



NRA SHOW

The Journal



Ultra- Processed Food linked to early death.
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Insights from the 2023 NRA Show:

It's time for restaurant operators to bring back hospitality

BY: Dog Haus Partner André Vener, Jun32 3rd , 2023: "Use technology so you can give service, don't just use technology as a way to replace people," Verner says. How has your show been, and what were you trying to find out here?



André Vener

I'm still looking at all of the different kinds of technologies. I know that's not anything cool or crazy, but for me, I'm headed out to the innovation sections of the Show to see what's new. On the culinary end, we're partners with Impossible, so I was hanging out with J. Michael [Melton, head of culinary at Impossible Foods] and he was testing all of the new stuff rolling out next year that we've been working on. Plant-based products—it's not something that's trending up or trending down, but it's something that's still happening.

I think that's cool, and I love going into the bar side of the program, too, and seeing some of the new stuff they're making out there with the cocktails. One of the things ... batched cocktails on tap. They're actually able now to get the right carbonation in them. They shake the kegs so you don't have to mix them up so they don't go bad. And also, the citrus doesn't go bad inside, which is something new.

So overall, I'm keeping an eye on the technology to make sure we're always staying current. The plant-based just kind of see. We don't mess around with our menu too much. We're keeping consistent there. And then all of our partners are here. I think that's the main thing I get out of it. Going to Tractor Beverage, for instance—they're a cool company.

I hate saying this, but a lot of times I feel like if you're finding it out here for the first time, right now, you're already behind. So my

business partner, Hagop [Giragossian], will always say, why are you going to that? If you're going to that today, other people have that idea already. We've got to be innovators ahead of time. We try not to find anything that's here; we try to lead or test stuff.

Let's switch gears to virtual brands. Speaking of being out front, this is a topic Dog Haus has been involved in for some time now. It feels like the category as a whole has lost some buzz this year, but I'm not sure if that's reality or perception. What's it been like for you all?

We have two that are all ready to rock. But right now, Bad-Ass Breakfast Burritos is doing so well that we're—I'm not even going to say doubling down, we're tripling down. That brand is probably going to start opening some brick-and-mortars. It's turned into its own brand.

Is that where virtual brands are headed, to the storefront?

Listen, we've used ghost kitchens from day one the way we wanted to use them. We go into a market in Austin, we go to a ghost kitchen, and we start finding out after the delivery, after three months everybody is coming from the northwest part. That's where all the orders are coming from. So then that's where we use that to go sign a 10-year lease to build a location because we tested it out, and then we close down the ghost kitchen. So I think the spirit of ghost kitchens is really, on a bigger brand, is being overflow for all your catering and off-premises. Say Chick-fil-A. Makes total sense. They're already busy so they need another location for a relief valve. For companies like that it works.

Another use is testing different food items going into a market. We've done that. We'll go open San Francisco and we want to test out and see what's going. In Austin, same. Where are the people who want Dog Haus? What are they ordering? Then go ahead. It would suck to sign a lease for 10 years and find out you're on the wrong block. We're not expanding in ghost kitchens. We're still working with Michael [Montagano] from Kitchen United on those Kroger deals. Because that's the hybrid of ghost kitchens. You still have two million people walking by, seeing your brand. It's still interactive. And they can get it to-go.

What's good [about Kitchen United's MIX platform] is if my kid wants a plain hamburger from Wendy's and I want a Bad-Ass Breakfast Burrito and my wife wants a salad, you can get one basket, one ticket order, fire time is the same—Kitchen United is ahead of the game on that part.

Is artificial intelligence happening for restaurants right now?

It's definitely going to happen, and it is happening. Whether it's from temperature and safety, security stuff, back of the house, you



Oscartek showcasing the new Drop- In series

have some AI that goes right above the grill to make sure everything is built the right way. So if someone is building the wrong order, putting the cheese below, putting the cheese after this or that, it catches and corrects it. I think some of that stuff is cool, but we use it on the marketing team. Just the other day, we wanted to come up with a small-size combo meal. What's a cool name, a fun name for it? So you plug it into the AI and it says, "mini bites," or whatever it may be. Sometimes we've written a press release. Just started talking to it. Some of those things are good. It's not perfect at all. But it can get 80 percent of it done and you reread it three times and tweak it out a little bit.

Listen, it's way beyond my pay grade to talk about AI. But I think it's something that exists and is going to continue existing. I'll let my smart team members look into that.

Any other applications make sense?

One of the realistic ones, I think, is the dishwasher. That's a very hard position to fill. It's something back of the house nobody is seeing. You're not messing around or cooking something. But to have a robot doing the dishes for you, and I've seen some of this stuff already happening, that seems pretty cool. That takes care of a position that's hard to find. It's something that nobody really wants to do, but it's something very important to the industry, and something no one sees. It can make sense to have a robot doing dishes. We'd still rather have people keep an eye on all the food.

What are your thoughts on robots?

I'll tell you; I've been staying here in Chicago for five years now in a hotel called EMC2. The robot comes to your room. If you need a toothbrush, water, it comes up. Then you take the food or whatever off and give it a thumbs up. You hit the green button and it dances for you. I love showing that to my kid. I don't need a person coming up. I just want water or my food. So for certain places where you're not looking for an experience, like the dishwasher, that's different than a busboy. I want to have an experience. I want to talk to somebody. I want to watch the bartender and talk about the basketball game. I don't need some robot making my drinks for me. Let the people who are working on that continue doing so. Maybe I'll do this interview next year with AI.

Let's fast forward a year. Automation? Self-driving cars? What's the vision?

I really think AI, the development of it, the next generation of it, is going to be a key part. What I hope at least, is how can you make the customer experience better using technology. Now, whether that's your ordering platform, whether that's ordering from the table, reorders from the table, delivery by a robot, a drone, how can the experience get there so the food is safe, quick, warm, all that kind of stuff?

I think it's not just one part of it. It's how does it all integrate together. How does something integrate where the customer can get that experience? How can the food travel better? For at least ourselves, what are things that can continue to make the food cook faster without cheating? I don't want a microwave. I don't want to put it in the cyrovac. I don't want to put it in the TurboChef. I don't

want to go down that path. But what are some other tricks out there that can help the whole system. Because I think people want food quicker. Whether that's as simple as FlyBuy where it's pickup waiting for you, or drive-thru technology, or it's a robot, or it's a TurboChef, whatever it is, I think we need to figure out how technology and AI and everything else, can work together to make the food faster, give a better experience to the customer, but in a quicker timeframe. I think people want stuff faster right now. And so, I don't know if that's going to be the topic next year—obviously not—but I think we've got to go back to, whether it's using technology or it's the people, technology that replaces a few bodies so you can invest in a few more bodies, to go back to hospitality.

I think we need to get back to customer service. In 2020, everyone cut corners. And when people walk into a place now, hospitality sucks. I'd rather have a bunch of AI press writers, my PR company doing that, let them use that so they can be able to give better customer service to their clients so they can work with the press better. Use technology so you can give service, don't just use technology as a way to replace people. We're all having a hard time finding good, quality bodies. So fine, let the technology do that. But I'm hoping that hospitality comes back.

We all have stress. Look what you're doing. You're working here today until 5, right? You're looking forward to having some drinks, food, and having some fun. Everyone else goes to work all day and when they come into our restaurants, they're having a bad day, a good day, a celebration day, hanging out with their kid, whatever they're doing, you've got to give them a good time.

I don't know if the burger robot is as important as the people who you get to hang with.

Ultra-processed food linked to early death.

By James Gallagher

Health and science correspondent, BBC News

Ultra-processed foods - such as chicken nuggets, ice cream and breakfast cereals - have been linked to early death and poor health, scientists say.

Researchers in France and Spain say the amount of such food being eaten has soared.

Their studies are not definite proof of harm but do come hot on the heels of trials suggesting ultra-processed foods lead to overeating.

Experts expressed caution but called for further investigation.

What are ultra-processed foods?

The term comes from a way of classifying food by how much industrial processing it has been through. The lowest category is "unprocessed or minimally processed foods", which include: • fruit • vegetables • milk • meat • legumes such as lentils • seeds • grains such as rice • eggs

"Processed foods" have been altered to make them last longer or taste better - generally using salt, oil,

Ultra-processed foods		
 Chocolate	 Cake	 Processed meat
 Meal-replacement shakes	 Instant soups	 Ice cream
 Sugary fizzy drinks	 Chicken nuggets	 Mass-produced bread
 Breakfast cereals or cereal bars	 "Ready to heat" meals, such as pies and pizza	<small>Note: Some academics question the labeling of food as ultra-processed, saying it can be inconsistent</small>

sugar or fermentation.

This category includes: • cheese • bacon • home-made bread • tinned fruit and vegetables • smoked fish • beer

Then come "ultra-processed foods", which have been through more substantial industrial processing and often have long ingredient lists on the packet, including added preservatives, sweeteners or colour enhancers. If a product contains more than five ingredients, it is probably ultra-processed, says Prof Maira Bes-Rastrollo of the University of Navarra, citing a maxim.

Examples include: • processed meat such as sausages and hamburgers • breakfast cereals or cereal bars • instant soups • sugary fizzy drinks • chicken nuggets • cake • chocolate • ice cream • mass-produced bread • many "ready to heat" meals such as pies and pizza | meal-replacement shakes

How bad were the findings?

The first study, by the University of Navarra, in Spain, followed 19,899 people for a decade and assessed their diet every other year. There were 335 deaths during the study.

But for every 10 deaths among those eating the least ultra-processed food, there were 16 deaths among those eating the most (more than four portions a day).

The second study, by the University of Paris, followed 105,159 people for five years and assessed their diet twice a year. It showed those eating more ultra-processed food had worse heart health.

Rates of cardiovascular disease were 277 per 100,000 people per year among those eating the most ultra-processed food, compared with 242 per 100,000 among those eating the least.

The rapid increase of ultra-processed foods over less processed foods, "may drive a substantial burden of cardiovascular diseases in the next decades," said Dr Mathilde Touvier, of the University of Paris.

So do these foods damage health?

"[The] evidence is accumulating," said Dr Touvier, noting "increasing numbers of independent studies". Prof Bes-Rastrollo said she was "very certain" ultra-processed foods were bad for health.

Last year, a link was made with an increased risk of cancer.

The challenge is being 100% sure. The studies have spotted a pattern between highly processed food and poor health but they cannot prove that one causes the other.

Those who ate the most ultra-processed food were also more likely to have other unhealthy behaviours, such as smoking, which the researchers tried to account for.

But there's no guarantee everything relevant was covered, says Kevin McConway, a professor of statistics at The Open University. "These studies do increase my confidence that there's something real behind these associations - but I'm still far from sure."

Why might ultra-processed foods be bad?

The first trial of ultra-processed foods showed they led people to eat more and put on weight.

Researchers at the US National Institutes of Health monitored every morsel of food that volunteers ate for a month. And when given ultra-processed food, they ate 500 calories a day more than when they were given unprocessed meals.

Other suggestions include:

- They are energy dense but lacking in nutrients and fiber
- While the additives in food have been safety tested, it may be unhealthy to consume lots of additives from different foods
- People eat more because they're easy to eat
- They push healthier foods such as fruit and vegetables out of diets - who wants a banana when you can have ice cream?

These ideas still need researching.

Is there any useful advice?

While the term ultra-processed food may be new, the health advice will be very familiar: adopt a Mediterranean-style diet. Such a diet includes plenty of minimally or unprocessed foods, such as fruit, vegetables, fish, nuts and seeds, beans, lentils and wholegrains, said Victoria Taylor, senior dietician at the British Heart Foundation.

"This, along with exercising regularly and not smoking, has been shown to be beneficial for lowering risk of heart and circulatory disease."

Measures such as taxation and marketing restrictions on ultra-processed foods, should be considered, said Prof Bes-Rastrollo, given the weight of evidence.

Is the ultra-processed label a load of nonsense?

There are certainly a lot of critics.

The labelling of food as ultra-processed could be inconsistent, said Dr Gunter Kuhnle, an expert in nutrition and health at the University of Reading

"It is also not obvious why salami is considered to be ultra-processed, yet cheese, which often requires considerably more processing steps and additives, is not. The classification combines a wide range of foods with very different potential impacts on health, which limits its usefulness as a basis for recommendations."

The studies were published in the British Medical Journal.



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