Catering

Keeping pace with increasing customer expectations.

Consumers today expect their meals to be healthy, sustainable and able to meet a variety of dietary requirements. Smart caterers are responding in force.

From Mexican to Japanese, Thai to Peruvian, big city high streets offer almost every cuisine imaginable. Diners are also becoming used to a much wider variety of healthy options, and, whether it’s a wrap, a burrito, a salad or a Poke bowl, more and more operators are allowing people to customise their meals.

When it comes to allergens, a combination of more stringent regulations and fast-growing customer demand has resulted in an explosion of ‘free from’ menus that cater to many different dietary requirements.

Consumers are becoming more discerning from a sustainability standpoint too. Not only are we now much more mindful of the amount of meat we consume, more of us are keen to understand the sustainability credentials of everything we put in our bodies, from soy to quinoa to coffee.

If it’s been farmed or produced unsustainably, or travelled thousands of unnecessary miles before reaching our plate, it could be a no-go.

Standing out from the crowd

In a corporate canteen environment, expectations are no lower. And successful caterers are responding in four key areas.

Healthier options

Pre-prepared foods packed full of additives aren’t suitable for today’s health-conscious diners.

Caterers are responding by making wholesome food choices more accessible. For example, Aramark is launching a new health style concept in Germany, which aims to inspire more guests at its company restaurants to eat healthily.

The „foodboost“ program offers light and nutritious meals, snacks and drinks, all of which are fresh and free from additives. Key ingredients include quinoa, avocado, red lentils and local superfoods.

Build your own meals

Just as customisation has become a popular model on the high street, customers are beginning to expect it in canteen environments. In the Netherlands, the Compass Group’s workplace caterer Eurest has combined the move towards building your own meals with consumers’ growing desire for healthy food.

Its ‘Salad Coach’ is designed to encourage employees to make healthy choices by allowing them to create salads based on the specific health characteristics of ingredients, all of which are meat-free. For example, sweet peppers are great for skin, couscous for energy and beans for stimulating digestion.
Offering every ingredient every day, however, can be overwhelming for caterers. Another approach is to pick a theme each day and do it well, whether that’s street food or super foods.

**Going green**

Consumers are making more ethical choices in all areas of their lives, and they expect to be able to do the same at a catering establishment.

One caterer that has taken this to heart is UK-based bartlett mitchell. The company’s sustainability policy covers everything from buying locally to sourcing sustainable seafood and high-welfare meat, as well as working with local communities and measuring and sending a portion of its food waste to anaerobic digestion.

With veganism growing at a rapid rate, largely because of our growing awareness of the impact farming livestock has on the planet, caterers are also putting more plant-based options on the menu.

At Google’s company canteens, vegan options are listed higher on the menu than meat-based ones, while contract catering giant Sodexo recently launched new plant-based menus across hundreds of university, healthcare and corporate services accounts across the US.

Veganism growth by 350% in Britain between 2006 and 2016 and a massive 600% in the US in the last three years.

**Catering to everyone**

Food allergies are on the rise, with researchers estimating that up to 15 million Americans and more than 17 million Europeans currently suffer from them.

Smart caterers are responding by creating menus that can be enjoyed by as many diners as possible. For example, a soup that isn’t thickened with wheat flour is suitable for those with gluten intolerances or allergies – if the company has stringent cross contamination measures in place behind the scenes.

**Balancing act**

At the same time as diners are demanding greener, healthier, more diverse menus, food and wage costs are rising, putting caterers in a difficult position. How do they deliver customer satisfaction while keeping costs under control?

Part of the solution lies behind the scenes with efficient cooking systems like RATIONAL’s SelfCookingCenter® and VarioCookingCenter®. Powerful, versatile and easy to use, they avoid over-production and wastage and reduce cooking losses to a minimum.

RATIONAL cooking systems have also been proven to support the production of simple, healthy food, no matter how many diners they’re catering for.

**Consumers are making more ethical choices in all areas of their lives.**

Plus, thanks to their intelligent cooking processes, which adjust automatically, the kitchen’s overall efficiency increases, allowing caterers to put more time and effort into creating an F&B offer that not only meets, but exceeds, customers’ ever-higher expectations.