



## 6 Trends to Watch in 2016 (with RFEC applications)

**Next Gen Comfort:** Comfort food resonates for a myriad of reasons. Restaurant comfort food must perpetually evolve, implementing small adaptations, to tug at the heartstrings of nostalgic appetites. You have two approaches. 1) Modernize selected existing comfort menu items with a global flair. 2) Craft selected existing menu items into more comforting offerings.

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  - **Bowls**, of all sorts (rice, noodles, grains, broth, porridge, chili, vegetables & more) continue to flourish and strike a satiating chord with comfort craving consumers.
  - **Brunch** (traditional & non-traditional) creates operator opportunities to extend revenue sources & expand meal periods.
  - **Fried chicken** has risen to culinary prowess via a mash up of global flavor accents (marination, flavor ingredients, breading, cuts of chicken, hand held carriers or not) – yet still maintaining its' comfort based lineage.

**Flavorful Heat:** Flavorful heat fires up a menu and your sales. Heat (with flavor vs. heat for heat sake) is an enticing purchasing cue for consumers & should be an integral part of your culinary arsenal. Navigate the array of regional & global heat possibilities, using fusion without confusion. Simple, culinary execution is always a better deliverable.

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  - **Trending ingredients**, which are ripe for featuring in your menu development: Korean, Memphis 'hot,' curries, peri peri, harissa and sriracha (yes –there are still plenty of line extensions to explore).
  - **Citrus** opens up heat to new boundaries of flavor.
  - **Charred** applications, in conjunction with heat, develop the craveable elements of fire, smoke and texture.

**Stay Ahead of the Competition (you may not see coming):** Competition for the coveted food dollar is ultra competitive, to say the least. The traditional competitive set is easy to spot – other restaurants and hotels. Look deeper and you will discover that grocery stores, retail shops and online food delivery formats are nibbling (maybe even chomping) away at your revenue streams. The first step in developing a counter plan of action is to recognize the problem...then craft your strategic response.

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  - **Design** and market your brand recognition to be in markets you never thought possible to physically be in.
    - Develop & menu your own signature “meals” in a box, which locals can pick up from the hotel to take home and prepare (tap into the success of Blue Apron). Either do something better than your competition or offer something they can’t experience anywhere else.
    - Partner with a local brewing company or beverage distributor and develop a craft beer or beverage together that showcases a signature flavor that your restaurant is famous for (example: chef Masaharu Morimoto teamed up with Rogue Ales & Spirits for its Soba Ale and also Rogue teamed up with Voodoo Donuts to create a Bacon Maple Ale and Bacon Maple Vodka).
      - [https://www.fsrmagazine.com/beer/doubling?utm\\_source=beverages&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=20151204](https://www.fsrmagazine.com/beer/doubling?utm_source=beverages&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=20151204)
  - **Protect** your dollars. Design a plan that takes care of your guests (to enjoy more meals on property) and courts locals (to spend their dollars, in new unexpected ways, with you).
  - **Highlight** the social experience of your restaurants! Smartphones and online ordering cannot compete with nor deliver your unique experience. Today’s dining is experiential at its’ core.

**Holistic Wellness:** Values seem to be trumping value. It may start to become not good enough that you support and source local, you tout your best sustainable practices and you have an on-site garden. The values inherent to your operation and your “reason to be” need to shine, connect AND evolve – as there will always be the “what’s next mentality” from the discerning younger generation of consumers. Your wellness approach needs to be holistic in nature.

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  - It is becoming more about what is **NOT** in your food: NO GMO, artificial ingredients/colors, antibiotics, caged, etc.
  - **Up next:** calorie counts, sugar & sodium reduction. Vegetables and non-animal proteins will become center of plate stars, shedding their previous image as mere side dish complements. Restaurant concepts are being built around vegetables. Craveable wellness = healthy foods can & should be just as craveable as indulgent foods.
  - **Outline & craft** your messaging. You need a 5-year strategic plan detailing your internal/external stewardship and how you perpetually stay relevant with your current & changing consumer base.

**Deliver the Unknown:** Consumers cook at home foods they are familiar with (even when expanding their skillset)...however; they look to restaurants to provide what they cannot replicate or the “unknown.” Capitalize on this mindset.

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  - **Rule #1:** Your food/beverage must deliver a component that is not capable of being reproduced at home. Implement a signature technique or ingredient to even your most mainstream/pedestrian of menu offerings. Guests crave what stands out and seems unapproachable to them; as it creates the “gotta go back there for the...” purchasing mindset.
    - It is getting more challenging to surprise & please discerning palates as social media, TV culinary shows & the internet have given the average home cook/foodie “know it all culinary confidence.”
  - **Intrigue** builds a point of differentiation from your competition and can generate repeat traffic.
    - Each RFEC property is unique and a destination to be treasured. Stay true to who you are and OWN IT.
  - **Hospitality** – we are in the hospitality business much more so than the food business. Create your signature “unknown” experience that a guest cannot experience anywhere else!!!

**Snacking = 24/7 “Ubiquitous” Dining:** The snacking revolution has shined light on how we have stopped counting meal periods and now, simply stated – are noshing throughout the day/night; more akin of a lifestyle eating approach. This “no borders” eating shift has virtually set our daily food clocks to zero. The operator opportunity lives in re-thinking your take on standardized meal periods.

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  - **Transform** dead meal zones into new revenue streams. Snacks can also serve as meal replacements.
  - **Position** your signature food & beverage menu items into new formats, enticing new snacking/meal revenue streams.
  - **Evaluate** your existing flavor profiles and update them to evolve with your target consumer’s developing modern taste preferences.
    - Sour with richness
    - Sweet to savory
    - Sweet-heat combos
    - Spicy-salty-savory combos
    - Bitter beverages
    - Deep-layered flavor profiles
    - Non-animal proteins and meatless features
    - Craveable health options

Cheers to an innovative & prosperous 2016!

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