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JULY-AUGUST 2016 • ₹100 India Edition

Trade Journal for the Hotel, Restaurant and Catering Industry



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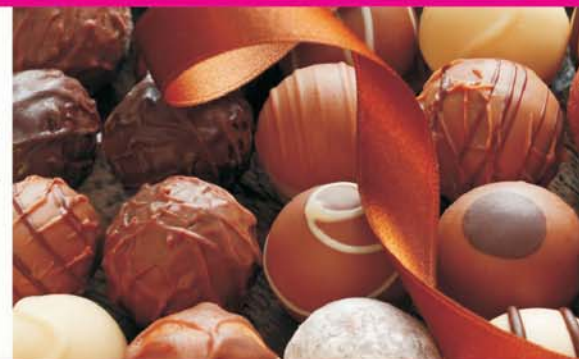
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Has the food tech bubble popped? The question is pertinent because funding in the food-tech sphere seems to have dried up faster than the river Yamuna in drought.

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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London Breakfast

London's breakfast scene is buzzing. Whether you're after traditional, 'mashup' or downright bizarre, you'll find something to suit your appetite. And not just at breakfast time either...

Millennials are said to be behind the trend. Late starters, they skip breakfast twice a week, meaning late breakfasts are often the order of the day. In today's London, that's not a problem though

Cereal Killer Café

Let's kick off with the strange. Brainchild of twin brothers Gary and Alan Keery, the Cereal Killer Café first opened its doors in 2014.

The UK's first speciality cereal café (which feels right at home in London's ultra-hipster Shoreditch) sells over 120 different types of cereal from all around the world. Customers can choose from 30 different varieties of milk and 20 different toppings, including banana, walnuts and marshmallows.

But unfettered sugar-rushes don't come cheap. A large bowl of American cereal like Lucky Charms, served with Bubble Gum milk and topped with 100s & 1000s would set you back £5.40, for example.

But you can't argue with the results. Having already opened up a second branch in Camden, it seems there's more than enough demand to keep the cereal killers in business.

www.cerealkillercafe.co.uk

Dishoom

Over to the 'mashup' breakfast. While the concept of 'mashups' has been around for a while, it has mostly appeared at either end of the market. But in London, that's all changing. And you could do a lot worse for breakfast than Dishoom's Bombay-inspired bacon naan roll.

Inspired by the old post-colonial 'Irani cafés' of Bombay, Dishoom offers Bombay café style food at easy to love prices. Dotted across the city – every café is decorated with slow turning fans, bentwood chairs and vintage décor. A nod to the faded elegance of the old Irani cafés of Bombay. Most authentic of all Dishoom's features is its menu. The bacon naan roll – served with cream cheese, coriander and chili tomato jam – was recently featured in TimeOut's Top 10 breakfasts in London.

www.dishoom.com

Arabica Bar & Kitchen

Another middle-eastern mashup king, Arabica Bar & Grill started out 14 years ago in London's Borough Market with little more than a cool box to their name, selling a small range of mezze.

Today, Arabica Bar & Grill feels more like a considered mix of 1960s Beirut and modern day

London. And for an example of their mastery in blending Lebanese and British cuisine, you just have to look at their breakfast menu.

With two fried eggs, grilled spicy beef Sujuk (grilled sausage), roasted tomato, chestnut mushrooms and flatbreads, the Arabica fry up is a perfect breakfast blend of East & West. And at just £10 a plate, no wonder it has been hailed as one of the "best new breakfasts in London".

www.arabicabarandkitchen.com

Pollen Street Social

For our money though, you can't do better for breakfast than Mayfair's Pollen St. Social. Everything about Jason Atherton's new restaurant feels as though it has been specifically designed to be the polar opposite of the stuffy formality associated with high end dining.

The segmented layout, the white-walled and wood-paneled décor and the laid back ambience all do their bit to convince you that this is formal dining, without the formality. And the 'English Breakfast' is no less rebellious.

Pushing the boundaries of gastronomy, your breakfast arrives in a wooden box. Inside, you'll find two pine-smoked pieces of quail. These are then gently laid on a wheat and barley risotto with wild mushrooms and accompanied with a 'slice' of sourdough toast topped with a quail terrine.



For £17.50, this unusual breakfast is definitely one to try. And a testament to the sort of exciting breakfast concepts London is dishing up.

www.pollenstreetsocial.com ••

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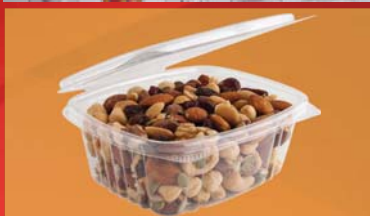
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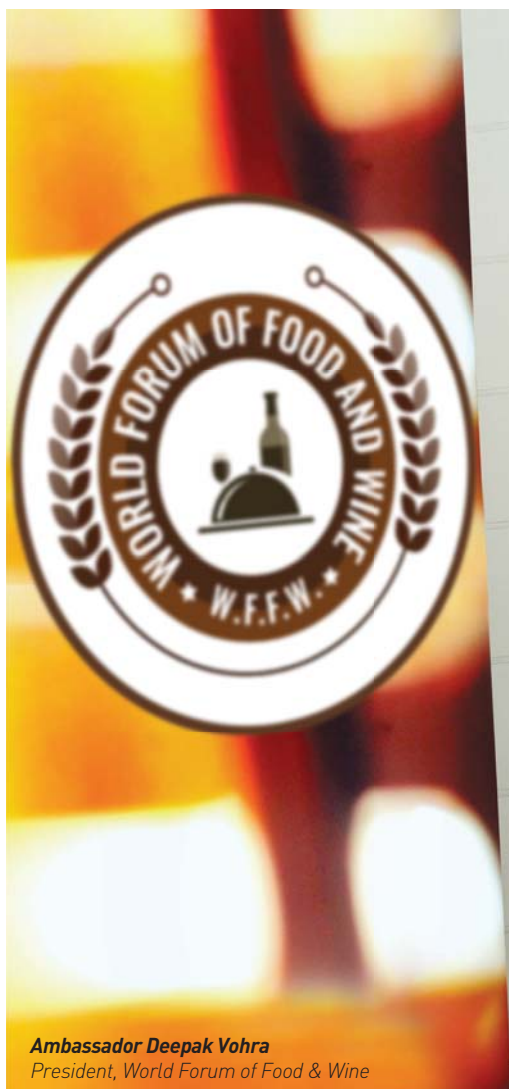
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Ambassador Deepak Vohra
President, World Forum of Food & Wine



A unique initiative for Food and Wine industry

The World Forum of Food & Wine is a trade promotion association, which has been instituted with the objective of promoting and driving long-term consumer demand for food and wine in India and abroad.



The World Forum of Food & Wine (WFFW) – a young trade promotion body started just a few months ago with the intention of developing the Food & Wine industry in India and linking it with other major markets abroad – was launched at a glittering ceremony held in the Capital city amidst the presence of Forum members, invited dignitaries and a large contingent of diplomatic corps from many overseas countries including those from the United States, France, Norway, New Zealand, Australia and several Latin American countries. Ambassador Deepak Vohra (retd.), President of World Forum of Food & Wine, presided over the well-attended evening soiree, regaling the gathering with his witticisms and infectious brand of humour.

World Forum of Food & Wine (WFFW) is a young trade promotion organisation, started just a few months ago with the intention of developing the wine industry in India and linking it with other major wine producing countries of the world. With a view to promoting trade in Food & Wine industry, the Forum seeks to become an effective platform for concerned companies including wine producers and manufacturers, distributors, importers, traders and business associations by bringing them together and connecting them with the larger industry to facilitate trade in the Food



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- Access to various food and wine federations

& Wine sector in India and globally. The Forum aims to harness the entrepreneurial potential of the community, expand the scope of their operations and pave the way for the next phase of advanced development in the Food & Wine sector. To meet its business objectives, WFFW has laid out a roadmap for organising B2B meetings, conferences, trade shows and events and handle delegations from India and overseas to facilitate their participation at international conferences. The services of the WFFW – for promoting global trade in food and wine and for establishing contact with the partner companies worldwide – include products, business relationships, joint venture technology transfers, among others.

Currently under the process of incorporation, the Forum already has about 300 members from across India and abroad and seeks to bring many other companies involved in the wine business under its fold. A great incentive for companies wanting to join the Forum membership is that it is free at the moment but the prospect of a fee is a certain possibility once a certain threshold is crossed. More details about the membership criteria is available on WFFW's website, and the process can be completed online as well.

According to the WFFW, the wine market in India is growing at a fast clip – in FY 2015-16, the



Sandeep Grover
VP, World Forum of Food & Wine

market for wine consumption in India grew at a compounded annual growth rate of 55 per cent. According to the statistics compiled by WFFW, there exists a fairly large base of wine consumers in India at 15 million who drink wine once or more during a week, and this figure is set to grow and expand substantially in the years to come. "Fifteen million is a fairly small number for a country the size of India, but it is more than the population of quite a few countries involved in wine production and trade," observed Ambassador Vohra.

For countries and companies looking to tap into the fast-growing wine industry in India, it would be the best and most opportune time to make a move in the country. Indian wine companies are also developing very quickly and it would not be long before some Indian wine brands find acclaim and recognition globally. But there exists challenges along the way as well. "The wine market in India – is also a complex market owing to its size and diversity. "Issues such as high duties, licenses, state taxes...have been responsible for the low volume of wine production in India, which is still at a very nascent state despite growing at a rapid stride in recent years," noted Sandeep Grover, Vice President of the Forum. But despite the odds, wine production in India has reached 18 million litres and is likely to cross 21 million litres by 2018.

The annual wine production of the country stood at an estimated 70 million litres last year. This translates into an yearly growth of more than 5 per cent. The drivers of growth are the growing bulge of the youth population in the country, rising affluence and broadening of the middle income segment of the people, greater inclination and aspiration for fun and healthy food and beverages and many other allied factors.

Going forward, "WFFW will seek to address some of these challenges and leverage the existing and potential opportunities to promote the Food & Wine industry by offering its multifaceted services to the agriculture, horticulture, fishery and agro-alimentary sectors and identify key domestic and international areas where Food & Wine industry can flourish immensely," said Vipin Gupta, General Secretary, WFFW.



“ WFFW will seek to address some of these challenges and leverage the existing and potential opportunities to promote the Food & Wine industry by offering its multifaceted services to the agriculture, horticulture, fishery and agro-alimentary sectors and identify key domestic and international areas where Food & Wine industry can flourish immensely ”

– Vipin Gupta
General Secretary
WFFW

“With experience comes innovation and creativity”

Creativity, quality and accuracy are some of the major attributes that define a chef’s challenging role. Chef Venecio Cadavida (chef Don Don), a Japanese specialty chef at Dashanzi, JW Marriott, Juhu, Mumbai, spoke to FoodService India about the challenges of being a successful chef and what it takes to remain on top.



Take us through your culinary journey so far, the major milestones accomplished along the way and how they have shaped and influenced your career?

Being a chef is a fairly intricate and challenging profession: You need to have an eye for accuracy, quality and style. All of the three play a major role in your success as a chef, and you cannot afford to compromise on any of the three. When starting off a career as a chef, it is imperative to understand the importance of learning the basics from scratch. Over time, you keep perfecting the skills and adding to your repertoire. With experience comes innovation and creativity. My patience has brought me where I am today.

What kind of a food person are you? What do you think are your key strengths as a chef?

Basically, I love to experiment with food. However, I prefer going for smaller portions. I love Asian cuisine for its sheer variety. About strengths and weaknesses, I feel one should always be positive and bubbling with ideas, creativity and confidence in oneself. These are few strengths I feel I possess.

How would you articulate the role of a modern-day chef? In your opinion, which are the hallmarks of a top-drawer professional chef?

I feel modern-day chefs need to concentrate equally on creativity, quality and detailing. These are the key factors that go into creating master dishes. Top order professional chefs keep honing and sharpening their skills because all ideas get old over time and you need to stay ahead of the curve. I think that chefs who are good at making use of the traditional techniques along with introducing a dash of modern touch with creative detailing and clever innovation in the preparation of traditional and classic recipes are the master professionals in their line of work.

What is the one thing that is going to change the way food will be promoted in future?

Art and creativity will come to the fore more prominently. Cooking a dish is a basic art, however giving it the right flavour is possible only by paying attention to the finer details. But giving it the right taste is possible only by using the right technique with detailing. In the coming days, people will experience new styles of food presentation, which will further lend character to a dish.

Which particular cuisines you focus on and how have you seen it evolve over the years?

My focus is Japanese cuisine; Japanese cuisine is very delicate and therefore requires slow-cooking techniques for the flavors to come off beautifully.

Can you offer us examples of some innovative F&B ideas that you have implemented?

Making vegetarian rolls from Nappa and Hakusai – known as Chinese cabbage – is my own innovation.

How do you envisage the evolving role of chefs?

Time definitely does dictate changes in the trends. In the case of food, it is even more so since people are always looking to experiment with new flavours, textures and cuisines in general.

What are your observations about the evolution and developments in fine dining?

Fine-dining has always had a niche set of loyalists. With the spending capacity of people getting augmented and coupled with an urge to experience new cuisines, the scope of fine-dining will widen and its horizons will expand further.

What do feel is the biggest challenge in your professional line?

As I said, being a chef is not an easy job. To be on top of your game, you have to continuously keep chasing your dreams. ●●



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Breaking gender barriers behind bar

Sarita Sharma – Mixologist, JW Marriott Mumbai Sahar, typifies a growing breed of successful lady professionals taking up a challenging career as bartender and mixologist. In a chat with FoodService India, she recounts her experience of working in a field that is typically regarded as a male bastion and how she negotiated the barriers to emerge successful in her chosen field



Sarita Sharma



How did you come into this profession and how long have you been tending bar?

I came to know about bartending when I was a trainee at the Oberoi and handled the bar back-up. My interest developed gradually while mixing drinks. After my training, when I went back to college I found out about Flaming Trio, a bartending academy. I am from a Brahmin family and it did take time to convince my parents about taking up this passion as a future profession. But I managed and convinced them about it. I was the only girl with eight boys from my college to join the academy. It was a six months course at Flaming Trio. After the training, I worked there for five years from 2009 to 2014. In October 2014, I joined JW Marriott Sahar at the time of its pre-opening.

How does it feel working in a line that is seen as a male bastion? Do your male counterparts see you invading their turf? What are the social and professional barriers for a woman in this profession?

When I started in this profession, it was not easy. My co-colleagues used to taunt me. According to them, customers would visit me only because I happened to be a female and not because of any appreciation for my work. Eventually, I proved them wrong by showing them my quality of work.

Yes, male bartenders feel insecure because they think that the rise of female bartenders could dent the demand for male bartenders. Over the years in this profession, I keep coming across two sets of

people – those who are really happy about females working behind a bar as a good sign of progress and workplace diversity and those who are strongly opinionated about a girl working behind the bar as something that is just not right. Initially, dealing with the second set of people was difficult but I adjusted and now I feel comfortable being a part of this profession.

What did it take to establish your reputation and identity?

My relationship with the clients, their trust, and the quality of work I delivered helped me establish my own identity in this profession. This also motivated me to come to work enthused every day.

What is it about this profession that makes you happy and feel fulfilled?

I feel happy working behind the bar and preparing the best cocktails. When I see my customers happy, I feel fulfilled. I enjoy meeting different set of people and I have made a lot of friends through my profession, which also makes me feel happy and fulfilled.

What's it like being a mixologist? How does one go from being a bartender to being a mixologist?

A mixologist is someone who can customise cocktails according to the customer and be a



Which are your favourite concoctions and how do you prepare them?

My favourite concoctions and the methods of preparing them are as follows:

Namaste White Rum

- White rum: 45 ml
- Cumin seed: 1 pinch
- Curry leaves: 3 leaves
- Fresh apple juice: 30 ml
- Simple syrup: 20 ml (honey + water)
- Lime juice: 10 ml

Grape Fruit Gin & Gin

- Gin: 45 ml
- Grapefruit juice: 30 ml
- Tarragon: 2 sprigs
- Lemon juice: 10 ml
- Tonic water to top it up

Old Fashion Tadka

- Whiskey: 60 ml
- Garam masla: 2 pinch
- Maple syrup: 15 ml
- Home made bitters: 2 dash

bartender as well. Whereas, a bartender is the one who works behind the bar and mixes drinks according to the fixed recipes.

What are the ingredients you use in your cocktails? Do you have a certain philosophy when it comes to what you put in your drinks?

I always use local ingredients – fresh home grown produce, which our chefs grow at the backyard of our hotel. My philosophy for preparing cocktails is to make it simple and refreshing.

Which new concepts, innovations and experiments you have tried out that have proven successful and popular?

In terms of innovation, I am good at making twists to the classic cocktail, and home-made bitters. I work on the concept of preparing cocktails as per the season – such as summer cocktails or winter cocktails. This concept has been popular and successful throughout.

What do you think makes one a good bartender and mixologist?

Being a good bartender and mixologist is all about knowing your basics right, building good relationships when working at a bar and being good at giving a twist to the basic cocktails.

What is most challenging about what you do?

To keep up with the pace between my work and personal life is a big challenge. However, it's fun being at work and exploring different drinks. ♦♦

I always use local ingredients – fresh home grown produce, which our chefs grow at the backyard of our hotel. My philosophy for preparing cocktails is to make it simple and refreshing



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European Food Trends 2015+

'Bits over Bites': the latest study by the Zurich-based Gottlieb Duttweiler Institute (GDI) on the subject of food trends in Europe focuses on a question of strategic importance for the food and foodservice industry, namely how digitalisation is redefining food consumption. In a nutshell: where and what people eat away from home will increasingly depend on integrated order, rating and reservation systems. This is a summary of the think tank's most important findings



DIGITAL & ANALOGUE

Good food goes mainstream:

green smoothies as symbol of the new religion of eating

Smart mama:

digital assistants help rebuild trust around food

Staging culinary pleasures:

from shop to theatre

Fine canteens, food trucks and salad vending machines:

good food at work

'Google food':

and the next digital game changer is...

With time at a premium in everyday life, the average European is only too happy to make use of the enormous choice in convenience products. While this is practical, it hardly satisfies the desire for the absolute authenticity of fresh, natural, local, organic food. For this reason, supply-side science and demand-side romance long seemed to be essentially irreconcilable.

Recently, as products have improved this has been changing: convenience and take away offer organic and fresh products, and consumers themselves innovate and slip into the role of producers.

Consumers are still fundamentally sceptical, but the gap has narrowed. Consumers' demands for greater transparency have borne fruit and they are steadily learning to empower themselves by joining food cooperatives and becoming market gardeners, gardeners, chefs, providers or waste recyclers.

Chefs and producers, too, are no longer satisfied with set roles, but looking to networking and multidisciplinary interaction.

Central to this new awareness is 'good food', which many now equate with 'good living': healthy, ethically responsible and sustainable. The green smoothie is symbolic of this trend to unite the good (romance) with the practical (science) in what increasingly resembles a substitute religion that is attracting crowds of disciples in secularised, rich western cities such as Copenhagen, Vienna, Zurich, London and Milan. Church attendance is giving way to street-food festivals, veganism and locavore initiatives.

The spread of the food gospel is primarily a digital phenomenon, preached via apps, online platforms and other smart assistants. They enhance the range of eating choices and drive the unrestricted remixing of who produces, processes,

distributes and consumes what and how. This sets the stage for unprecedented distribution struggles ahead, and one of the most important will be the dash for the last mile. Whoever wins this will dominate food consumption in the future, whether in retail, gastronomy or production.

For this reason, food professionals need to understand other product developments and innovations: concepts such as Uber and Instacart also embrace and change the world of food – fundamentally.

The message for the future across the entire food value added chain is: bits over bites. For, when goods head for the customer, and no longer vice versa, software has become more important than infrastructure. This enables small providers, such as family-run restaurants, to distribute their products to a new clientele – without having to invest capital and run up debt. To win, you just need to be present on the user's smart device and aggregate and communicate the right data.

Internet giants such as Amazon and Google are already there. But young, innovative tech start-ups without inhibitions or illusions are also moving into fields formerly the preserve of producers, gastronomes and retailers. They identify gaps and optimise or replace existing products. Nothing in the existing supply chain is sacrosanct. Dynamic and flexible and with a new way of thinking, they are atomising the food industry into its smallest elements; food-delivery services are already well on the way to uberisation. These upheavals, together with the blurring and disappearance of erstwhile boundaries and barriers between industries and sectors and the growth in product diversity, will continue the drive for greater transparency. Once people are confident about this, they will experience food as a pleasure. People still long for inspiration and sensuousness.

Brick-and-mortar locations to shop and eat will, therefore, remain important even when online shopping finally becomes simpler and more enjoyable than today, more versatile and flexible, and cheaper delivery services have displaced outdated concepts. The prerequisite for shops (and restaurants), however, is to know how to combine proven strengths with new needs. Combined concepts of shops and restaurants, and of online and offline, will continue to advance. Reservation systems are already benefiting from ongoing technological innovations. In the future where people dine and what they eat will increasingly depend on systems that integrate ordering, evaluation and reservation, a 'Google Food', so to speak. This will further power the drive for transparency: as Airbnb and Uber demonstrate, such apps will enable producers, retailers, gastronomes and consumers to openly provide feedback about one another.

The basic challenge at all levels, micro and macro, will still be how to reconcile science and romance, in particular at the touch points where consumers make their decisions about food and eating. Unless established food professionals fight back, they will be swept aside by the new techies – giants like Google as well as small start-ups. ●●



European Food Trends Report. Study No. 43, GDI 2015. ISBN 978-3-7184-7097-6. Authors: Mirjam Hauser, David Boschart, Bettina Höchli, Jaël Borek, Christopher Muller. Available as pdf or hardcopy (CHF92/114) in English and German. More than 70 pages, numerous diagrams. www.gdi.ch

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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

Shipra's favourite chefs:
Nobu Matsuhisa and Heston
Blumenthal



As I do a lot of fusion cooking, I agree with the philosophy of marrying the different styles of cooking. This marriage and coming together of different styles has made an otherwise large and vast world become a smaller place for food aficionados

who is in charge. So this is not a myth but one of the greatest realities in the food business. A good chef will first create and train a team of chefs to perfection for one restaurant and then think of expanding the business with time.

Food, presentation, ambience – in today's time all the three are equally important. What's your take?

As I consult for restaurants, I recommend all the three to be balanced as they are all an integral part of the foodservice business.

As a globe trotting chef, which are your favourite cuisines?

Japanese and Peruvian. What I love about these cuisines is of course the techniques, skills, the combination of ingredients – simple or exotic, the flavours of each dish is simply mind blowing! Zuma, Coya and Nobu in London are some of the best places to experience these cuisines.

OK. How about your most inspirational dishes?

They are way too many. However, dishes that are made using authentic methods of cooking, inspire me a lot.

Who are the chefs you admire?

Nobu Matsuhisa, who is a world renowned chef known for his fusion cuisine – blending traditional Japanese dishes with Peruvian ingredients – and Heston Blumenthal, an equally acclaimed British chef and owner of one of four restaurants in Great Britain to have three Michelin stars. Skills, technique and their approach to food makes

me admire them. Whether it's a combination of ingredients and their treatment or whether it is applying scientific principles to food to make it more interesting and fun, these two masterchefs are consummate artists and they keep food lovers craving for more. They have taken food to another level, and have created many their own specialised cuisines. Then, there are a few others whom I admire for their originality and versatility.

Why is it that chefs so avowedly profess to their liking for simple home-made food despite spending their lifetime concocting lavish dishes? Isn't there an underlying hypocrisy in chefs liking home-made food for themselves and expecting more people to come and consume restaurant food?

It's purely on account of the law of having too much. As a chef, you are constantly tasting and eating lavish food and so there is a tendency to prefer softer, lighter food cooked at home to neutralise one's intake. It is like taking a break from work.

How do you see the evolving role of chefs in a changing food scenario?

Chefs have a huge responsibility when it comes to influencing food culture and trends. Whether it's bringing in new concepts or evolving the existing ones and even changing the old, chefs will have a great influence on our eating habits. For example, due to the increasing health issues coming to the fore, I really stress on healthy food habits and styles of cooking.

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Some of the restaurants I know lay their claim to fame on their exemplary pairing of modern cuisine with contemporary Indian food. What is your culinary approach and how would you describe the hallmarks of your cooking method and presentation?

As I do a lot of fusion cooking, I agree with the philosophy of marrying the different styles of cooking. This marriage and coming together of different styles has made an otherwise large and vast world become a smaller place for food aficionados. This is the trend for the future as taste buds across the world are getting more experimental and accepting, giving the way to innovation and creativity.

What are the twists you make in your recipes?

Fire and Ice! To marry extremely opposite flavours and create a distinct taste to the dish makes for a good twist with a high after-taste.

Today's generation is hungry for social networking posts and they try to find an opportunity to click their pictures with a good backdrop. So, are an aesthetically done ambience, furnishings, lighting, music, props, spacing, fragrance, paintings, décor and colours becoming more vital elements for a pleasant and memorable restaurant experience than the quality of food itself?

I disagree. It is the food first. Unless you visit a restaurant, how will you click pictures, Aspirational decor, artistic approach, etc, are all important in their own ways but they are all secondary to the food.

Today, restaurants have become multi-dimensional spaces for events and marketing events have become very important for the restaurants to attract clientele. Is it because products across restaurants are getting more and more common and indistinguishable?

Not all restaurants fall in the same slot. The work-related restraints seldom allow many of them to become multi-dimensional. Yes, as a promotion strategy, events, etc, are done to build the client base and break the monotony of just dining.

As a restaurant consultant, do you believe in organising events like book reading or yoga session, Sufi nights, DJ nights and so on and so forth?

An event is truly an event and a positive activity for a restaurant when it is not overdone. It is unique to have some activity to kill the monotony; however it can't be the basis. Also, activities should match with the profile of the place. The activity has to fit in with the brand of the restaurant. One can't do every and any activity and create a clutter of activities in the process. This creates for a confused positioning of the restaurant.

What do you feel about the future of the food industry in India and how do you see it evolving?

It has already started to evolve with new cuisines being accepted and appreciated in the metros and we are seeing these trends moving to Tier I and II cities as well. Fast food, healthy food, small bites and fine dine are all going to coexist in India as we are a continent and not a country when it comes to food preferences and tastes.

In your opinion, what is a decent profit margin for a restaurant business?

Profit margins can not be generalised. Restaurants range across various budgets, cities and clients. We can't have a thumb rule. It depends entirely on the vision of the promoters. But what I can say is that food usually follows either high volumes with thin profit margins or controlled volumes with high profit margins. But the important thing is to first build the sustainability of any restaurant.

Many hospitality entrepreneurs believe that the biggest challenge in the F&B sector is to try and make every customer happy. How do you look at it and how do you react to adverse publicity?

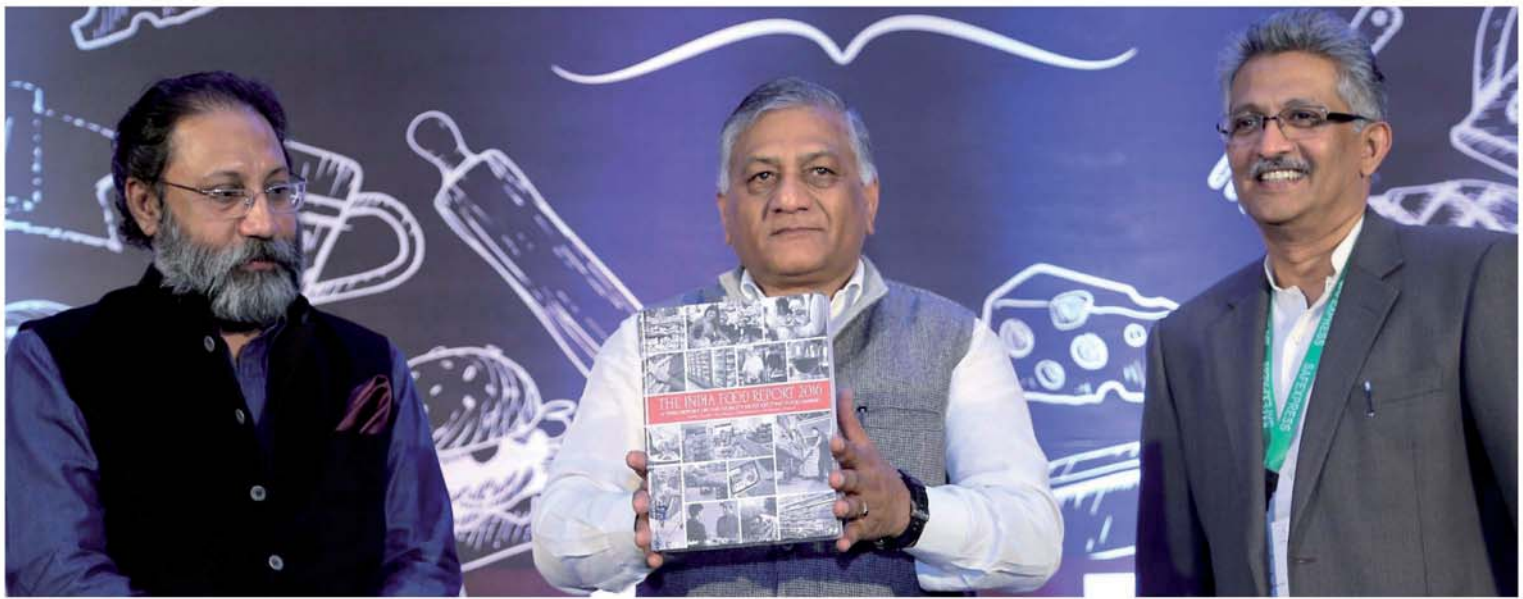
It's all part of the business.

Do you think that customers who post reviews on sites like Zomato do so without having an understanding of the nuances of cuisine? What can restaurateurs do to counter unscrupulous reviews?

You can not control a negative thought or comment. But you can definitely get feedback. One has to know that any art form is dependant on myriad opinions, which are often subjective. Thus, it is important to have a window for critical comments on movies, food, fashion, et al. One has to know

Aspirational decor, artistic approach, etc, are all important in their own ways but they are all secondary to the food





INDIA FOOD REPORT 2016

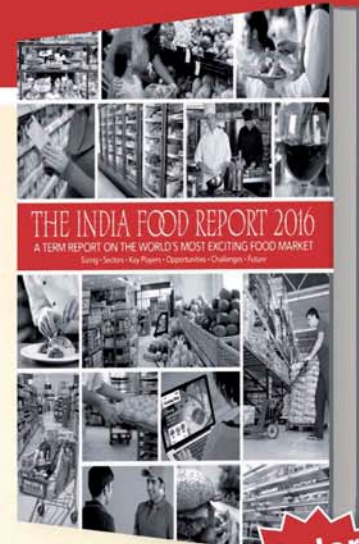
THE MOST AUTHORITATIVE GUIDE TO FOOD RETAIL MARKET IN INDIA

India Food Report 2016 was released on January 19th by General (retd.) V.K. Singh, Union Minister State for Statistics and Programme Implementation (independent charge), Minister of State for External Affairs & Minister of State for Overseas Indian Affairs.

“Indian Retail Food Market has the potential to not only double but triple in the next 4-5 years by 2020, aided by the government’s initiative to bring in systemic change, despite resistance, said the Minister at the launch of the Report.

The Report has been compiled with inputs from some of the world’s most respected consulting and/or market study organisations, retail business heads, brand analysts and consumer research companies, among others.

Organisations/industry experts who have contributed to the making of the Report include Nielsen, A T Kearney, Accenture, PWC, Technopak, IMRB, GS1, Institute for Competitiveness, IFC, Troika, PRICE, Wazir, Maple Capital Advisors, D’Essence Hospitality Advisory, IBEF, NRAI, IMT, IIM, Rama Bijapurkar, Dr. Rajesh Shukla, and Harish Bijoor to name a few.



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Food usually follows either high volumes with thin profit margins or controlled volumes with high profit margins. But the important thing is to first build the sustainability of any restaurant

when someone is being objective and have the sincerity to absorb what those opinions have to say or else just ignore them. Good food talks for itself.

How do you decide and act on changing any particular food product on the menu? How do you look at the various options of replacement and what actually goes into menu planning and development?

It all starts with first making a menu keeping in mind the availability of the ingredients and the in-demand dishes, followed by testing and tasting it in its initial stages. The key to this whole process is the chef who gets the feedback from the customers and accordingly then tweaks the recipes to the liking of the clients. A dish might not move and there could be many reasons for it, and that might include the tastes of the customers. So, at times even a superb dish might not cater to the taste buds of the visitors. In such cases, it is best to get it off the menu. Trial and Error is the reality when it comes to making a workable menu.

Which is a better approach to menu planning – having 100 dishes on the menu or just a few compelling ones. From the perception of customers, do restaurants with more number of menus score higher than a place which may have less number of dishes?

I would definitely go for a few compelling ones. However, one also needs to create more variety. Unless new dishes are available, how will the customer get to know about them and evolve to finding more than just the standard dishes. So a constant effort to introduce new recipes and make them work is a challenge but at the same time having such an approach will also ensure success at some stage.

For fine dining restaurants, is access to getting best quality international ingredients a challenge? Is it still hard to find some real good ingredients with even the best importers/vendors?

Yes, ingredients' availability and cost of procuring the ingredients is a challenge for sure. But it will change with time as it's a factor of demand and supply. The demand and consumption in India is increasing, so supply will find its way. But as of now, the scenario is definitely a challenge. One has to have enough

passion for sourcing finest international quality ingredients. Fine dine restaurants always need to go the extra mile to source such ingredients.

Why is it that home-grown restaurants have not really been able to break into the big league like many foreign restaurant chains the world over?

Primarily, there exists an extremely robust and growing market in India, and so most ventures tend to focus on catering to the domestic consumption. However, I feel the time has come where Indian chains will trend toward catering to a huge Indian origin population across the globe. Also, the global market and taste buds are now more welcoming of Indian food. Dining in chain restaurants is growing fast and it will be the chains that will expand faster.

Are the lines blurring between fine dining and newer formats such as Smart Casual and Casual-Fine Dining?

Fine Dine has a great potential in India. Location is the primary factor that will ensure the success of this format. There is plenty of talent and skill set available for this format to flourish. To maintain the distinctive edge of this format, it is important to ensure exotic and unique recipes that one can't find easily. Presentation of food and an overall experience, including ambience and service, are the other important characteristics of a fine dine restaurant.

What suggestions/advice would you give to young entrepreneurs in the foodservice business?

Be extremely cautious in going about creating a success story. Define your location, have a targeted customer base and slowly build your brand with consistent food quality. Passion is an important part of any venture and more so with food. Passion, quality and consistency along with the focus on things like hygiene are an integral part of foodservice.

How would you describe your culinary journey so far and what are your goals for the future?

The journey so far has been very interesting and challenging at the same time. It has been full of learning, experience and travel. Looking ahead, restaurants, books, travel and TV shows all are part of my future plans. ••

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Best performing technologies in F&B

Technology touches every facet of our lives. One of the places we're seeing more and more technology in use is the restaurant industry. Mobile devices on the table, online reservations, social media and new payment methods – technology has infiltrated this industry like never before. The fast-changing developments in this arena will determine the fate of many restaurants, regardless of what's on the menu.

Nivedita Jayaram Pawar spoke to industry stalwarts on the role of technology in the F&B sector and the objectives that are most important when considering investment in new technology.

How do you see the role of technology in F&B

Zorawar Kalra, Founder & Managing Director, Massive Restaurants Pvt. Ltd.:

As in any business, technology plays a crucial part in streamlining numerous processes, especially at the back-end, even in the hospitality industry. Be it procurement, supply chain management, systems alignment, payroll management, reservations, customer relationship management and so on, technology today has to offer a wide range of solutions, which helps in effective inventory management as well as managing cost efficiency.

Rahul Singh, Founder & CEO- The Beer Café:

Technology is touching every facet of our lives and more restaurants in the industry are investing in systems to increase revenues as well as provide a better dining experience to guests. In our enterprise, we have more than a dozen technology partners that work behind the scenes and manage a considerable amount of work. Technology not only helps us to complement traditional methods of operations but also makes us relevant in the ever-changing consumer world.

Sanjay Vazirani, CEO & MD of Foodlink Services India Pvt. Ltd.:

Technology plays the role of an "enabler" in F&B to improvise the way restaurants do business, be it the back-end or front of the house. The benefits come from communalisation of critical data among suppliers, manufacturers, packers, wholesalers and retailers. It means doing whatever is necessary to minimise losses, opportunity costs and using information systems as a tool. Such critical data encompasses point-of-sale information, inventory stock, demand signals, constraints and in-transit notifications. Technology also helps in the creation of binding standards and protocol for collective performance. Surrounding this central part of the technology ecosystem, you have loyalty, mobile payments, employment management, and supply chain management. However, its effectiveness depends on how much operators understand what they want and how they can utilise the technology to its optimum level.

Which are the technologies impacting F&B business?

Zorawar Kalra: If I had to select the most notable of them, it would be customer interface functions – feedback, order taking and execution and billing, apart from auditing programmes.

Rahul Singh: It’s amazing to see how technology is transforming the F&B sector. Encompassing various innovative elements such as targeted social media campaigns, digital menu boards to online ordering apps, technology is taking over the industry. Customer mapping is an emerging trend, which is gaining popularity. With the relevant software, one can track usage, customise engagement and create focused marketing strategies. Understanding and mapping customer loyalty and needs helps the brand to identify weaknesses and turn them all into a “wow” experience for the guest.

Sanjay Vazirani: Digital innovations have helped the F&B industry to focus not only on better service but also on better values. Technology has entirely changed and systemised supply chain policies, which have led to better inventory and control. Operators have got solutions to kitchen throttling, for fastening and standardising processes, and for better time management of the employees. Restaurateurs are also using options like commissaries and central kitchens, off-site call centers and second cook lines.

Technology has even led to more efficient automated guest management and relationship services. Consumer-facing technology is encroaching on the restaurant experience. Ordering, payment, reviews, loyalty – it’s all gone digital. Additional support is now possible through the convergence of mobile technology and social media, which has brought consumers closer and has made it possible for markets to understand consumer behaviour and needs better.

Tell us about how you are using technology in your F&B business.

Zorawar Kalra: Massive Restaurants has a very strong back-end management system in place.

The system comprises operational solutions like our POS systems, the material management system as well as systems supporting our payroll, finance and auditing management. All these systems being extremely crucial, they have to work in cohesion for smooth and effective daily operations of the organisation.

Rahul Singh: For our Beer Café outlets and their operations, we have partnered with i2e1. It offers instant and easy connectivity to high-speed, reliable and secure Internet services. Our aim is to build a connected ecosystem where information is available to everyone, at the right time and place, to enable better and faster decision-making.

It also helps us to track customer preferences and usage behaviour, customise promotions and advertise to frequent and infrequent customers, capitalise on the low business hour and thereby increase operational efficiency while providing customers a great beer experience!

Talview is another technology that we use for hassle-free video-based assessments in hiring. It helps with data for hiring analytics and talent engagement.

We have implemented Zomato’s point of sale system Zomato Base across all our outlets in India. By seamlessly integrating operational solutions such as menu management and remote inventory management into a single system, Zomato Base makes our day-to-day functioning incredibly efficient. This platform is built to provide real time outlet-level analytics, which allows us to plan our supply chain better and provide benefits to our guests through effective promotion and profiling. The best part is that all of this can be done remotely and in real time, which is a huge convenience for a business owner on the move.

For the consumers, we have recently introduced an augmented reality-based feature through our app and a tie up with Blippar. A first in the industry, the ‘Know Your Beer’ campaign helps beer enthusiasts to learn more about their favourite brews.

We also launched a merchandise line called ‘Beerosphere’, which comprises more than 30 products. Some of them such as Spin Chill, Sonic Foamer and Chill Puck are patented. Our app-



“ Massive Restaurants has a very strong back-end management system in place. The system comprises operational solutions like our POS systems, the material management system as well as systems supporting our payroll, finance and auditing management ”

– Zorawar Kalra
 Founder & MD,
 Massive Restaurants
 Pvt. Ltd





“ We are currently implementing the Kitchen Display System (KDS) in our restaurants, which allows kitchen orders to display on large screens as opposed to a physical kitchen printer ”

– Sanjay Vazirani
CEO & MD of Foodlink Services India Pvt. Ltd



based loyalty programme Brew Miles is another great initiative, which helps us to connect directly with consumers and keep them abreast with the latest events and developments at The Beer Café.

We also have Getsu, a peer to peer “One Click” gifting platform, which enables users to gift and receive beer from friends.

Sanjay Vazirani: At Foodlink, we make use of the best technologies to streamline deliverables, improve the supply chain tactics and scale up businesses easily with the help of advanced digital strategies. This includes software for POS, table management, reservations, ordering via tabs, guest feedback, data management, report generation, F&B and cost control. We also make use of restaurant-related technology offered by third parties for managing marketing campaigns, building sales and driving traffic, followed by consumer engagement.

What’s the one technological innovation that your business thrives on?

Rahul Singh: Customer loyalty is the single most important driver of growth and profitability. Loyalty programmes incentivise and drive beneficial customer behaviour like brand evangelism. The Beer Café app was thus designed and created to engage customers, drive loyalty and grow revenue. The user interface is clean and simple with graphics that tempt you to head on over for a chilled mug. It offers a personal channel of communication to interact with customers and

receive their feedback. We can also announce offers, menu updates, promote events, give directions to stores and monetise the brand on app via push notifications. It has over 40,000 downloads and out of which 25,000 beer enthusiasts are very active on Brew Miles. The programme is designed to reward loyal Beer Café patrons with gifts worth up to 30 per cent of the amount spent. It has been extremely successful with almost 18.2 per cent of our sales awarded in points for our guests.

The app has allowed the company to understand customer spending, redemption of points, create more accurate and targeted marketing strategies and encourage repeat visits.

Sanjay Vazirani: At Foodlink, we have deployed a full fledged enterprise resource planning software, which allows us to use a system of integrated applications to manage the business and automate many back office functions related to technology, services and human resources. Our ERP software integrates all facets of POS, material management, sales and accounting.

We are currently implementing the kitchen display system (KDS) in our restaurants, which allows kitchen orders to display on large screens as opposed to a physical kitchen printer that prints receipts. A KDS eliminates order inaccuracies. It increases kitchen efficiencies by keeping track of all of the different tickets and quickly identifies the ones that need to be prioritised. It is an effective way to make operations more efficient and move orders more quickly. It also enables an improved inventory management by allowing automatic monitoring of inventory levels and order volume.

Which tech innovations would you like to see in the near future?

Zorawar Kalra: Technology is changing with every passing second and there is improvisation happening across all platforms. While there are some extremely effective systems in place, the one thing missing is their seamless amalgamation into a single solution offering a holistic resolution.

For example, there are some extremely effective customer management and engagement systems. However, because they aren’t able to set



up a seamless collaboration with other systems for whatever reason, there is a gap in effective recording of guest preferences / history for future references. Similarly, there are gaps in collaboration among various other back-end systems as well.

Rahul Singh: More of augmented reality – I would like to see the integration of digital information with live video and user environment. By recognising a visual picture, this technology blends new information and displays the virtual result in real time, thereby producing extraordinary experiences. Having an AR platform for the restaurant helps you add more value to the customer interaction and the possibilities of adapting it are endless – from menu to specific marketing campaigns.

Sanjay Vazirani: There are already various innovations that are yet to be exploited completely and they can surely impact the business in more positive ways than we have known till now. Having said that, it'd be great to see advancement in

technology that can facilitate predictive ordering, purchase suggestivity and guidance based on guest behaviour.

Which are the important objectives when considering investment in technology?

Zorawar Kalra: The biggest objective while investing in any form of technology is that it needs to solve the purpose it is meant for, while offering end-to-end solution to the user without any hindrance.

Rahul Singh: In adopting any technology, it is important to determine whether the cost will be more than offset by the revenue increase. Once that financial calculation is found to be favourable, then consider the benefits to both the employees and customers, taking into account their perceptions of the technology's effectiveness. Without those elements in place, the technology faces dim prospects no matter what its prospective financial benefits are.

Sanjay Vazirani: One must keep in mind the cost benefits, ROI, cause and effects of using the technology, predictions for future trends and the adaptability of the technology with the ever evolving demands. ♦♦



“The Beer Café app was designed and created to engage customers, drive loyalty and grow revenue”

– Rahul Singh
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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
MD, Benefits and
Rewards Services,
Sodexo SVC





USP ZETA

Zeta is the newest portfolio company under the Direct umbrella - a prestigious tech conglomerate with a 17-year-long history and 25 software products in the market. Zeta is fundamentally in the business of disrupting the digital payment space with an aim to challenge how commerce is carried out in India. Some of Zeta's product features are:

Customisability: Its products are 100% customisable enabling companies to choose the parameters suited to their company policies.

Compliance: All its products enjoy a 100% compliance with RBI and IT norms.

One interface: Zeta offers a single digital platform for employee benefits and tax reimbursements.

Inclusivity: In terms of usage, Zeta is the most inclusive payment platform. The Zeta app can be used even without the internet. And for non-smartphone users we also have a MasterCard powered Zeta Super Card.

Digital nature: Zeta represents the first digital foray into the Employee Tax Benefits space. HR practices have for long suffered from archaic methods. With Zeta, this is set to change.

Sodexo, which is amongst the top two companies worldwide in the service vouchers and card segment industry, is no less gung-ho about its prospects in the Indian market. The organisation has a substantial grasp of the Indian market as over 6,000 firms across both the private and public sector have opted for the Sodexo meal benefit plan. Sodexo provides meal vouchers and pre-paid cards, which can be loaded with the value of meal benefit. These can be used at over 25,000 outlets across India for buying food and non-alcoholic beverages. Sodexo offers a range of services in the form of employee benefit solutions to clients and their employees. The company also gives value-added deals and promotions that the Sodexo card offers from time to time.

Mechanism for operating

Sodexo's clients agree on the eligibility per employee and place request to load cards with an amount every month or provide an equivalent value of meal vouchers. Sodexo, on most occasions, first issues pre-paid cards and then loads them monthly with the specified amount. Employees can use these cards for purchasing food and non-alcoholic beverages at any affiliated outlet of Sodexo across India. The merchants are reimbursed by Sodexo for the purchases made at their outlets as per the contract. Sodexo earns a commission on these transactions from the merchants and a commission of issuance from the clients.



In a similar fashion, Zeta charges a fee from companies in lieu of the meal voucher service. The firm levies a small fee from the merchants for a tie-up with Zeta.

A win-win

Meal benefit programmes have a far-reaching positive impact on various segments of society. Consumers across the world receive a meal benefit that can be redeemed at the restaurants of their choice, which in turn helps them improve their quality of life.

This benefit contributes significantly to the business of small merchants, who in turn are able to use that money and put it to better use.

For HR professionals, the meal benefit program is a great way to ensure that their employees eat healthy meals during work, which in turn help them to stay fit, increase productivity and remain motivated.

The role of vouchers/cards can be extended beyond its traditional usage. Government can use it for playing a larger role in the public distribution system nationwide. They can also be used for other purposeful interventions such as fulfilling mass social obligations like the alleviation of hunger amongst under-privileged sections of society,

The growth of the meal voucher business in India was until now rather stunted owing to several issues that come with distribution, management and usage of vouchers. Corporates found it extremely expensive to manage and distribute vouchers. Employees found it difficult to locate stores that accept vouchers. This often resulted in companies not offering meal vouchers as a tax benefit and employees lost out about 12,000 every year in taxes.

However, the market has developed and has immense potential to grow, with approximately only one million employees using meal vouchers in some form or the other. The possible market size is estimated at over 10 million users and companies like Zeta and Sodexo want to be the first ones to tap this goldmine with their unique offerings. ●●



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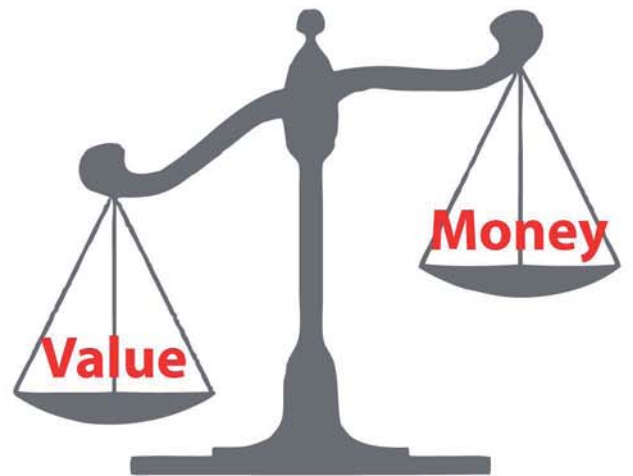


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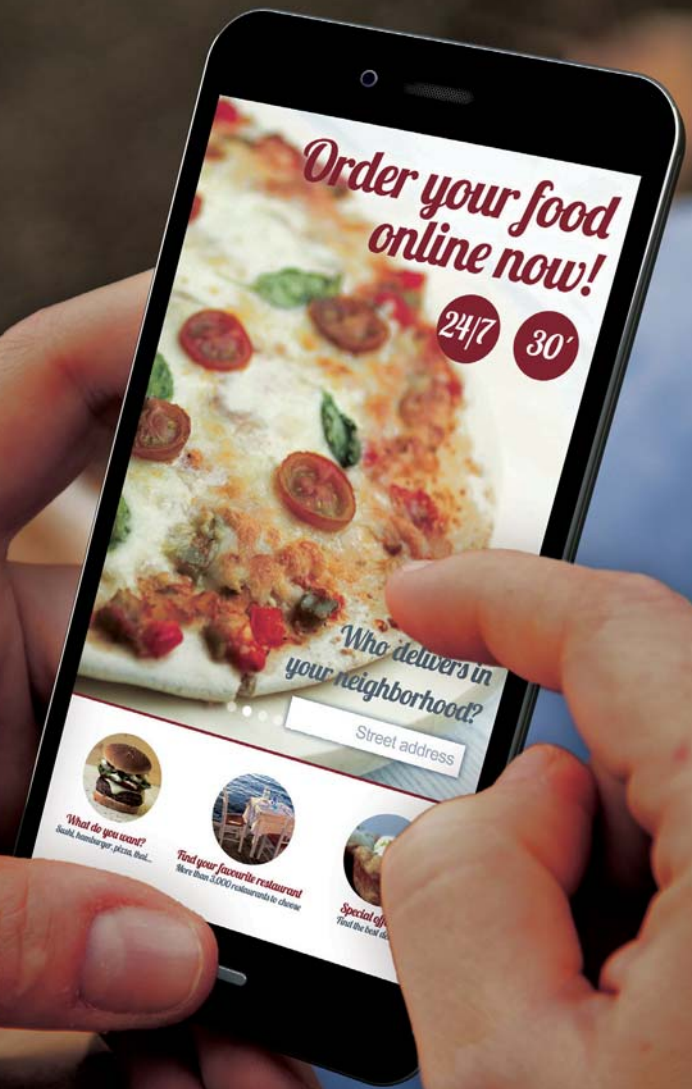


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Food on Cloud

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.



Models of Online Food Ordering

The trend of ordering food online is largely observed amongst working professionals as they have an option to order food on the internet without any hassle. It is being observed that the trend is catching up amongst rest of the food enthusiasts as well. Some of the reasons for this growing trend is that ordering food online is very consumer friendly as it allows people to enjoy the experience of having their favourite food from their favourite restaurant from within the comfort of their homes. Further, one can enjoy it without going through the waiting lines or traffic chaos that often makes the process of dining out all too cumbersome an affair.

The food habits of Indian consumers show that people love to explore all types of food and restaurants just at a click. Online food ordering portals have carefully observed this trend and are expanding their services based on ordering patterns and behaviour of food lovers in India. Here are a few online models trending on the food scene.

Restaurant Discovery model: This model is meant for listing of restaurants with details of menu, address, phone number and user reviews. But investors are losing appetite for this model. According to a report by YourStory.com, a media platform for entrepreneurs, seven food tech deals worth \$74 million fructified in April in last year. By August, the numbers had dipped to five totaling \$19 million. The following month saw only two deals, one of which involved Zomato.

Kitchen-In-The-Cloud model: In this kind of online food business model, companies don't have a physical store to take the orders. Orders are taken online and delivered at home. As the name suggests, companies have their own kitchen run by professional chefs and staffs. E.g. Eatonomist.

Discovery, Restaurant Bookings, Deals model: This model provides listing of restaurants with booking and deal discovery. It is mainly focused on wooing consumers to restaurants. E.g. Easy Dinner.



Restaurant Aggregation and Food ordering model:

Companies working on this business model not only aggregate restaurants on their platforms but take orders for home delivery as well. E.g. Food Panda.

Chef/Home-chef Marketplace: Start-ups promote home-chefs and professional chefs on their platforms. E.g. Bite Club.

Ready-to-Cook: Food companies working in this model pack the raw ingredients for a recipe and dispatch it to a consumer who wants to cook. E.g. Cook Gourmet.

What is Kitchen on Cloud Model?

Kitchen on Cloud is a type of food outlet where food is prepared in an authentic way following all food safety standards. You need to tap only a few clicks on your mobile or PC for the food to be delivered at home within the minimum time and with the same taste, quality and hygiene as maintained by any 5 star hotel. Since Cloud Kitchen has no facility other than providing food, so the focus remains on food preparation and its quality. Price cut is obvious in this model as there is no investment on infrastructure or ambience, etc. The characteristics or specialities of a Cloud Kitchen are:

- Easy ordering, food is only few clicks away.
- A-Grade food is now available at nominal price.
- Attracting customers through eye catching packaging.
- Healthy and calorie counted gourmet meals are offered.
- Providing a quality food guarantee.
- Invite to customers take a kitchen tour to get an idea of how food is prepared.
- Customer interactive menus are easily available.
- Now customer can directly reach the chef.
- No coins required, pay online and get confirmed delivery.

How Cloud Kitchens are Beneficial for Food Lovers

As we know, the food craze is increasing and people are looking to find suitable places where they can get authentic delicious food within nominal prices. Also, there are some families who are afraid of ordering food from outside, fearing that it would burn a hole in their pocket. Cloud Kitchens have made it easy to order food either for any occasion or for any special day. People can explore different cuisines at nominal prices and celebrate their day foodie style. The unique thing about the model is that the customers can get their food at their home in the shortest time, which can't be fulfilled by restaurants other than Cloud Kitchens.

Looking at these driving forces of the online food ordering industry, there is no denying that it holds a significant potential in taking the Indian food industry to the next level. With online food portals also getting greater response from food lovers, it seems the online food ordering industry is here to stay. It is going to boom in the coming years and its success will continue to grow in the near future too! ●●

Nowadays, the online food market has 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 total traffic with the increased internet and smartphone penetration. There is a huge potential that lies in Tier-II and Tier-III cities as well



Anisha Dhar



Nupur Khanna

The writers are Co-founders of Eatonomist, an online food-tech venture that delivers meals prepared at its kitchens



Tech's Impact

on the Restaurant Industry

The use of technology is critical for all restaurant owners – both from revenue generation and cost optimisation perspectives. Technologies have emerged in recent times that make businesses more efficient. While most restaurateurs are aware of this fact, and some are even effectively using these technologies, there is a large untapped potential in this area

by Samir Kuckreja

There are three ways for restaurateurs to increase their revenue – get new customers, increase their spends and get them to visit more regularly. The retention of customers is very important due to the intense competition in all segments of the industry. Restaurants should use technology available in terms of Customer Relationship Management Systems (CRM), Customer Acquisition Platforms such as Zomato and other aggregators, Customer Engagement through social media, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and other relevant applications.

Events are a powerful tool to use for generating traffic to establishments. These could be a mix of food-focused events, entertainment related (music / theatre/ comedy/ art), celebrity visits and other relevant occasions. For these events, one needs to reach out to the right target consumer by leveraging the customer data base and using relevant social media and appropriate technology platforms.

It is important to understand the occasion for visits, persons accompanying the customers and time for the visit. Profiling your customers, their choices and meal preferences, preferred server and tastes – all will just enhance the relationship that one has with the customers. It will lead to a successful retention rate, increased spending and additional footfall from their recommendations to friends and colleagues.

Casual and fine dining restaurants have started to increasingly use table reservations and management. There are various technology platforms available: Zomato Book, Eat2Eat, Book your Table, In Resto and others. The key is for the operators to find the most suitable and cost-effective technology for their concept. There is a great opportunity to provide better customer service through detailed information on their preferences and also to target them for relevant marketing promotions.



Samir Kuckreja



Restaurants need to use their customer data including ordering patterns, personal preferences, and celebration related data more efficiently and effectively. Data should be used for targeted marketing based on consumer behaviour patterns



data in clusters. Restaurant owners need to respond to customer feedback on social media on a “real time” basis. There are technology solutions available to consolidate customer feedback on multiple platforms and aggregators, including Nifty Window.

Some interesting technology lead innovations that are being effectively used in other countries are “wait buzzers” used by Applebee’s in the US to inform customers when tables are ready at restaurants with long waiting lists; “order alert” gadgets to inform customers when their orders are ready at Food Courts in the UK; “electronic bells” to call servers to the table at Yo Sushi in the UK and “Tablets” to review menus and place orders at restaurants in the US. Indian F&B operators should look at implementing these innovative technologies in their restaurants.

Technology is thus an absolutely essential element for a restaurant owner. The power of technological platforms and solutions needs to be harnessed effectively for enhancing revenue, optimising cost, and increasing customer satisfaction. ••

Point of sales systems (POS) are another very crucial element of technology used by restaurants. Leading players include Shawman, IDS, Micros, Zomato Base and others. Operators need to work on using the data intelligence and reporting available from the POS systems to make their restaurants run more efficiently. This technology should also be used for analysing menu trends, pricing, inventory, purchase pricing, food cost and other relevant factors. Cloud-based POS applications are becoming more common, which allow staff to process orders, bookings and payments directly from a tablet. This affords them greater mobility and adds another level of convenience for the customer. Optimisation of key costs, including food & beverage, labour, utilities and marketing, can be done through the intelligent use of technology.

Customer relationship management (CRM) softwares are crucial as they enable brands to “mine” their database and create stronger relationships with customers, which help to improve the frequency of visits and enable e-mail and SMS marketing. Marketing automation allows personalised e-mails to be sent to customers based on their consumption habits. A basic example is to automatically send a discount e-mail to customers on their birthdays and anniversaries. Restaurants need to use their customer data including ordering patterns, personal preferences, and celebration-related data more efficiently and effectively. Data should be used for targeted marketing based on consumer behaviour patterns. This is a very effective way of reaching out to consumers with promotions that would interest them.

Customer feedback is an essential part of the business. It is beneficial to use a technology platform for taking customer feedback and responding to the same. Brands like Mobikon help with consumer engagement and provide intelligent marketing solutions, take consumer feedback and record their

Samir Kuckreja is the Founder & CEO of Tasanaya Hospitality – a boutique consulting company, www.tasanaya.com



“By 2017, our target is ₹30 crore from seven outlets”

Saurav Sharma, Managing Director, KDR Foods & Beverages Pvt Ltd, which currently operates three restaurants in Delhi-NCR under the brand 'Chutneez' and plans to have 15 outlets under eight different brands by 2018, speaks to FoodService India about the significance of matching format styles to different locations and target audiences in the restaurant business and about his new bar Drinks at Stake, which is themed on the concept of a stock exchange



Saurav Sharma

How many restaurants are you operating currently, where, and which formats?

Currently, I am operating three restaurants under the brand 'Chutneez', and all these are located in East Delhi. It is a neighbourhood resto-bar, with good Indian food, pocket friendly booze, good music and much more. Apart from that, very soon we are coming up with a new place - 'Drinks at Stake' in Punjabi Bagh. This will be a bar exchange, one of its kind in West Delhi. We will be launching it on 16th July. Besides, in 2017, we are coming up with three more restaurants with different formats and in different parts of Delhi/NCR.

What is your market positioning, your USP and customer value proposition?

Our strategies are different for our various ventures/brands and for different areas. For me, site selection is very important. One format can work good in a particular area but might not do that well in some other. We make sure that we open a place for a particular target market. Also, my team work really hard in developing the menu in accordance with the area. We try really hard that every customer should feel satisfied not only in terms of the food taste or service wise, but also by feeling that everything is rightly priced. We make sure that we give different experience in terms of

food, ambience, presentation, and music in our different brands.

What is your sales split for sit-ins, takeaways and delivery and what are your initiatives to ramp up sales in all these segments?

All our restaurants have good sitting spaces and we focus on innovative dining concepts so that we don't lose our focus. For Drinks at Stake, we have plans for making its presence felt on online mediums. These days online marketing has gained a lot of importance. When Drinks at Stake will be launched, people will witness the next level of food and beverage innovations. From taste to ingredients to presentations.

What is your value-for-money proposition for diners and which are your key customer demographics?

I feel regardless of what you do, you get to have bigger competitors. Usually, one or two of them are clear market leaders. Of course, their continued success isn't about luck. Instead, they have the best value propositions and they know how to use them. So we make sure that everything we sell is appropriately priced. We majorly cater to the youth, and hence our focus is on best of food, services, music, innovative cocktails & ambience and pocket-friendly pricing.



Food, presentation, ambience – in today’s time all three are equally important. How have you woven these elements and others in your restaurant business?

I feel along with good food, its presentation, ambience of the place and good music are equally important. As people not only come to cafés just to have good food, they want to enjoy good music, dance and have a great time. Our functional restaurants and the new ones revolve around this mantra. Drinks at Stake has interiors inspired from a stock exchange office. The presentation of every dish and cocktails are inspired from that only. I am very sure that the people of Delhi will love it.

Are an aesthetically done ambience, furnishings, lighting, music, props, spacing, fragrance, paintings, décor, colours become more vital elements for a pleasant and memorable restaurant experience than the quality of food itself?

People now want the best of everything – best of food, presentation, music, events, ambience and economical pricing. We too aim to offer our customers the best of all. Moreover, times have changed. Social media has become a part and parcel of our lives now. Besides, with so much advancement, people love concept-based restaurants. Every place has its own story and every aspect must reflect the same. This is what we try and infuse in our restaurants.

But whatever it takes, the quality of food is and will always be the backbone of a successful restaurant.

Today, restaurants have become multi-dimensional spaces for events and marketing events have become very important for restaurants to attract clientele. Is it because products across restaurants are getting more and more common?

Until a few years ago, we did not see artists



perform live in cafés, but now customers want such experiences everytime they visit. Now people want something new happening every time they come to a restaurant. You have to do something unique to attract the clientele by organising events and artist performances.

Having said that, I also feel that nothing is permanent, and people get bored of extant trends before moving to new ones. Then we will have to think of something else. But yes, at the moment, marketing events are very important.

In your opinion, what is a decent profit margin for a restaurant business? What is the turnover from your current slate of restaurants?

I would say 30-35 per cent yearly of your total investment for a particular outlet is a good number. My company has a turnover of Rs. 8.5 crore from three outlets. By the end of 2017, our target is to make it Rs. 30 crore from seven outlets.

From the perception of customers, do restaurants with more number of menus score higher than a place which may have lesser number of dishes?

For me having 100 dishes on the menu is never a good idea. We put only those things in our menu of which we are confident about. But yes, the new generation loves to experiment. They don’t want the usuals. They want molecular gastronomy, mix-n-match of different cuisines. So, we too have to keep on changing the menu from time to time.

In terms of your investment and expansion plans, what are your short-term and long-term goals?

After the launch of Drinks at Stake, we are planning to open three new cafés. We are in talks with some investors too. If everything goes as per planned, by 2018 our company will have 15 outlets under 8 different brands.

How are you bringing technology to bear on your logistics, supply chain and innovation?

We use softwares for billing, inventory control and similar operations. Menus are digital these days. Drinks at Stake is a bar exchange, so a lot of technology is used to fluctuate the prices of liquor every second on the basis of demand & supply. People check apps like Zomato to check out the place before coming. Then they use some other app to reserve a table or get an offer. When they come, they use Facebook or Instagram to share photos. We take their reviews on our back-end apps on tablets. Then again, customers use apps to pay and then review us. So, I feel technology has become an integral part of the F&B system. ●●

We make sure that everything we sell is appropriately priced. We majorly cater to the youth, and hence our focus is on best of food, services, music, innovative cocktails & ambience and pocket-friendly pricing





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



"Going by market trends – individuals and families prefer eating out as it's a form of entertainment. The F&B industry is a vibrant industry, yet for a standalone offering a variety in foods - local tastes mixed with global textures – we foresee higher growth in terms of increased footfalls and revenues," says Sudhir Ahuja of Bakstage, a rock pub with world cuisine influences, a unique alcohol menu and a signature range of cocktails.

Location is the biggest advantage for Aauris, a venture of Modern Group of Companies. Says its spokesperson Ankur Salim Siddiqui: "Our biggest strength is our locational advantage. We are situated right in the heart of the city. We offer 5 star facilities and comfort at 4 star pricing, making fine dining affordable. We take pride in the various food & beverage outlets that we have to offer to our guests. Our properties include Black – a Lounge Bar which is a high end night club. Then there is Black Sky Bar- an open air roof top lounge as the name suggests. Blu, a 24x7 multi-cuisine coffee shop, Bisque, an exquisite banquet with all the state-of-the- art facilities and Scarlet, which is our lobby level coffee lounge."



Previously only Park Street was the sole dine out destination of the city, but over the past 15 years each pocket of Calcutta has evolved as a dining destination, specially south Calcutta

are eating out. A perceptible shift is seen in ordering food online; in fact there is business in standalone food joints and catering and they are more profitable than hotels nowadays because of the fact that a huge amount of taxes is involved and the man power costs are tremendous."

Talking about why his restaurant stands out in the crowd Shiladitya Chaudhury of Platter Hospitality says: "Our menu is well researched and extensive. Both our outlets boast of a period look, recreating the 16th century feel. Our target audience is the aspirational middle class and we position ourselves as a standalone 5-star dining experience. For the average middle class, Five star dining is an ambition. And with the prices we offer, we want to make it a habit for the middle class to go for quality dine out frequently." "We position our restaurants as period destinations. It's not just about food; it's an overall experience – the cuisine, presentation, ambiance, and music. For all this retro is a genre we chose. It is like recreating a period," he adds.

National and International Brands In Kolkata

In the last 5-7 years, Kolkata has seen the emergence of many international and national chains of food outlets. Earlier, there was a misconception that the Kolkata public retrospected a lot before spending money on costly and experimental food. However, now this concept seems outdated as there is a steady influx of such branded food chains. And since 2010, many national and international chains have made a steady and successful foray into the franchise restaurant business in Kolkata. Some of the brands that have made a mark and are continuing to flourish in Kolkata are Don Giovanni's, KFC, Domino's Pizza, Pizza Hut, McDonald's, Subway, Wow Momo!, Monginis, Chatar Patar, Cafe Chokolade, Hoppipola, Baskin Robbin's, Gelato Italiano, Pabrai's Fresh and Naturelle Ice Cream, Chili's, Mainland China, Cafe Mezzuna, Cookie Jar, Cafe Coffee Day, Cookie Man, Barcelos, Cinnabon, Auntie Annes, Biscotti, The Irish House and many other well known brands. All of them have seen



super successful launches and have been doing a roaring business in the apparently stagnant economy of Kolkata.

"Predominantly Bengalis are great connoisseurs of food. Quintessential Bengalis are great foodies. Over the years, dining out has increased a lot, which at one point of time was only an aspiration. The trend has changed over the years. Previously only Park Street was the sole dine out destination of the city, but over the past 15 years each pocket of Calcutta has evolved as a dining destination, specially south Calcutta," says Shiladitya Chaudhury.

Mohit Harlalka, Partner Fly Kouzina says: "Having an innovative theme attracts people. The global cuisines being offered, the super friendly customer service and high food quality standards make customer attainment easy. Serving vegetarian lovers an international palate in Kolkata gives us an edge." "Kolkataans are pre-dominantly street food lovers, so the penetration of organised food retail is at its nascent stage, which gives us immense opportunity to explore. We firmly believe there is a lot more ground to be covered in terms of serving different concepts to the city," he adds.

His words are echoed by Anirban Sengupta of What's Up Cafe. "What's Up is all about a hard to forget experience. The ambiance, the spectacular greenery of the lakes and the majestic south Kolkata skyline view it offers from the terrace sets the tone, which is aptly complimented by delectable international cuisine prepared by an expert team of chefs who have travelled around the world, and served by handpicked servers who are smart, friendly and courteous. We love to pamper our guests and give them a 5 star experience – the Jacuzzi on the terrace where one can dip their feet while enjoying their meals / drinks or the full body massage chairs where a guest can just sit and enjoy a blissful massage while waiting for his / her table are the elements that have taken the What's Up experience beyond the ordinary."

"There are a lot of positives in the F&B market now. With the kind of F&B start-ups we have seen in the past couple of years, we are bound to see a lot of innovation and a lot of western concepts coming to India. This region has been more or less un-touched in the past, so it gives a lot of scope to

catch up with the rest of the country. We will now see more small start-ups popping up everywhere. I am hoping to see a lot of new concept-based properties coming up in the near future," says Ankur Salim Siddiqui of Modern Group.

Restaurant Categories in Kolkata

A report by the London-based global management consulting group A.T. Kearney has named Kolkata as one of the three fastest growing cities in India. The parameters used to judge the cities based on the Global Cities Index (GCI) are political engagement, cultural experience, information exchange, human capital and business activities. Another happy point is that the GDP of West Bengal has surpassed that of many other states and is currently hovering around 7.15 per cent. Considering the statistics, it is no wonder that the restaurant industry is booming in Kolkata.

The best thing about the restaurant boom in Kolkata is that all types of formats are finding traction. So which are the segments in the restaurant business witnessing a healthy growth in the past years and in the years to come? Well they are Fast Food, Fine Dining, Casual Dining and Cafes. "As per a recent USDA report on Indian food service sector, India witnessed a surge in the number of its casual dining and quick service restaurant outlets over the past several years. In terms of market segments, QSR and CDR formats account for 74 per cent of the total market, while cafes make up 12 per cent, and fine dining and PBCL comprise the remaining 14 per cent.

"From the report, the opportunity for our format is apparent and huge. Nearly 32 per cent of the Indian population is urban and 65 per cent of the population is under 30 years old and it is this group who are the largest consumers of casual café style dining. Moreover, this group has the necessary exposure and is health conscious. In short, we cater to the right category of spenders and hence the growth opportunities are immense," says Debraj Dey, Partner, What' Up Café.

Sourav Jalan, Partner, Fly Kouzina adds: "We are expecting the industry to grow at 20-25 per cent year on year. Moreover we have been witnessing a unique trend in the market that during the non-peak time there is a huge demand

A.T. Kearney has named Kolkata as one of the three fastest growing cities in India. Another happy point is that the GDP of West Bengal has surpassed that of many other states and is currently hovering around 7.15 per cent. Considering the statistics, it is no wonder that the restaurant industry is booming in Kolkata



Ankur Salim Siddiqui
Aauris Hotels

for small get-togethers of home makers (ladies). So in order to get a big pie of this market, we keep coming up with unique schemes and promotions, the latest being our discount offer that is equal to the number of ladies present in the get together. It has been well taken by our patrons. "

Fast Food: With a fast life becoming the norm for the young and middle aged Indians and equally for the Kolkata dwellers, the concept of consuming fast food at the drop of a hat at highway eateries, shopping malls, metro stations, multiplex complexes, and even in the choc-a-bloc office blocks is becoming extremely common, easy and popular. The fast food outlets like Domino's Pizza, KFC, Subway or even Pizza Hut are concentrating on Indianising the menus and introducing breakfast menus. The initiative has been taken especially for the vegetarian Indians and the fast food joints are not focused on publicising their meat menu to negate the risk of putting off the strictly vegetarian crowd who constitute a large part of Kolkata's population. Rather, the emphasis is on serving tasty food that can be enjoyed even on the go. Domino's Pizza has introduced the sit-and-eat formats and has also positioned its fast food outlets as weekend destinations for family outings.

Fine Dining: The concept of fine dining has also got a shot in the arm with the constant and consistent opening of high end restaurant options in the Kolkata market. Most of them are in the 5 star rated properties and happily, there is no dearth of takers for the expensively priced menu on offer. The addresses speak for themselves and the best fine dining options include Zen - The Park, Waterside Cafe - Hyatt Regency, Peshawari - ITC Sonar, Alfresco - The Lalit Great Eastern, Sonargaon - Taj Bengal, Aaheli - The Peerless Inn, Eden Pavilion - ITC Sonar, Cafe Swiss - Swissotel, Chinoiserie - Taj Bengal, Durbari - Swissotel, Buzz - The Gateway Hotel, Pan Asian - ITC Sonar, The Square - Novotel, Guchhi - Hyatt Regency, La Cucina - Hyatt Regency, Souk - Taj Bengal, Baan Thai - The Oberoi Grand, Dum Pukht - ITC Sonar, Studio - The Pan-Asian Gallery - Novotel, La Terrasse - The Oberoi Grand, Oceanic -

The Peerless Inn, West View Bar & Grill - ITC Sonar, The Oriental Express- Hotel Hindusthan International, The Legacy Grill - The Lalit Great Eastern, Grill by the Pool - Taj Bengal and others.

Besides, several stand-alone restaurants like Mainland China, Bombay Brasserie, Yauatcha, Café Mezuanna have become equally popular in the City of Joy. Talking about the huge opportunity in the sector, Sudhir Ahuja of Bakstage says: "The foodservice market has seen a tremendous change in the last decade. Today, going out and dining is common, be it meeting for a kitty party, a play date or hanging out with friends. With the advent and growth of the IT sector, we see a lot of young professionals coming to relax over a chilled drink and a soothing ambience."

"The food market in the east, as compared to Mumbai or Delhi or even a Bangalore, is still a developing market. Kolkata has just started getting adventurous and has started taking risks of getting new brands and outlets into the city. Being the cultural capital of India, Kolkata always had the best mix of authentic Bengali cuisine - the English Anglo Indian cuisine, the new age Marwari cuisine and a dynamic culture of street chatpata foods. Even after so much, the city has always been very traditional with its approach to opening more F&B retail outlets. But the dynamics are changing and the new age entrepreneurs are getting the city on the culinary map of India," adds Ahuja.

Casual Dining: The global quick service restaurant (QSR) and casual dining restaurant (CDR) business has seen a huge spurt in Kolkata. The old and new names to reckon with in this segment are Peter Cat, Arsalan, Chowman, Oudh 1590, Santa's Fantasea, Spice Kraft, Hakuna Matata, Barbeque Nation, Blue And Beyond (one of the best open air restaurants in Kolkata), 6 Ballygunge Place, Hatari, Wasabee, Benjarong...well the list is quite endless. The best thing is that a food lover will not have to travel all the way to Park Street or even make the trip to a mall to have a casual dining experience. Rather the Rashbehari Connector and the Sarat Bose Road stretch have seen a spurt of innumerable restaurants, which have taken the load off Park Street in recent years.

Fast food outlets like Domino's Pizza, KFC, Subway or even Pizza Hut are concentrating on Indianising the menus and introducing breakfast menus. Fast food joints are not publicising their meat menu to offset the risk of putting off vegetarians

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While quick service restaurants dominate market share, casual dine-ins / café are growing rapidly and now contribute roughly 30 per cent of the market

"We occupy a melange of a stand-alone, fine dining and casual dining outlets. Players who embrace the organised market will be the ones with less risk appetite in my opinion as there is a set format in the organised market with little to no scope of innovation. These players can enter the F&B market with a safety net of a set menu, set social media campaigns and set events," believes Sudhir Ahuja of Bakstage.

"The scope of food service operations across east India is immense – QSRs, fun dining cafes, bakeries and fine dining have all mushroomed over the years and there's room for everyone to grow as long as they offer a superior customer experience. While Quick Service Restaurants dominate market share, casual dine-ins / café are growing rapidly and now contribute roughly 30 per cent of the market. We currently are in the casual dine in sector," says Anirban Sengupta of What's Up café.

Cafes: Be it the old Coffee House of College Street or the new fangled and swanky ones like Barista, The Bikers Cafe, The Tea Trove, Mocha, Cha Bar, The Shack Lounge, Chai Break, Wise Owl or The

Royal Bengal Tiger Cafe, the concept of indulging in a fun filled and bonhomie laced discussion is something the Bengali and Kolkata crowd can very well relate to. Therefore, the influx of the cafe culture is a welcome activity. Another reason why Kolkata is a go-to destination for entrepreneurs wanting to open a restaurant is because eating out in Kolkata is much cheaper when compared to cities like Delhi and Mumbai. However, that has not stopped the Kolkatans from spending lavishly on the expensive restaurants that are opening dime a dozen in the city.

Factors Driving Food Service Industry in Kolkata

Disposable Income: With the rise in educational standards, the annual income of the middle and upper middle class is also increasing day by day. That in turn has given rise to disposable incomes for these two segments of the society. For them, spending a little extra money on consuming food that is different from their daily food habits is not a big issue. In fact, consumers are now spending as much as 51 per cent of their income on food products and that is huge shift from the earlier mindset.

Food Habits: Earlier, the Bengali society was primarily a joint family structure. However, now the food habits have also changed because of changed family structures. Families consist of 3 or 4 members only and the focus is on convenience. This has again led to higher instances of eating out and the trend of take-away and home delivery is on the rise. The Kolkata foodie is now well travelled and have tasted world cuisines. They are also open to experimenting with the global cuisine that has pervaded the Kolkata food scene in the recent years.

Youth and Food: India currently has a population of 1.2 billion with a substantial part of them being youth. A large number of them is in the eastern region, West Bengal and Kolkata. Therefore, the region and the urbanized citizenry is a large consumer market in the country. Kolkata has a huge population of young crowd and the majority of them eagerly consume fast food. Therefore, a big driver for the food industry in Kolkata is people between the age group of 18 - 40 years. In short, it is the appetite and commensuration deep pockets of the young Kolkata crowd that is a key driver in the growth of the industry.

Working Women: Women in India form around 25 per cent of the workforce and a major proportion of them are in the Metro city and consequently a large part of them belong to Kolkata. The unmarried women or wives and mothers are juggling the dual roles of managing their home and job. In this hullabaloo, it is not possible for the working women to spend a substantial amount of time in the kitchen and prepare elaborate meals for themselves or the family. These working women are using their disposable incomes for



take-away or to buy ready-to-eat or prepared foods. These can ease the load on the women after they go home from a hard day's work. Moreover, the women are now economically independent and that has increased the incidence of eating out with the family and it is the women who are sponsoring it along with the man of the house.

Problems Faced by the Food Service Industry

In the recent years, the food service industry in the country as well as in West Bengal has encountered various problems like

- Lack of adequate and skilled manpower
- Increasing taxation
- Licensing issues
- Lack of quality infrastructure
- High real estate cost

Lack of skilled manpower: The single biggest challenge faced by the food service industry in Kolkata is the lack of skilled manpower in adequate numbers. The attrition rate is extremely high and can even hover between 25 per cent to 50 per cent. In the restaurant business, manpower is required at every level and one needs chefs, managers and waiters and support staff.

Human interface is of paramount importance in the industry and the staff should have adequate soft skills and industry skills. The customers who patronize a fine dining restaurant or an expensive cafe expects, demand and hope for services that compensate them for the amount they spend at the destination of their choice. The staff thus should have skill sets which cater to these demands.

Sadly, Kolkata lacks in good institutes that can cater to these basic and highly required skill sets in the food service industry. There is an urgent and imperative need to create more trained professionals for the industry.

Increasing taxation: The worst part of the taxation system that it is done at multiple sources and levels. The taxes include VAT, excise tax and service tax. While these are applicable country wise, West Bengal - just like the other states levy a state tax of its own. Imposition of so many tax components often prove to be deterrent for eating out as it adds to the overall cost. Sandeep Basu, general manager of Jameson Inn says: "Tax is one of the challenges and government has to look on it as because of taxes people have stopped going to the hotels. Every financial year more and more taxes are being added up which is actually a big challenge for the hospitality industry. Apart from this it is for sure the industry is growing."

Licensing issue: Obtaining the requisite licenses that are required to venture in the food service industry often pose some difficulty. These licenses include food safety license, health license, No Objection Certificate, NOC from the fire department and the state pollution control board, police license, etc. Obtaining all these can be a major obstacle which may hinder the operation of



Top to bottom:
Mohit Harlaka and
Rishi Singhal, Fly Kouzina
Sudhir Ahuja, Bakstage
Gul Ahuja, Bakstage

a newly opened restaurant. Currently, the process is not centralized and to obtain the licenses, one requires filing applications with individual stakeholders. This again involves too much of paperwork and is a time-consuming activity.

Lack of quality infrastructure: In West Bengal, there is a persistent problem of lack of appropriate infrastructure. Sometimes, the technology is inadequate and the non-integration of the food value chain leads to the wastage of nearly 30-40 per cent of prepared food across all the food chains.

High real estate cost: In the last 5 years, the real estate price and rent has sky rocketed to astronomical levels. This in turn has affected the profitability of a store. Therefore, this is negatively impacting the food service industry in Kolkata. However, the brighter side is that many restaurants are now moving away from the established food street of Kolkata and expanding to other areas like the E.M Bypass, Salt Lake and even to the fringe areas of the city.

"Everyday is a challenge. The business of F&B is all about detailing. God is in details. It's through a constant process of upgrading ourselves by means of training the Service boys, kitchen guys; and keeping a check on quality, hygiene & raw materials," Shiladitya Chaudhury, Partner Platter Hospitality.

"The service tax and vat structure is increasing, which is affecting the customers. I think the concerned authorities should keep a check on this," he adds.

"Lack of trained manpower, high staff turnover, availability of quality raw materials throughout the year and thus standardization of service



Shiladitya and Debaditya Chaudhury
Platter Hospitality

and quality are the key challenges facing our business," says Debraj Dey of What's Up Café.

"Low rentals are the key. We got to keep the recurring expense as low as possible. We always believe that high rentals (Malls) do not guarantee you of high income and footfall," believes Mohit Harlarka of Fly Kouzina. According to him one of the biggest challenges is procuring various licenses required to run a restaurant. "Meanwhile keeping all the babus happy is an enormous task. We hope we can have a one window system for all licenses. In operations, we got to keep a check on the attrition, as poaching is super common in this line of business," he adds.

"In Eastern India people have more loyalty towards a neighborhood restaurant and cafes over multinational foodservice chains because of personal touch of the management and customization of food according to the personal preference," he further adds.

Sudhir Ahuja of Bakstage says: "Well, challenges would be the regular ones faced by the F&B industry. Large number of licenses is needed to operate without a single window of clearance, instead its multiple. Added to that there are issues of high level of levied taxes, increasing real estate costs and difficulty in finding trained managerial and non managerial personnel."

"Kolkata is a very small and price oriented market. We always have to be on our toes to drive Business. Here the establishment is much more in number than the demand," says Ankur Salim Siddiqui of Aauris Hotel.

Evolution in the Food Service Market

Nowadays, technology is being used extensively in the food service industry for various purposes and that has made eating out and delivery hassle free. Some innovative and recent uses of technology are as follows.

CRM Systems: Recently, a lot of emphasis is being put on the Customer Feedback System that comes with dedicated CRM systems. The restaurants are favouring it and the system is now accepted by most of the restaurants in the organised sector. For example, in Kolkata, at café chain Piccadilly Square, the moment the customer is served the bill he/she receives an online feedback form, which when filled gives the customer 10 per cent discount on the next purchase. This, for sure, enhances customer participation and engagement.

Mobile Apps: Mobile Application Development is a new trend, which is largely used in the QSR segment. It is used for taking orders on mobile apps. Here the input, i.e. orders and address is typed by the customer and so the chances of error are less or even nil. The demand for such apps is increasing day by day and currently the opportunity in the segment is huge and the prospects are bright. A digital menu is also offered and it is directly linked to the kitchen. Besides, more and more restaurants are using the social media to reach out to customers.

GPS Delivery System: The GPS system is in great use nowadays and is being used by restaurants in order to enable quick and easy delivery.

Mobile Point of Sale (MPOS): Mobile Point of Sale (MPOS) enables the customer to pay for an order by using debit/credit cards instead of cash on delivery. Nowadays, plastic money is more in use and MPOS is the ideal solution for that.

"Internet and Digital technology have influenced all aspects of life today and the food service sector is no different. Customers use apps like Zomato



Customers use apps like Zomato / Trip Advisor / Just Dial to research restaurants before they visit and most of the time they base their decisions on the reviews they see



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Guests come to a café for an overall entertaining experience. Every café hosts events like live performances / table games / interactive learning sessions like wine tasting, etc, which can be marketed not only through conventional media but through the use of interactive media like FB, Twitter, What's Up, YouTube, etc

/ Trip Advisor / Just Dial to research restaurants before they visit and most of the times base their decisions on the reviews they see. Even online delivery groups like Swiggy, Pickji have helped the food service industry by bringing them closer to their customers," says Debraj Dey, Partner, What's Up café.

"In today's tech savvy world managing social media is one of the biggest challenge and an opportunity as well," says Saurav Jalan, Partner, Fly Kouzina, adding that investing in the right technology is a must for restaurateurs.

"Food appeals to three basic sensory organs – eye, nose and tongue. Therefore, first comes the presentation of food. In our lingo, we call it 'plating'. We use mostly digital media to showcase food presentation – Pinterest, Instagram can be very good mediums," he opines further.

Guests come to a café for an overall entertaining experience. Every café hosts events like live performances / table games / interactive learning sessions like wine tasting, etc, which can be marketed not only through conventional media like print ads but through the use of interactive media like FB, Twitter, What's Up, YouTube etc. For tactical offers and promotional advertising, Radio can also prove to be a good and cost effective medium since it is local in reach, enjoys a wide audience and is engaging. Contests may be run through radio spots or RJ mentions, which could help to generate footfalls.

Last but not least, the smart use of loyalty cards or loyalty programmes generates word of mouth experience, which is by far the best form of communication for a café.

"We at What's Up use digital media as our lead vehicle – FB, Instagram, Twitter, Google Plus are our preferred medium of communication. We have also launched our own loyalty programme and we stay invested with our technology Partners like Zomato / Just Dial / Trip Advisor to generate footfalls. Apart from the digital media, we also participate in a lot of media Partnerships (mainly conventional media like Print and Television)," says Anirban Sengupta of What's Up café.

"In today's connected world, technology is king. However having said that, character and personality of products, events and product launch, acquiring feedback, rewarding loyal customers, being socially visible, following ethos, and having visually appealing design is also very important. Technology only enhances and conveys these above strengths. We ensure that our marketing looks into each and every aspect mentioned above," says Ankur Salim Siddiqui of Aauris Hotels.

Food Designing Opportunities

Food designing is an upcoming concept that focuses on the visual aspect of culinary art. This is totally responsible for imparting a visually appealing look to a food. Most of the up-scale restaurants in Kolkata like Oh Calcutta!, Spice Kraft and others are highly into food designing.

Expansion of Food Industry In Kolkata

On being questioned as to what would drive the F&B industry in eastern India, Rishi Singhal of Fly Kouzina says: "A single window system for all licenses and a single tax structure would be key determiners. Restaurants should be treated at par with MSMEs in order to raise funds easily and at a competitive rate. We believe that our industry is creating more jobs for both white and blue collar professionals in a jobs-starved Eastern India. We should also get the benefit of capital subsidy, interest subsidy and benefit of taxation when procuring various equipment for the kitchen."

"We believe in investing a lot into human resources. They are the face of our company who are always in the line of fire. We try to keep a check on the attrition level by giving employees extra perks such as private medical insurance, accommodation and a good bonus, apart from adhering to all the government norms. In return, they leave no stone unturned and work with all their heart and soul to ensure quality service to all of our customers. Maintaining a personal rapport with our team plays a very important role in keeping the team motivated. We also ensure that our team takes extra effort to give the best of services to our patrons and satisfy their expectations," adds Singhal.

"Expansion definitely gives you the advantage of economies. It helps getting better deals



with vendors, a better corporate structure for the workforce and to enable rotation of teams between different outlets. For now, we have our hands full with the hotel which is coming up on the floor above Bakstage. But a second Bakstage outlet cannot be ruled out," says Sudhir Ahuja of Bakstage.

"We believe that the industry should come together so that there is more harmony and unity in this sector, where people don't see another outlet as a competitor but see it as a propeller to the growth of the industry. Kolkata lags way behind the other metros and if we unite and help each other grow, Kolkata would soon be amongst the top F&B destinations of India," adds Ahuja.

Kolkata is a place synonymous with hospitality and the love for food. The scores of restaurants opening up in the city is a testimony to that trend. The restaurant industry is also seeing a new trend and that is the merger of small and mid-size unorganised outlets with international and national food chains of repute. This has helped to monitor the quality of a brand or chain at a more personalised level. At the same time, there has also been the merger of the already popular dishes with some newer concepts and menus. That has again helped the restaurants and food business to stay dynamic and fresh. The chance of a customer getting bored with the old dishes is extremely high and the latest additions to the food business in Kolkata are taking concrete steps to retain the clients.

Innovation seems to be the buzzword in the industry. "Innovation is the key to customer attention. We introduced a unique concept of a Naan-based Pizza to the city – called the Nazaa. To make it more interesting we experimented with it further to get a mix which people can never think of – we got a daal makhni nazza for the vegetarians and mutton rogan gosht nazza for the meat-eaters. It is currently the highest selling item at our place. We have a special chef's menu for the month – which the executive chef personally flambees it on the customer table. It's unique in presentation and looks flaming hot," says Sudhir Ahuja of Bakstage.

Other innovations that the brand has introduced include: "We were the first to introduce Sufi night in a pub and also the first pub to introduce Istanbul Nights with belly dancing & tanoura. We have a chef's special menu with all items on flambee and also innovative items like liquor cakes - you choose the liquor, we bake the cake," Ahuja says.

"Bakstage has evolved in the last few years by introducing new concepts to the city along with a new location. Located in the IT Hub of Calcutta, we were the first players there and the FMA has and continues to work in our favour. Bakstage is the registered and favourite vendor for a multitude of MNCs. We have been roped in as catering Partners for various events and even hosted celebrations, team parties, vendor meets, etc, at Bakstage," he adds.



The single biggest challenge faced by the food service industry in Kolkata is the lack of skilled manpower in adequate numbers. The attrition rate is extremely high and can even hover between 25 per cent to 50 per cent

"We thrive on innovations – from making a wash basin with a recycled car tyre to using cycle and rickshaw chains for bar stools, throwing in full body massage chairs for guests in waiting to offering a real Jacuzzi with streaming jets on the terrace, we have left no stone unturned in offering our guests a unique café experience. We have also used unique crockery and cutlery while serving. For example, we serve tiramisu in a jam jar and serve drinks in measuring test tubes. We have customised many traditional dishes to suit the palate of our guests and we offer a wide range of shisha, mocktails, continental, Mediterranean and Oriental cuisines to address all types of palates. We procure our ingredients fresh and ensure the use of best quality raw materials while preparing our dishes," says Anamika Sengupta of Bakstage Café.

To sum it up, food lovers and connoisseurs in Kolkata are happy and experimental enough to give a chance to all the novel cuisines that are finding their way into the dining hot spots in the city. The trend is likely to continue and accelerate further in the coming days in Kolkata (so that it can justifiably call itself the food capital of India). By all reckoning, the food business in Kolkata and its adjoining markets is set for rapid expansion in the days ahead, making food business the most alluring sector in the region to invest in. ••



“We are a young and progressive hotel management and brand franchising company”

Sandeep Basu, GM, Jameson Inn Shiraz, Kolkata, which is managed by **Cygnett Hotels & Resorts**, spoke to FoodService India about the innovative concepts being tried out at his outlets and how he sees the business growing in the future



have recently launched the Cozzet Hotels brand, which primarily does franchise and management tie-up across India.

How do you see the opportunity for your outlets?

Overall, we are in the fastest growing segment and our outlets have ample growth potential. The strength of a restaurant lies in what it does best, whether it's serving tasty food, offering quality service at the table or providing decor that makes the experience memorable. We have all these strengths and much more. Our pricing structure is very aggressive, and we offer a menu that is more competitively priced than what other restaurants in a similar category can offer.

Which consumption trends would you highlight?

People are increasingly ordering food online and looking for home delivery services. We are adapting to new technologies in order to reach our customers easily and quickly.

Have you tried out any interesting/innovative concepts at your outlets?

Our restaurant brands like The GT Route and K2K are the blend of five different cuisines from Kabul, Peshawar, Punjab, Oudh and Kolkata. This route from Kabul to Kolkata has contributed largely to the growth of the rich food culture of West Bengal. At our outlets, we take our customers through a culinary drive along this ancient route so that the guests discover the traditional culinary riches of Indian food.

At The GT Route restaurant, we have tried many new and innovative concepts in the past and got a very good response from our guests. One such concept is the The Great Harvest Festival, a first of its kind rice food festival showcasing an array of enticing and exotic rice preparations. We have tried to keep the food as innovative as possible, so with every bite we ensure that the taste is perfect. From time to time, we also introduce special items in the menu to cater to the different consumer segments. And in the coming days, we will come up with many more new concepts in foodservice.

Tell us about the challenges of your business?

In my opinion, taxation is the biggest challenge in the restaurant business. After the food cost, HLP and manpower cost, the profit margin is negligible. The Goods and Services Tax (GST) can replace all indirect taxes levied by the government – at both the Central and State levels – and we are looking forward to its quick implementation. ●●



Sandeep Basu
GM, Jameson Inn Shiraz,
Kolkata, Managed by
Cygnett Hotels & Resorts

Tell us of the upsides to foodservice in East India?

The upsides are the proliferation of innovative concepts, growth of home delivery services, online portals, etc. Consumers' eating habits are driving the growth of the business and foodservice operators are using new ideas and technology to attract more customers.

Which specific sector/segment of the foodservice market do you cater to?

We are currently operational in two of our Cygnett Hotels in Kolkata and Guhawati. Besides, we are coming up with two new hotels in Bongaigaon – Assam and Gangtok – Sikkim. We cater to all consumer segments and all age groups.

Please describe your growth over the years?

Cygnett Hotels and Resorts is a young and progressive hotel management and brand franchising company launched in India in 2012. Our group portfolio includes international brands such as the mid-scale Jameson Inn & Suites as well as the budget Jameson Inn – the award-winning hospitality chain in the USA that is well known for its revolutionary approach to hotel management. Our hotel brands include the up-scale Cygnett Plaza, the mid-scale Cygnett Park, the budget Cygnett Inn and Cygnett Residences (condo hotels/service apartment) and the economy Cygnotel. We



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“We want to be the brand leader in frozen foods in east India”

Sudeep Gupta, General Manager, Sales & Marketing of **Keventer Agro Ltd.**, speaks to FoodService India about his company’s accomplishments in the frozen food category and the various innovations and trends that the brand has introduced in the east India market



Sudeep Gupta
GM, Sales & Marketing
Keventer Agro

Tell us about your company and products.

Keventer Frozen food commenced operations in 2014 with the introduction of green peas and sweet corn through general trade outlets. Since then, we have grown exponentially and boast a portfolio consisting of 26 products across various categories – from ingredients to vegetarian and non-vegetarian value-added products, breads, etc. – which are available in general trade, modern trade and e-commerce platforms throughout eastern India. The products are sold under the Keventer brand name.

How do you evaluate the market potential in the region?

Geographically, eastern India remains largely untapped in the frozen foods market and has extremely high potential for growth in this particular segment. We saw this potential and have tapped into the markets in Chhattisgarh, Orissa, Bihar and the North East. Demographically, we target young millennials on the go and the working man or woman or anyone with limited time looking for something quick and easy to make and which tastes delicious. Tier II and Tier III cities like Kantabanji, Kohima, Asansol, Gaya, etc. are the markets where there is a large potential and little penetration in this segment, and we are looking to become market leaders in these markets.

What is your strategy for ensuring maximum retail outreach in the region?

We are currently present at the outlets in eastern India of Big Bazaar, Spencer’s, ABRL, Reliance, Metro Cash & Carry. Apart from these, we are also present at major regional standalone outlets like Arambagh (Kolkata), 9to9 (Bihar) and The World Retails (Orissa).

The sales contribution from modern trade and general trade is different in our case because we are present largely in the frozen vegetables segment too. This skews our ration to a 30:70 between modern trade and general trade. However, in the case of our counterparts in the frozen food industry, it should be exactly the opposite.

How is the category shaping up and performing in terms of demand and growth?

The frozen food market size in India is estimated to be Rs. 4,000 crore. Currently, eastern India’s frozen foods market is approximately 5 per cent of the Indian market and is expected to grow to 15 per cent in the next five years. The established and mature markets are in the northern and western parts of India. Our research shows there is a huge untapped potential in eastern India. Hence, we are focusing extensively on expanding throughout eastern India.

What has been the growth rate for your product range?

We have grown at a CAGR of 159 per cent over the last two years.

Which have been your innovations with regard to products, marketing and branding, and packaging?

In terms of products, we have entered the markets with offerings that have previously not been seen in the frozen foods segment – chicken fries, matar-paneer mix, palak-paneer mix as well as breaded items. The paneer mixes are not ready to eat but are frozen combo packs for easy cooking as and when necessary.

With marketing becoming more digital and more e-commerce platforms like Bigbasket, AskMeGrocery, Grofers, etc., coming into play, our marketing and branding activities are focused more on the digital platforms to reach the target audience and create awareness of our products and brand. We are currently on the above mentioned platforms and also using a variety of social media platforms to create awareness of our products and understand our customer’s needs better. In packaging, we have, for the first time in India introduced packaging that includes both matte and glossy finish. This kind of packaging is more attractive to the consumers and we are the pioneers of this kind of packaging in the frozen vegetables sector. ●●

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Pampering the millennials' taste buds

Harsh Vardhan Ruia, Managing Director of Aqua Java, spoke to Food Service India magazine on how youth-centric trends in the east India market is fuelling the growth of his outlets and the foodservice industry in the region



Harsh Vardhan Ruia
Managing Director
Aqua Java

Which are the positive upsides to the foodservice market of East India and how is it helping your business?

I feel, the positive upside of East India market is its youth driven approach. Our biggest target audience is the budding student base in the zone. We cater majorly to the youth – anyone from the age range from 18 to 30 is our customer. We serve a wide range of menu starting from north Indian, Italian, Mexican along with a complete range of beverages, which attracts the youth towards us. Overall, the scope and opportunity for foodservice business in eastern India is huge and it's growing rapidly.

Which food retail format do you occupy? How organised is the business in this format?

Aqua Java is a full-fledged restaurant, which serves more than 150 different items to the customers along with a full range of non-alcoholic beverages. Our specialty is Italian dishes and would like to specify our outlets as Italian specialty restaurants. The market is largely unorganised and there is a need for organised players to enter the market in view of the high demand.

How has your business evolved over the years?

Aqua Java was started in the year 1999. Since then, from one outlet we have grown to 11 outlets today. Among the 11 outlets, most of them are franchised. People are eager to take the franchise route as this market is growing and there is no slack in this industry. In the coming five years, we plan to have at least 30 outlets across the country. We have plans to open 10 more outlets in the coming financial year itself. These will come up in Bhubaneswar, Guwahati, Durgapur and Asansol.

What kind of investment is needed for setting up a franchise outlet under your banner?

If anybody wants to step into the hospitality industry with a franchise of Aqua Java, the minimum investment will be around Rs. 45-50 lakh for an area of 1,000-1,500 sq.ft.. The break even would not take more than two years. The market is growing continuously and we expect it to pick more speed in the near future.

Which have been the interesting/innovative concepts that you have tried out for your format?

Innovation is one of our main USPs, which has helped us to attract more new customers. We have introduced loyalty cards and prepaid cards (which can be recharged). If someone recharges the card with an amount of Rs. 1,000, they can avail a service of Rs. 1,500. This additional Rs. 500 is a bonus from Aqua Java. At our outlets, we have also introduced separate sections for celebrating birthday party or any kind of a customised party. Our location is another prime USP that draws customers to our outlets.

Tell us about your specific initiatives to enhance your brand appeal?

As our main target audience is the youth, we majorly use the digital media to promote our brand. We use different e-commerce sites, Facebook, Instagram, etc., to maintain a close connect with our customer base. Also, we do mass mailing, mass SMS, besides also advertising in print media in magazines and newspapers.

Tell us about the challenges before the foodservice business in east India?

The main challenge is the lack of skilled manpower in the industry. ●●

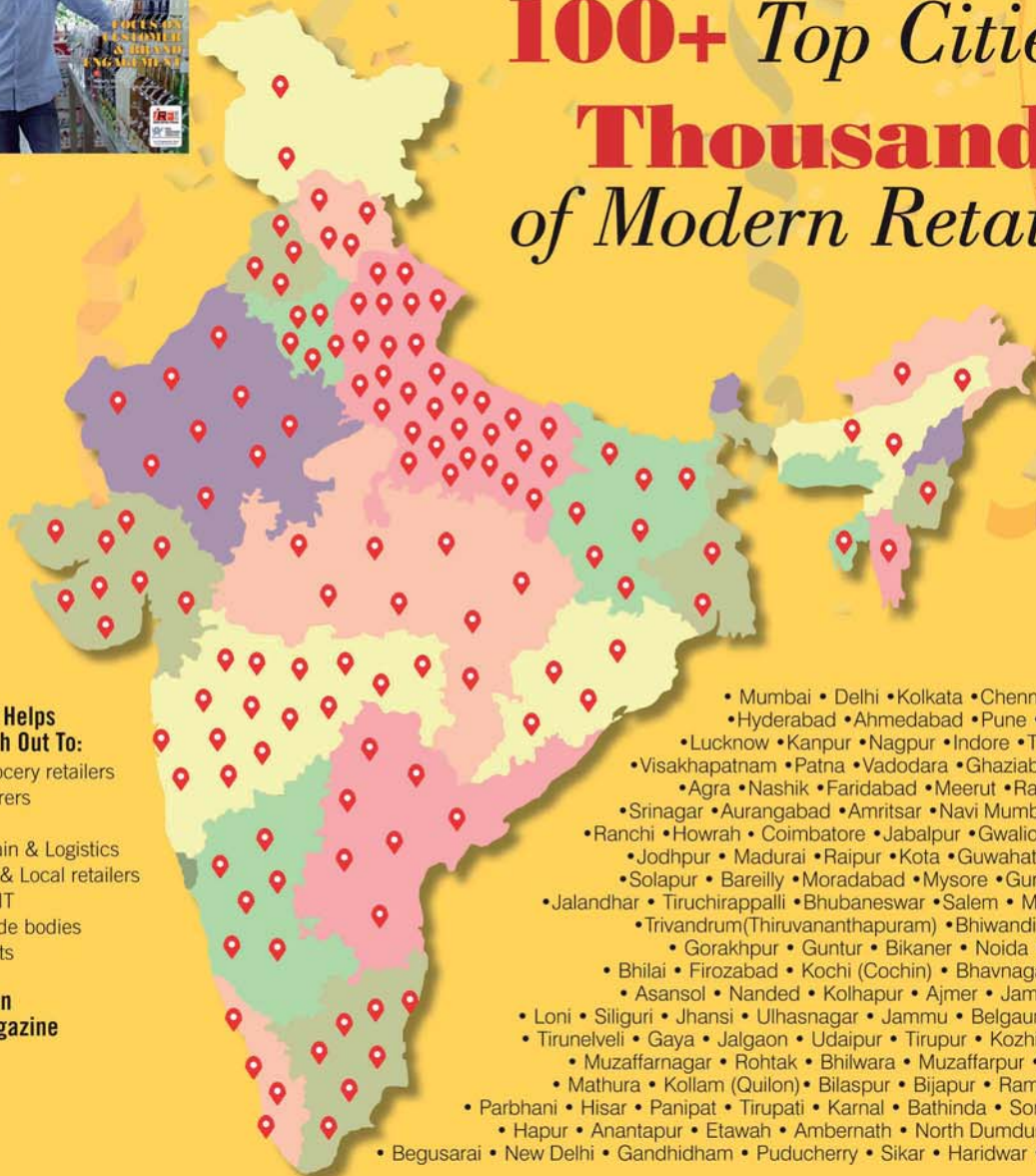
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Danke presents India Nightlife Convention & Awards, an initiative by Kickstart Entertainment and NRAI

Kickstart Entertainment and National Restaurant Association of India (NRAI) announced the launch of an intellectual property created to bring India's nightlife industry together. 'Danke Presents India Nightlife Convention and Awards' (INCA) 2016 in association with Johnnie Walker, will take place on the 17th and 18th July 2016 at the St. Regis Hotel in Mumbai. It will be the first platform specifically designed to bring together and recognize the various stakeholders of one of India's most vibrant and fastest growing Industries – Nightlife.

Aman Anand, Director of Kickstart Entertainment says, "We are proud to present a huge prospect to the industry enthusiasts to gain insights and the personal experiences of International renowned speakers as well as to felicitate the best in the bar and nightlife industry. The event, which attracts attendees from across India, is a key forum for vendors to connect and develop a social network thereby helping them build their customer base".

At present, India has the youngest population in the world with major metros having numerous bars and nightclubs in each city, however there is no such platform that brings together bar and nightclub owners from multiple cities under one roof. The nightlife industry needs recognition within the fraternity and what better way to do it other than to launch a property like India Nightlife Convention and Awards. Partnering with this initiative are **Miss Malini:** Digital Partner, **Universal Music Group:** Music Partner, **Harman Kardon:** Lights & Sound Partner, **Ernst & Young:** Process Advisor, **id8 media solutions:** Brand & Communication Partner, **Alpha Q:** Bar Innovation and **Neo Juris:** Legal Advisor.

The idea behind conceptualizing INCA is to support and uplift the bar and nightlife industry as a majority of revenue generated contributes largely to the economy of the country. The convention includes business and informational workshops with some of the industry's most influential entrepreneurs with an aim to expand the presence of exhibitors and enhance the scope of Mentorship program.

INCA 2016 will be a two day business convention for attendees within the bar and the nightlife industry from across India encompassing business and informational workshops with the industry's most influential entrepreneurs and business specialists. NRAI, the voice of the restaurant and nightlife industry, will be acting as the knowledge partner across India, contributing its considerable expertise to develop convention programming, workshop content and ensuring the presence of nationally and internationally renowned speakers. Apart from this, NRAI will also act as a facilitator for brands & categories that need access to the bar and nightclub owners. The convention will include a Mentorship Program sponsored by NRAI where industry professionals and renowned hospitality spokespersons would be guiding and imparting knowledge within students and budding entrepreneurs.

Following the convention would be the awards ceremony recognizing the best from the bar and nightlife industry. What differentiates these awards from the quintessential nightlife awards is the transparency with which each participant will be reviewed. INCA will be announcing the categories for the awards where



National Restaurant Association of India
Voice of the Indian Restaurant Industry

participants from across the country stand a chance to compete against each other. Carefully selected jury members from the main metros (Mumbai, Delhi, Pune, Goa, Bangalore, Chennai, Hyderabad and Kolkata) will contribute towards finalizing the entrants from their respective cities. Concurrently, bars from across India have the opportunity to enroll themselves as well as the public can vote for their favourite nightspot. An appointed national jury will then nominate the best under each of the categories.

The world's most credible and leading professional auditors **Ernst & Young** will be reviewing and tabulating the entire process revealing top finalists in each category. Also in a first, these awards will be at a National level for the Industry by the Industry Insiders, making them even more prestigious and revered.

*"National Restaurant Association of India strongly supports the India Nightlife Convention & Awards" said **Riyaz Amlani, President, NRAI**. He adds, "The Contribution of the Nightlife industry also known as PBCLs (Pubs, Bar Cafes, and Lounges) to the nations GDP and employment has largely gone unrecognized. Currently there are over 6,200 licensed bar premises, contributing over 11,500 crores to the Indian economy growing at an astonishing CAGR of 20% making it the fastest growing Industry in the country outperforming the Indian IT Industry and beating GDP growth rates 3x employing over 20 Lakh people. The Nightlife business is also the fastest growing segment in the overall foodservices space, growing twice as fast as QSRs and Casual Dining segments. The time has come for the Nightlife industry to be recognized as an independent booming Industry of its own."*

Gaurav Gupta CEO, Danke Exim India Pvt. Ltd says, "We are very proud to be a part of INCA as there cannot be a better platform than this to announce the launch of Danke to the who's who of the Nightlife industry and we look forward to redefine the beer culture in India."

INCA aims to establish itself as the first mover in the



category with a long-term commitment from trade bodies creating a revolution. Being one of the largest revenue and employment generators in the service industry but not receiving the deserved gratification, INCA endeavors to promote accessibility, ideation, cross-pollination and development of a mutually inspiring community within the industry.

Official website link for India Nightlife Convention & Awards: <http://indiabarinc.com/>

Social Media:

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/IndiaBarConventionAwards/>

Twitter: https://twitter.com/INCA_Official_

Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/inca_official/

NRAI India Food Service Report 2016

After the tremendous success and industry response to the 2013 and 2010 reports, the National Restaurant Association of India (NRAI) is launching the 3rd edition of India Food Services Report on **Wednesday, July 20, 2016** at **India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road, New Delhi**. This will be an afternoon event between **11:00 am – 1:00 pm** followed by cocktails and lunch.

The report will be released by **Shri Amitabh Kant, CEO, NITI Aayog** (National Institution for Transforming India), Government of India. Like its previous versions, India Food Services Report would

provide a good platform to strengthen its connect with various stakeholders of the industry – existing and prospective NRAI members, F&B companies and suppliers, government and the media. It will address the needs of all stakeholders and will be the single, one stop, credible source of information, trends, opportunities and challenges for the industry in India.

Members of the NRAI are requested to block their calendar for the first launch event to be organized in Delhi. The report will be subsequently launched in Mumbai and Bengaluru in August.

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