up with several other tasks that come with the role.*

*Providing the same energy and attention to the last guest of the shift as you do to the first is a personal requirement, making it essential to monitor your well-being with a quick break or nourishment during long shifts.*

*Serving at a fine dining restaurant is fun as relationships are built with colleagues and guests. Bringing a special and personal touch to guests as they create memories, celebrate special occasions, or simply find joy in a fine dining experience is a rewarding highlight. All the action happens in one shift until the curtain goes down for the night.*

# How's your digital presence?

Are you getting results with your website and digital marketing?

*A successful website offers a seamless, one-stop experience that captures attention and keeps it with easy navigation and the following inclusions.*



1

Images that appeal to the senses. Include professional photos of your food, events, and your team. Help your customers visualize the experience.

2

Clear information about menu items, customization options, services, loyalty programs, and pricing.

3

Self-service features, including ordering and payments, within a seamless digital ordering system with automated order confirmations. Online ordering has the potential to streamline operations and significantly boost sales.

4

Include testimonials and reviews. Consider offering incentives for reviews from your customers.



## DON'T FORGET TO MAKE YOUR WEBSITE MOBILE FRIENDLY!

Statistics show that roughly **60% of internet traffic is mobile**, according to FoodStorm by Instacart and Statista.

Source: [Statista](#)

## Expand Your Digital Marketing

Stay on the minds of your loyal and potential customers and drive traffic to your website.

### MAXIMIZE YOUR SEO

Utilize SEO to improve your search result rankings. Share useful content with key phrases and words and attract local traffic to your site by using keywords specific to your region, and town.

### SOCIAL MEDIA

Be consistent with your presence on your channels. Include photos, videos, personal stories, and real-time promotions.

### ONLINE DIRECTORIES

Boost your digital marketing efforts by adding your restaurant business to relevant online directories.



### CREATIVE CONTENT

Share your culinary expertise with fun stories and ideas on your social channels.

Blogs and podcasts are great for igniting interest and a loyal following.

Connect and share all your digital assets for a higher search ranking.

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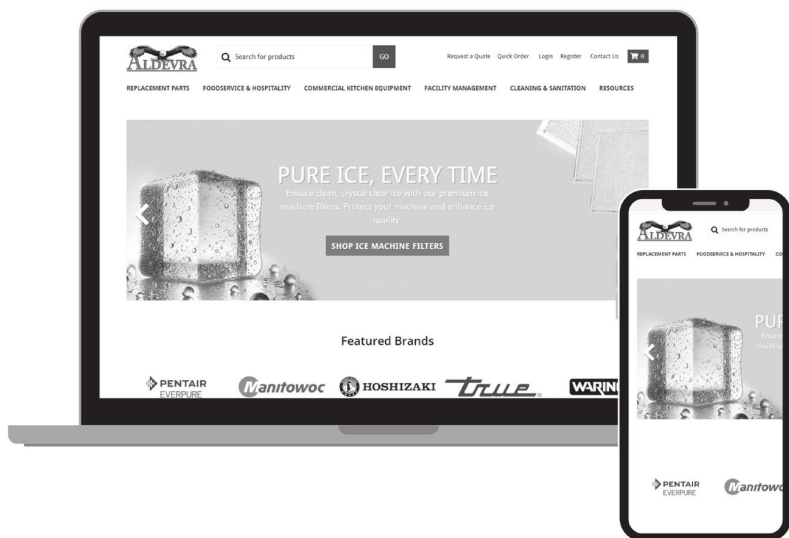
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