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*Michelin-starred
Indian chef,
restaurateur, food
writer, filmmaker
and a humanitarian*

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How to drive sales and consumer stickiness

Featured inside: Zorawar Kalra, Rohit Malhotra, Priyank Sukhija, chef Sujan S, Sanjeev Pant



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Is the high noon of fund raising in Food tech a thing of the past? While it may be premature to pass any hasty judgement, the feeding frenzy has slowed down considerably in recent months. Companies like Food Panda, TinyOwl, Zomato and many more, which at one time were riding the crest of a powerful business wave, are now witnessing sobering times. For instance, discovery and food ordering app Zomato has shut down its online ordering service in Lucknow, Kochi, Indore and Coimbatore, where it had ventured a few months ago.

What is interesting about this retreat is that cities like Coimbatore and Kochi are no pushovers in technology adoption. Kochi in Kerala boasts of some of the largest IT parks in the country, and Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu sits on the high table of world's top global outsourcing cities. So, why did the business cookie crumble for India's top food tech brand in these putatively technology-friendly cities?

Perhaps, start-ups should rethink their go-to-market strategy. A business model that works well in bigger metros can come a cropper outside tier 1 cities. Most food tech start-ups have existed purely as an order delivery chain in the metros. Even though they have been delivering food to customers at a higher cost in the hope that they will form a habit of ordering food, the volumes have been attractive enough to make business sense for the companies in the long run.

In most tier-2 cities – even with visible tech permeability – most people still prefer to walk into an outlet first before buying online. It is therefore wiser for food tech companies to first test the waters in these places before taking the full plunge. There are examples aplenty where companies have had to wait out patiently and get involved in building the market before they could start counting the pennies. But then, such forbearance calls for staying power and deep pockets, which our new-age companies are mostly bereft of.

The moot thing is not to lose heart in the business potential of our smaller towns. Technology is a great enabler and a few years down the line, it will be these places that will become the magnets and hotbeds for the food tech companies. All that is needed is to keep the faith and not stop probing the waters.

Amitabh Taneja

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Rocketchefs is a first of its kind mobile food delivery service that makes food available immediately through its mobile food bikes and especially designed food vans

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Zorawar Kalra

Zorawar Kalra, Founder & Managing Director, Massive Restaurants Pvt. Ltd., outlines some key culinary trends and challenges that will impact the F&B industry in the new year

“The challenges will be putting in place international processes like prior reservations, dress code, etc.”

by Nivedita Pawar



From a business perspective, what is your opinion about the year gone by?

It was an extremely rewarding year. We are truly humbled by the overwhelming response our patrons have showered on us across the various concepts that we operate in. We not just celebrated Jiggs Kalra's contribution towards reviving, restoring, recording, reinventing and reintroducing Indian cuisine to diners from across the globe and placing it on the global map, but also launched our first ever foray into another cuisine with the launch of our new, modern Asian concept Pa Pa Ya in Mumbai. There have been many milestones that we have achieved and hope to keep the same pace going in the years to come.

What are your expectations from 2016?

We are going to introduce a couple of new dining concepts, thereby endeavouring to set new benchmarks and attain new heights in the global hospitality arena.

What are your goals for 2016 and how do you plan to achieve those?

Our vision since the inception of Massive Restaurants has been to build the world's best restaurant concepts across categories, creating

unparalleled dining experiences, and achieving near perfect guest satisfaction levels consistently. It is this vision that forms the basis of all our endeavours and has been the driving force for us.

How do you see the challenges in 2016?

The biggest challenge is of restaurants being able to put in place certain international processes like prior reservations, dress code, etc., which I feel we are still trying to get around. Then there is also the point of a diner's perception and expectations when it comes to dining out in India. While we have been able to bust some age old notions, in the process showcasing the robustness of various cuisines through our restaurant concepts, the guest's perception of what they expect as against what they may get is a difficult one. Lastly, quantity is not always a deciding factor about the quality of the cuisine served; as consumers we tend to think very highly of a place if there are a 100 dishes on the menu, as compared to a place which may have, say, 50-55 dishes.

What will be the trends to look out for in 2016?

Some key trends which seem to be catching up and I expect will become big in the coming year are:

Tapas - Now and going forward, the scales are shifting towards small plates and the concept of tapas style menus where diners get to experience a large array of the restaurants specialities, while not filling themselves to the brim will take precedence. Tapas style menus are a trend that many restaurants have started adopting in recent times and something that we see picking up both in the Indian as well as the international restaurant

before and is a relatively new concept in India. While the diners find the concept fascinating, there is still a lot left to explore in the concept and a long way to go for the diners to be aware about the nuances of the process, for a pure molecular gastronomy concept to work in the Indian environment. Also, there is a generic perception of the concept being unsafe, which is largely owing to the fact that diners haven't been exposed in



space. This trend is still at a very nascent stage and will take some time to gain momentum, though the process has already started.

Use of fresh produce - Locally sourced vegetable and fruits have become a norm and many chefs and restaurateurs have already begun their own small farms as an extension of the restaurant or away from it. The reason for this trend are multi-dimensional; while on one hand it's more cost and time effective for restaurants to develop their own produce, on the other plucking and using fresh produce in the dishes gives guests a whole new dining experience, which is more engaging.

Molecular Gastronomy - Molecular Gastronomy is a technique of food science, where you use certain processes like spherification, gelification, powderising, deep freezing and much more through various certified natural ingredients like maltodextrin during the process of cooking. While molecular gastronomy has been prevalent and hugely successful globally for the past few years, Masala Library by Jiggs Kalra and Farzi Café have been credited with introducing it in Indian cuisine and recently Pa Pa Ya has done so for Asian cuisine, to Indian diners, which was never done

depth to the concept of molecular gastronomy; this notion doesn't hold true in actuality. The elements used in molecular gastronomy are all natural and mostly plant extracts, which are globally accepted & certified and now being very frequently used in India as well.

Traditional Vs Modern cuisine - Diners globally, today, have become quite adventurous and have allowed their curiosity to get the better of them. This curiosity to try new dishes / cuisines has given space for fusion variations to come up. However the downside to it is, in the Indian context, that "traditional Indian" cuisine is getting lost or losing focus. While we may be stepping away from traditional cuisine due to globalisation, there is enough demand for authentic as well as contemporary Indian cuisine in their respective spaces. While the demand for traditional Indian fare is still equal to what it was a few years back, modern Indian cuisine is only set to take centrestage in times to come.

Progressive cuisine - Modern age diners are looking for out-of-the-box concepts and something that breaks the daily monotony of home dining. It is here that the concept of Progressive cuisine has stepped

Our vision has been to build the world's best restaurant concepts across categories, creating unparalleled dining experiences, and achieving near perfect guest satisfaction levels consistently



Is something **wrong** with food tech startups?

A pure delivery model is a no-no because value-add is not great. As an investor, I would be inclined to invest my money in a food-tech startup that connects restaurants and consumers, enables discovery and has a rational costing model for the home delivery part of the business.

by Anil Joshi

Venture capitalists are always on a lookout for the next big idea. After placing their bets in e-commerce sector in India, the next sector that excited them was food-tech startups. As investors opened their pursestrings for such startups, more and more entrepreneurs launched food companies or QSR businesses. As an early stage VC firm, we are also keen to invest in a food-tech startup but we haven't yet come across a company, which has a differentiation, and can disrupt the space or create a niche in the space. Presently, food-tech companies have developed their business model around service component, which is not so commercially viable. Their whole objective is to serve the customer without considering the unit economics. The reason that many food-tech companies like Food Panda and TinyOwl, in spite of growth, saw turbulence is because of high serving cost for the kind of service being rendered. This was mainly because of lower margins and higher operational cost coupled with high customer acquisition cost in a bid to acquire market share.

Home delivery model

Delivery cost is a big component in order to make the home delivery model work. And it doesn't come cheap. Companies have been delivering food to customers at a higher cost in the hope that they will form a habit of ordering food, and volumes will eventually make enough business sense for them in the long run. However, this premise has not proved right and has gone against food-tech startups. They started out as tech companies and transformed into a marketing model, which has different costs associated. Examples are for everyone to see. Localbanya, a mobile app and an online tech enabled grocery company, in spite of having a large customer base, had to shut down because of higher operational cost.

Another problem area is that today nobody is talking about unique product offering coupled with consistent quality/taste and variety, which would bring stickiness. Most of the startups, which got funded, focused more on acquiring customers than working on preparing menu, which could have offered better variety food. If you see the menu options available, there is hardly any fusion food or even new food items being thought about. That's because everyone is so focused on the packaging and delivery part of the business. Entrepreneurs have to realise that more food variety options and innovation in food offering will drive sales more with stickiness than fancy packaging.

Internet-first restaurants

Another popular model in the food-tech space is Internet-first restaurants. They need to bring more variety in their menus otherwise overtime customers will get bored and won't come back for a repeat order. They also need to come up with a formula where they can achieve positive unit economics for every item that they are delivering or at least achieve positive average unit economics. Unless they show a consistently growing revenue cycle, investors won't show the money. Another factor that has hurt Internet-first restaurants is that the space got too crowded too fast. Thus, they didn't get a chance to

build food habits or even a loyal customer base. A customer is now constantly ordering from various sites wherever the discount is highest. This was also because the habits were built mainly on a discount model than building a business on creating a niche or solving a real problem. Most of the customers came because they were getting a discount and before business could be built on sustainable basis companies ran out of money, resulting in the closure of business or truncating operations.

Operational efficiency

For food-tech startups to survive, operational efficiency at every step of the way is important. The kitchen, where they prepare their food, requires maximum investment in terms of equipment, ingredients, chefs and other related infrastructure. And on top of that there is the high real estate cost too to be factored in.

Omni-channel platforms may not work as every customer has a limitation over the number of apps a phone can download and support. One can't expect them to download the apps of every food-tech startup that is getting launched in the country.

Explore other revenue generation models

Focus on revenues is important if you are in this business for the long haul. Cut down on expenses that don't need to be there. For example, tie-ups with restaurant across a city's various suburbs to use their kitchen for preparing your daily order will cut down your cost of preparing a meal substantially. Spread out to the whole city with such partnerships. It will give you a larger footprint, ability to serve customers faster, control your cost and thus generate revenues once you have a critical mass of customers.

Only restaurant listing as a business model is a risky proposition specially now when we already have players like Zomato who started out as a listing marketplace years ago. Even they have diversified, so there is no reason for you to start your journey from the beginning of the curve.

Omni-channel platforms may not work as every customer has a limitation over the number of apps a phone can download and support. One can't expect them to download the apps of every food-tech startup that is getting launched in the country



“I only know how to cook and nothing else”

Vikas Khanna is an award winning, Michelin-starred Indian chef, restaurateur, food writer, filmmaker and a humanitarian. He has also been a host for many TV shows. Even though he is based in New York City, it would not be wrong to say that he has evolved as a global citizen through his progressive outlook and approach toward food. In India, he travels extensively to various regions and explores diverse cuisines. From his busy routine, he takes a pause to share with FoodService India magazine his thoughts about life, love for food, new changes in the culinary world and what to expect in 2016

by Suchitra & Sanjeev



Tell us a bit about your growing years that made you drift toward cooking.

I was raised in Amritsar where I grew up surrounded by large family feasts, the seasonal produce that were fresh and came right from the fields of Punjab and, of course, my grandmother's traditional home cooking. It was at my grandmother's that I started learning the intricacies of the Indian cuisine. At the age of 17, I started my own banquet and catering business — Lawrence Gardens.

Talking from my experience, college life was an eye opener for me. I realised that cooking is where I could find my own space, and it completed me. It eventually turned out to be a beautiful journey of my life. After my college, I even worked at the Leela Kempinski in Mumbai for three years and then returned to take charge of my own catering business in Amritsar. Later, my elder brother pushed me to scale the American dream, and that's how I came to the US to pursue my higher studies and my career as a chef.

How did you streamline your passion for food and channelise it toward making your career?

I pursued formal education in culinary arts to hone my skills. During my graduation from the WelcomGroup Graduate School of Hotel Administration, I got the opportunity to train under renowned chefs of Taj Group of Hotels, Oberoi's, the Leela Group and many more. Then, I went to study at the Culinary Institute of America, Cornell University and New York University and the prestigious Le Cordon Bleu, Paris.

Later, I worked with some of the most honoured chefs in the world in New York. There, I was fortunate to receive positive reviews from the press, peers and also recognition from the James Beard Foundation.

How do you identify with your job, especially when there are pressures of being a celebrated Michelin Star chef?

The Michelin Star for my restaurant Junoon by Michelin Guide became one of the high points of my career as a chef. I am extremely proud of the fact that my restaurant received a Michelin Star within 10 months of opening. I call this destiny. Yet, there are definitely challenges and merits of being a chef. It has its own pressures, especially when every time you go on to cook something or you monitor someone; you have to get things right for your own satisfaction and only then it is possible to satisfy others with cooked food. Just a few years ago, nobody would have known anything about me, but the television shows have catapulted me into so-called celebrityhood. Today, people are opening their homes to me and are willing to share their secret family recipes. I really feel honoured.

How do you view your growth as a professional in the US in comparison to what you have achieved in India?

I came to India in December 2000 with an ambition to prove myself at any cost. America was a different ball game from India. But I had consciously decided that I will never compare America and India, as not only they are different culturally, but also for many reasons. For me, America is the highest point of human creation and creativity, which I will never deny. They have made the whole world bow to the creativity of children and respect individuals for his/her talent. What they create is phenomenal. But what India has created is a phenomenon of the human soul. I enjoy learning a different dimension of culinary art here, essentially the place where my love for food started during my childhood.

What do you feel about cooking — a method to be followed or an expression of one's creativity?

A lot is being said about cooking institutes, for example. Can they really make you a chef or teach you how to cook? I still feel that if you speak well or are a good orator, it is not a qualification enough to be a lawyer. Similarly is the case with cooking. But, the significance of education cannot be undermined. While culinary schools do provide a major link between the industry and training, cooking is also an art, so it also has a lot to do with inborn talent.

What kind of a food person is chef Vikas Khanna?

Having experienced so many things in food, I still swear by simple food, i.e., aloo methi and any dal along with it, which is my favourite dish. In fact, I was never a fussy eater and enjoyed everything — even the not-so-likeable veggies such as ghiya, karela, tinda and so on. I love vegetables — their texture, the taste and the aroma as they cook.

Since I am in the kitchen all day and taste a lot of dishes, I tend to balance it out with simple food in my everyday meals. I snack on smoothies, fruits,



nuts and granola bars. Steamed fish, plain dal, vegetables and egg whites are my staples.

You enjoy healthy cooking, and especially love cooking seafood. How do you evaluate the possibilities that frozen marine products, such as shrimps, squids, cuttlefish and other fin-fish, bring to the table?

Seafood is super large; I did a whole show on Coastal Curries on Fox Life. There is plenty of fish in our culture that stretch from region to region. I always discuss the rise in seafood consumption in India and the potential it has in the future. I love cooking (and eating) healthy, grilled food a majority of the time.

While cooking seafood, which are the few things that one should be careful about?

It is essential to first bring seafood from the frozen state to room temperature before cooking or even marinating it. Then, secondly, when it comes to spice, it is important to remember that less is more in seafood for obvious reason. It is also difficult to choose which recipe is good over another. I personally believe that it is difficult to pick a favourite when it comes to seafood, as I enjoy cooking and eating them.

You recently started promoting Gadre Marine Export that exports Surimi and other fish products in large quantities to Japan, Taiwan, Malaysia, Korea and Australia. Tell us about this association and its genesis.

I have been actively promoting seafood and I firmly believe that we can certainly learn a lot more about it (culinary scope), especially the frozen ones. I was discussing the rise in seafood consumption in India and the potential it has with Arjun Gadre, managing director of Gadre Marine Export. That was the basis of my partnership with Gadre seafood. It was then that we both noticed a few trends among the Indian consumers where the perception of fresh fish was better than the use of frozen fish. If we are to analyse it scientifically, most

For me, America is the highest point of human creation and creativity, which I will never deny. They have made the whole world bow to the creativity of children and respect individuals for his/her talent. What they create is phenomenal. But what India has created is a phenomenon of the human soul



The welcome blaze of pizza vans on call

With its 7-minutes oven to table guarantee, Rocketchefs is a first of its kind mobile food delivery service, which makes food available immediately through its mobile food bikes and especially designed food vans. Ramnidhi Wasan, its Founder and CEO, speaks to FoodService India about how his service offers better value for the customer's money by delivering orders piping hot and fresh, unlike most home delivery options where the food gets cold by the time it reaches the customer



Ramnidhi Wasan

Tell us about Rocketchefs. How was the idea conceived and what made you believe in its proof of concept?

Rocketchefs is a first ever pizza vans on call. Customers can place an order through its geo location based app to get piping hot pizzas and other foods, sometimes even cooked right at your doorstep.

Food delivery as a concept is fast gaining popularity in India given the young working population and consumers' preference of 'eating out' while being comfortable at home. With online food delivery players building scale through partnerships, the organised food business has a huge potential and a promising future.

Taking cognisance of the obvious concern faced by consumers during food delivery, namely the deterioration in food quality, we have tried to address such concerns. Thus was born the concept of Rocketchefs. With its 7-minutes oven to table guarantee, Rocketchefs envisages to be a solution for this gap in the market. It is a first of its kind mobile food delivery service that makes food available immediately, through its mobile food bikes and especially designed food vans.

Does the name carry any special meaning?

The name Rocketchefs aims to denote speed with a high degree of quality.

What is the menu on offer and which are the cuisines that you cater to? Also, what is your pricing strategy?

The inaugural menu includes lip smacking dishes such as stone oven thin crust pizzas and gourmet kebabs. We aim to expand the variety of food available and take it to the next level by providing

them completely on demand. We shall soon be launching interesting options as korma sandwich, korma coffee, etc.

Our pricing is almost at par, in fact, even lower than that of other key players operating in the segment. Our customers certainly receive value for their money as their order is delivered piping hot and fresh, unlike most home delivery options wherein the food gets cold by the time it reaches the customer.

Tell us about your kitchen operations and how far it has been rigged and customized to meet the demands of mobile food service delivery?

The kitchen was specifically designed to attend to the needs of the mobile food service delivery. It is highly mechanised to ensure standardisation of the food, and the entire process is scientific and helps in achieving efficiencies.

What are the relative business advantages that a mobile food delivery business has over brick-and-mortar restaurants and the Internet-first restaurants?

As mentioned earlier, an obvious concern faced by consumers during food delivery is the deterioration in food quality. Led by industry experts, Rocketchefs aims to use food knowledge, hospitality expertise, back-end support and a strong technological backbone to offer a cutting edge experience to its customers. Our mobile food bikes, vans and especially designed food pods allows us to be 'on the move' thus giving us the ability to adapt to the customer's requirements. We are able to serve customers better by offering them a fine dining cuisine experience right at their doorstep.

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Spices • Dehydrated Vegetables & Herbs • Seasonings • Contract Farming • Private Labeling Solution • Chicory Processing

Paras Spices Private Limited

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