

foodService

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Featured inside: Bhavin Turakhia, Rahul Singh, Rajiv Warriar, Sanjay Vazirani, Zorawar Kalra



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Has the food tech bubble popped? The question is pertinent because funding in the food-tech sphere seems to have dried up faster than the river Yamuna in drought.

The number of investments this year is expected to slow down by 18.52 per cent as compared to the past year. But the psychological impact has been even more devastating. The rush of entrepreneurs in this space has been abruptly halted and only those with stout hearts and the will to rough it out are looking at the sector seriously.

All said and done, the bleak investment scenario in the sector today is a far cry from the days not too long ago when food tech players had a problem of plenty on their hands. Just until a few months ago, the category was making headlines and investors were more than open fisted to bankroll a multitude of players chasing their pot of gold with start-ups that looked too promising to fail.

What has changed to make the tide ebb and turn? For one, the investor community has made a definitive shift from a "grow at any cost" mentality to a higher emphasis on unit economics and operating KPIs. So, in spite of the appetising opportunities in the sector, investors have become more careful with their shekels. It would appear that the drying up of investment and sentiment for the sector is rather unfortunate at the moment. On the contrary, I believe that the current tapering off in the flow of funds will make the sector stronger in the long run. It will encourage existing players to look for better business efficiencies and ways to rightsize their operations, which will ultimately pave the way for healthier financials and a more sustainable business in the times to come.

But across the board, food tech is still at the beginning of a pretty long trajectory and segments like food safety, restaurant automation, sourcing and delivery are just a few of the areas that are about to break into big strides, with lots of growth and investment potential.



Amitabh Taneja

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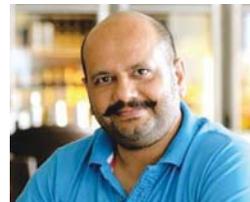
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“I started making my fusion recipes after educating myself with practical food experiences in India and across the world.”

– Chef Shipra Khanna



The **Fire & Ice** Chef

Versatile, lissome and with a razor-sharp wit, celebrity chef Shipra Khanna shares her culinary vision with FoodService India. The winner of Season II of MasterChef India, Shipra talks of her love for Japanese and Peruvian cuisines. "What I love about these cuisines is the techniques, skills, the combination of ingredients, the flavours...each dish is simply mind blowing!", says Shipra who counts legendary chefs Nobu Matsuhisa and Heston Blumenthal as her role models.

by Sanjay Kumar

How did you come into the world of foodservice?

I got a chance to break into the culinary world through Masterchef India. After winning Masterchef India, I travelled across the globe and started learning new techniques from various chefs. I started making my fusion recipes and educated myself with practical food experiences in India and across the world. One thing led to another and I have experienced a great organic growth in the food service business, which is so vast and diverse.

What keeps you busy?

I set up restaurants and menus for several establishments, and do cooking shows for TV and digital media. I do consultation for restaurants across all foodservice segments, depending on their requirements.

Do you see yourself more as a chef or a hospitality entrepreneur? Which is closer to your heart – managing food or managing business?

I am a chef first, and business follows. I follow a strict discipline and my focus is on being a chef first and foremost. To be a restaurateur, one needs to be a passionate foodie or chef. The ability to grow in the restaurant business depends on the same skill set that you bring to bear as a chef. You have to be a master at hospitality and good at personalising the experience with a team by persuading all to follow the same set of rules.

Do chefs really make good restaurateurs or is it just a myth? What are the chances of a good chef botching up as a restaurant business?

A restaurant runs because of the quality of food and that is dependent on the chef



A disruptive force waiting to erupt

The meal voucher segment in India has a tremendous potential for growth. India has a market of about 8-10 million users for meal vouchers, though only a million people actually use it. However, now, everyone uses smartphones and companies like Zeta and Sodexo, which are into the meal ticket business, can leverage the ubiquity of smartphones to great effect and grow the market for meal vouchers in India



and for them to work efficiently. At the same time, employees want to get the right work environment and support for themselves to perform their work duties better. The net result is a win-win for all concerned. There have been studies conducted that show a direct relationship between employee engagement, workplace productivity and adequate meal support for the employees.

The meal voucher segment in India has a tremendous potential for growth. The Indian economy is growing at a rapid clip and its Food Retail sector is witnessing an unprecedented boom. Industry estimates reckon that India has a market of about 8-10 million users for meal vouchers, though only a million people actually use it. However, now, everyone uses smartphones and companies like Zeta and Sodexo, which are into the meal ticket business, can leverage the ubiquity of smartphones to great effect.

Although the concept is an invention of the West, it is catching up fast in the service industry. The employees aren't complaining either, since meal vouchers save them taxes. These vouchers work as a motivational tool and create an allegiance among workers who value the consideration for their welfare, building a better employer-employee rapport.

However, receiving or granting approvals for expenses is a nightmarish process not just for organisations but for all the parties involved, including the HR, management and employees. But now, with meal vouchers going digital – meal vouchers by Zeta is one such example – employees can either use or transfer the vouchers to merchants over mobile while HR teams have the ease of one-click distribution via a desktop app. And all of this in a matter of few seconds. "Ours is



Companies and organisations are always looking for innovative ways to reward their employees and meal vouchers is one of the ways to do so. In recent years, HR departments have taken to meal vouchers in a big way as it helps to pay for an employee's meals at the office or outside. A meal voucher is a meal ticket in paper or digital form given to employees as an employee benefit, allowing them to eat at outside restaurants and purchase food and non-alcoholic beverages. Meal vouchers work to the advantage of both the employers and employees. The employers would like their employees to have adequate meal support so as to boost productivity

a first-of-its-kind solution to make meal vouchers an employee benefit, accessible to not only large enterprises, but also the medium and small companies. Employees can also benefit from the widest acceptance of food merchants across the country," says Bhavin Turakhia, CEO and Co-founder, Zeta, whose meal vouchers solution is designed to make management and distribution of vouchers extremely smooth for corporates. For employees, too, the solution promises ease of access and use, along with tax savings. Zeta Meal Vouchers can be used through various ways like the Zeta app and a physical MasterCard powered Zeta Super Card.

Sodexo, a global player in the meal benefit industry, offers secured pre-paid instruments with security features that are accepted at a proprietary network of merchant establishments spread across over 1,400 cities worldwide. Sodexo Meal Pass Card is a rupee-denominated reloadable magnetic stripe PIN based prepaid meal card offered by Sodexo. It is a proprietary card that is issued to corporates as part of their employee benefit programs and accepted at Sodexo merchant outlets for food and non-alcoholic beverages. "Sodexo is the only company in India that provides an Integrated Meal Benefit Program for corporates comprising Meal Card, Resto Card, Cafeteria Card and Meal Voucher. It is the only company in India that has a Proprietary Meal Card Network. This enables the company to offer a complete bouquet of services for employee benefit programs while operating at the highest levels of compliance," informs Rajiv Warriar, MD, Benefits and Rewards Services, Sodexo SVC.

Market for meal vouchers

The organisations involved in the business of meal vouchers consider it a right time to tap the unexploited sector in the country. Zeta, a leading player in the meal voucher industry, is gunning for the local meal voucher market reckoned at worth Rs.



4,000 crore. "We have over 110 corporates that have signed up with Zeta and are happy customers using our first product – Zeta Meal Vouchers – which was launched in January this year. Our product has seen a warm welcome in the market, which lays down a steady path for the future already," says Turakhia.

Sodexo also believes that the meal benefit industry in India (including meal vouchers/ cards and free or subsidised meals provided by companies) offers tremendous opportunities for growth and is looking to be a leader in this market, which it values to be now worth approximately Rs. 7,500 crore annually. "The meal benefits industry in India still has a lot of headroom for growth. The migration to cards and digital payments is likely to help maintain the growth trajectory for many years," believes Warriar.

Features and offerings

Zeta has witnessed an exponential growth in the sector with one of its primary products – Zeta Meal Voucher – becoming a runaway success since its launch in January this year. According to Turakhia, the company has been successfully adding a new client each working day.

Zeta offers a range of services to its customers. Zeta Meal Voucher is a fully customised product and provides a 360-degree flexibility to firms. This can be tailored to revolve around the parameters and policies set by an organisation. In addition, the meal voucher is fully in compliance with the RBI norms and IT guidelines. It also offers a single digital platform for employee benefits and tax reimbursement. The voucher also provides comprehensive payment channels. Zeta's app operates even without the accessibility of the internet, and for non-smart phone users Zeta has developed a Zeta Super Card.

The company has developed the Zeta app and this assists the users to accomplish a transaction in less than five seconds, using a smartphone. Priority has been given to the interest of retailers and Zeta delivers a complete package that integrates perfectly with the existing POS/EDC terminals of merchants.



“ For retailers, our solution offers a complete package that integrates perfectly with their existing POS/ EDC terminals, making it convenient for them to accept Zeta payments ”

– Bhavin Turakhia
CEO and Co-founder,
Zeta



“ Consumers need easy acceptance of their meal instruments (vouchers/ cards) across a wide network. Sodexo has delivered on all these attributes ”

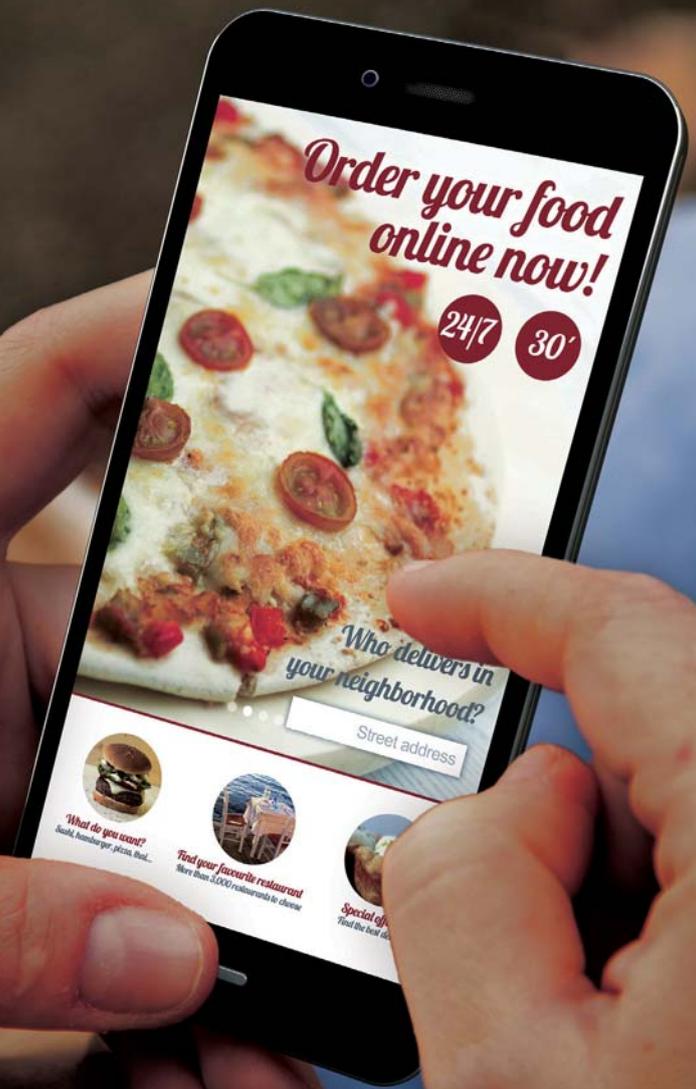
– Rajiv Warriar
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Rewards Services,
Sodexo SVC



Food on Cloud

by Anisha Dhar and Nupur Khanna

The online Food Ordering trend in India is making waves in metro cities where consumers are increasingly opting for faster and quicker ways to get food. Now people in even Tier II and Tier III cities have started ordering food online, thanks to the penetration of internet



It's a well established fact that our lives today are partially guided by the Internet. This revolutionary digital phenomenon took the world by storm and today it's impossible to imagine our lives without it! With digital businesses getting a stronghold in the online retail space over the last few years, there is a lot to experiment and explore.

You must be wondering, what is the point we are trying to make here and how it is even related to food. Well, just like other businesses, the food industry too is expanding as well as experimenting with the latest trends in the digital world. The most well known of them all is the concept of Online Food Ordering. In India, this trend has already made waves in metro cities where time never stops and consumers are increasingly opting for faster and quicker ways to get food. What's also interesting to note is that the impact of ordering food on the internet has been so positive that even consumers in Tier II and Tier III cities have started exhibiting their liking for this trend. Thanks to the penetration of internet into these small towns and cities.

Online Food Market

With the rapid increase in Internet penetration and rising purchasing power, the number of online shoppers for food is also growing multifold. Nowadays, the online food market has a huge potential, with almost 200 million internet users in India. Due to the consistent growth of internet in metros, it contributes to 65 per cent of the total traffic from smartphone users alone. And with smartphones everywhere, there is obviously a huge potential for online food ordering in Tier-II and Tier-III cities as well.

Still, the online food industry is in its nascent stage although it is seeing an exponential growth. According to a recent report published on the Indian Brand Equity Foundation's website, the organised food business in India is worth US\$ 48 billion, of which food delivery is valued at US\$ 15 billion. For online food delivery players, the organised food business has a huge potential and a promising future, says the report.

The Boston Consultancy Group had earlier this year said the market size of food retail in India was expected to reach Rs. 42 lakh crore by 2020, from Rs. 23 lakh crore in 2014. And the rise of online food start-ups, aiming to tap millions of internet users in India, has a lot to do with this growth.





Food Service Industry in **Eastern India:** An Overview

by Ritusmita Biswas

Since the time Kolkata (then Calcutta) evolved from the three hamlets sitting beside the flowing river of Hooghly, the city has been synonymous with the culture of food. Be it street food, sweets or dining out at one of the classy and posh restaurants that dot Park Street (and now most of the city), Kolkata dwellers (and not necessarily Bengalis) and their love for food has been a hard to break love affair.

Despite the supposedly lack of infrastructure and industry in the city, there has been no stop to the development of the food service industry in Kolkata, which till date remains one of the biggest revenue churners for the Government. Every month, newer gastronomic destinations are opening up in Kolkata and citizens are welcoming them with open arms. Happily, many of the latest destinations are for every age and economic group and hence the roaring popularity of the same.

Says Sagar J. Daryani, CEO and Co Founder of Wow Momo, one of the fastest growing brands of the city: "Kolkata is the perfect destination to start a food business – here most of the people are connoisseurs of good food. The quality and taste of the diverse kinds of cuisine which people get here is found nowhere else in India. Besides, in the city, the cost of living is low and all these factors make the city a food entrepreneur's dream." "East India has a huge prospect and that is why we are keen to expand fast in this region," he adds.

Kolkata Food Culture: Past and Present

The passion Kolkata shares for food is probably shared by no other city in India. The legendary love of Kolkatans for food is well documented. Earlier, however, they preferred the traditional items of food and cuisines that complemented their palate and might have been a novelty at that point of time. However, now the trends have



changed drastically and Kolkata is home to a wide variety of cuisines from all over the world. Be it the classic British, Chinese, Mughlai, Anglo-Indian or the more recent Mexican, Japanese, Lebanese, Italian, Thai, Continental or Tibetan, the once loathe-to-experiment Kolkata citizen is happily trying out the newest food that the city has to offer.

Take, for example, the newly opened Platter Hospitality: "Platter Hospitality Pvt Ltd was started in the year 2013 by my brother Debaditya and me. We opened the first period dining restaurant of Kolkata, Oudh 1590, in Deshapriya Park. Buoyed by its success, we opened the second outlet of Oudh 1590 in Salt Lake in June, 2016. Oudh 1590 today enjoys a proud position in the culinary map of the city. Our passion for food has driven us to gift Kolkatans the first retro dining restaurant, Chapter 2 at Mani Square Mall in Kolkata. Our motto is to provide fine dining cuisine at an affordable price with an unmatched ambience and service," says Shiladitya Chaudhury, Partner Platter Hospitality.

Innovation, both in terms of menu and ambience, seems to be the buzz word as far as the restaurant business in Kolkata is concerned. A good example of this kind of innovation is the newly opened restaurant Fly Kouzina. "Fly Kouzina is India's first aircraft themed restaurant. On reaching the restaurant, the automatic glass sensor doors open at the entry (as seen at the airport), and you enter the waiting lounge where an airhostess hands over the boarding pass to all our passengers. On being seated in the aircraft section with seats numbered as window, middle and aisle, you see food being served on trolleys by flight attendants (stewards and stewardesses) in authentic crew uniform. Each table window has videos depicting taking off and landing of a flight, which gives the actual feel of being in an airplane," says Rishi Singhal, Partner at Fly Kouzina.

What's Up Café is another example of innovation at play in the foodservice business. Anamika Sengupta, Partner at the newly opened What's up

Café says: "We want to be the classiest and most popular hangout zone for the upwardly mobile young adults in Kolkata. Our services are not restricted to the aromatic hookah or gourmet food only. We want to give our clients an environment where they can chill, fall in love, gossip, take selfies, lose themselves in endless banter and soak in the ambience. We have created an ambience to suit all mood types – a retro section for people to jog their childhood memories. It has old switches, used AC units, a grand piano bar table, rickshaw chain bar stools, all of which invoke a sense of déjà vu for the 40+ while for today's youth it comes across as a never before seen ambience. The Rock-n-roll lovers will surely swoon over the 'lived in' look replete with old brick like walls, stock cork and tyre wash basin while the teeny weenies will fall in love with our bathroom mirror that stares back at them wearing an equally cool shade. For those who want to jive hard, we have our private section – a contemporary lounge with colour-changing laser lights and hand painted caricatures of iconic musicians. And for nature lovers, we offer an envious view of the south Kolkata skyline. And hold on, that's not all. If one wants to have a good time au natural and under the sky with his/her feet dipped in a Jacuzzi, we have that too. Now that's something you would not think ordinary. But who cares for the ordinary."

The healthy GDP growth and affordable price of the newly opened restaurants is a big reason why food lovers are spending on the newer restaurants in town and loving the experience as well. The facts are equally supported by the on-the-ground research: the last few years saw the opening of restaurants such as Chili's, Yauatcha, Wasabi, Tibetan Delight and various such food outlets where diversity and standing out from the hoi polloi is of utmost importance.

Sandeep Basu, General Manager of Jameson Inn, says: "There has been a lifestyle change in eastern region as an increasing number of people



The last few years saw the opening of restaurants such as Chili's, Yauatcha, Wasabi, Tibetan Delight and various such food outlets where diversity and standing out from the hoi polloi is of utmost importance

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