

FEC Trends: “Eatertainment”

Combining the “Daily Necessity” with Fun Proves to Be a Winner

Enticing customers into an entertainment-based establishment seems to be an ever-increasing challenge in our over-stimulated and incredibly busy world. For many, offering the regular slate of attractions just doesn’t cut it anymore, however, an IAAPA webinar hosted early this year discussed a growing source of new revenues for many FECs: food!

“We’re not biologically wired to bowl, play laser tag or play arcade games, but we are to eat,” said Randy White, founder and CEO of White Hutchinson Leisure and Learning Group. “Combining these things seems obvious to me. The basic formula is ‘come for the food and stay for the fun.’”

This is the simple idea behind the growing trend of eatertainment.

While it’s been around for some time, public interest in higher quality, healthier food offerings has burgeoned the business model into an accessible market for many. It’s a lot more than just adding food into a current model: Eatertainment focuses on emphasizing the quality and uniqueness of that food, and melding that into an entertainment-



Randy White



Kevin Williams



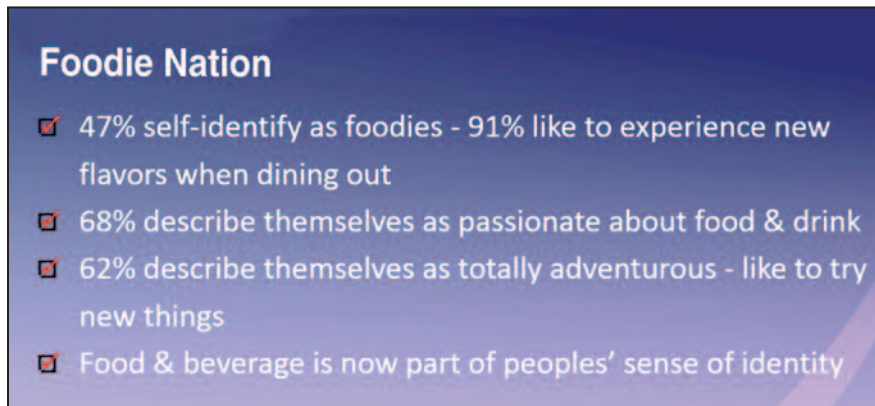
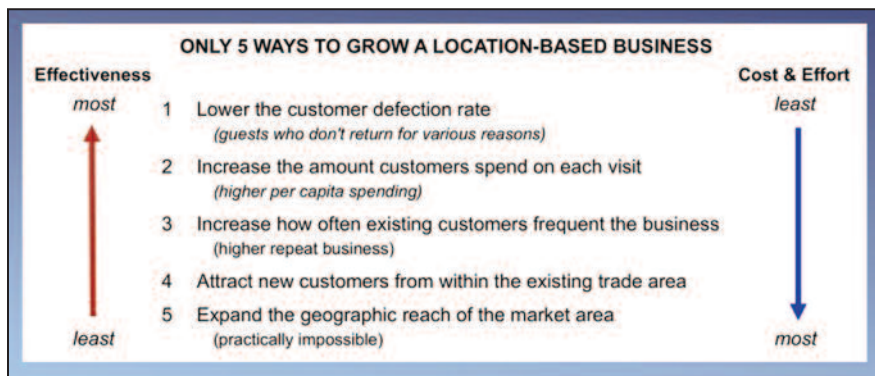
Mike Abecassis

the word “experience,” playing into the idea that the idea of eatertainment is more than just having concession stands in your business or offering heat-lamp-warmed pizza at your cash register. It’s much more than that, anchored by fact that we’re slowly morphing into a

“foodie nation.” In a survey conducted by the session’s organizers, 47 percent of Americans self-identify as foodies, 91 percent enjoy new flavors and experiences when dining out, and 68 percent self-identify as passionate about food. From glasses of wine and gourmet pretzels offered in movie theaters to bar-cades tapping micro-beers and grilling craft burgers, food and fun are undergoing a huge overhaul.

White, along with industry consultant Kevin

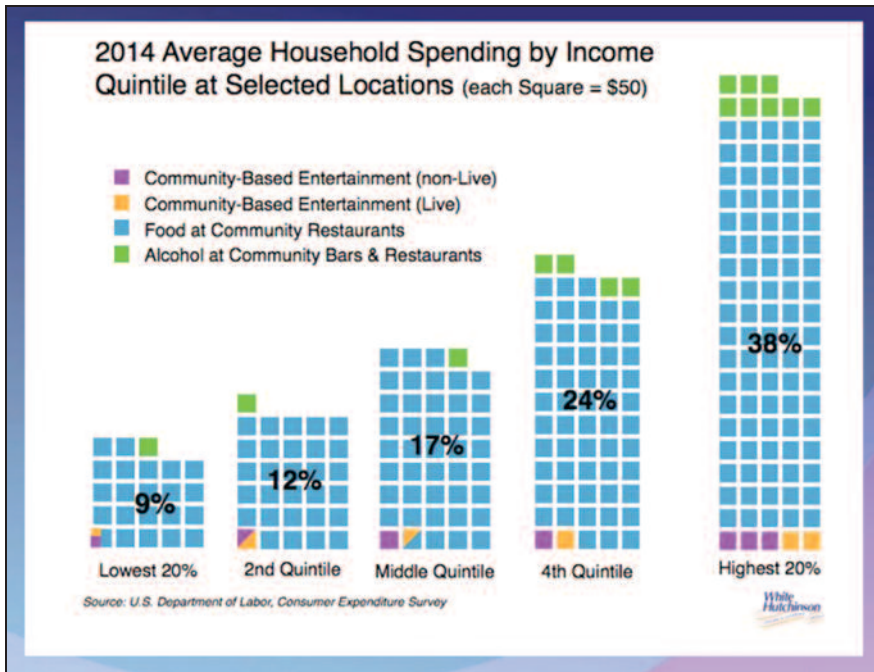
Williams of KWP Limited and GameTime’s Mike Abecassis, spoke about that overhaul to an audience of IAAPA members tuning in from around the world. According to data presented by the webinar hosts, the average American spends 21 times more money in restaurants and bars than they do in out-of-home entertain-



based venue so both enhance each other.

“A cultural shift in dining is happening,” said White. “We call it ‘The Food Network effect.’ There are over 800 cooking shows currently running in America, which cater to — and grow — our desire to experience food.”

In the webinar, White emphasized



ment locations. With this in mind, the idea of retrofitting an FEC or other entertainment center to include good food seems obvious.

“The average American only goes to an out-of-home entertainment center 3.8 times a year,” said White. “Yet that same American goes out to a restaurant for dinner over 100 times a year. So you only need to capture a little bit of that dinner business to significantly grow your attendance. And even if they don’t come that frequently, if they spend more money when they do come, for the eatertainment, you’ve also



GameTime combines food and fun. Below, some innovative bar treatments.

Eatertainment Technology in FEC

Customization

- i-Bar

KWP Limited

IAAPA

increased your revenues.”

This idea is catching fire across the entertainment industry, however, organizers of the webinar were adamant that there are many ways to do it, some wrong and some right. They stressed the importance of making your offerings “Instagrammable,” meaning that if the food you serve is not unique enough, well-presented and tasty enough for a customer to want to brag about on social media, you’re missing out on important renown. They also cautioned against designing too heavily for children, stressing that if you want to attract families, design for adults.

“Kids always want to do what adults are doing, but adults don’t want to sit in

a kid-centric area,” said Abecassis. “There are kid versions of adult things, but not adult versions of kid things.”

The presenters also warned about the hindrance of noise in an eatertainment venue. Significant volume is something that goes hand-in-hand with social gathering places, especially venues that include arcade games,

bowling or other entertainment options. However, when a customer comes in for a high-quality dinner, a relatively quiet, intimate setting is expected.

“Noise is a major hindrance to dining at a venue so acoustics have to be addressed,” said White. “The number one reason people go out to eat is for the social experience — not the food. You have to be comfortable in order for the experience to work and you don’t want to have to raise your voice.”

White’s final suggestion was to heed dietary accommodation, even if that accommodation seems to affect a relatively small audience. He stressed that if one person in a party of four has gluten intolerance or is a vegetarian, and your venue does not offer food accommodating that preference, then (more often than not) you lose out on the whole party.

Kevin Williams finished the session

At right, Kevin Williams discussed how technological trends can help connect with younger patrons who grew up on the Internet. Among them, 3D printed food, menus projected onto the surface of the table, and more.

by discussing some of the up and coming technologies and strategies that are pushing the eatertainment trend forward.

“The core aspect about eatertainment is that it is an undiscovered country for a lot of people. Those that have found it are benefitting; those that haven’t are missing out,” Williams said. “Technology offers the chance to connect with the digital generation and achieve repeat visitation from those who were born with a silver Internet connection in their mouths.”

He stressed that there are opportunities for those who use technology to create a fantastic, one-of-a-kind environment where people can socialize, eat and create memories from the inclusive and immersive experiences. These include things like 3D projection mapping that can cover your walls and tables in ever-changing decorations, digital touch-screens inserted into the table surfaces, and even 3D printing food.

One product he highlighted was Inamo. This technology replaces a tangible menu with projections on the surface of a table, allowing customers to order and see the meal they will receive along with information about it. Then they can surf the Internet from their table or play games with friends. The i-Bar is a similar idea used in a bar setting. This tech transforms your traditional bar into an information hub, giving customers access to drink menus and nutritional information, and allows them to create an avatar and personalize their experience. It even alerts the bartender when a customer’s drink is empty, prompting them to sell another.

“Anyone can create a restaurant; anyone can create fine dining,” Williams said. “It takes someone special to create an experience people want to repeat.”

That’s the core of what eatertainment is about: transporting the customer out of the usual dining-out routine and putting them into an experi-

Eatertainment Technology in FEC

Interactive

- Tavern Action




Eatertainment Technology in FEC

Experiential

- 3D Printed Food



ence that’s focused on fun. For more information on this trend, IAAPA members can listen to the entire webinar (titled Family Entertainment Center

Trends 2016: The Next Big Thing. Welcome to the World of Eatertainment) at: <http://www.iaapa.org/events-education/education/e-learning>. 



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