

PULSE SURVEY AUTUMN 2017

Nisbets' Pulse Survey presents survey data from over 400 catering industry professionals. The answers provided offer a vital insight into the industry's concerns on topics that affect day-to-day business and future planning for the industry. The autumn 2017 survey has focused on food trends and the importance of digital marketing for caterers.

2017 Review

Over three quarters of respondents to our survey indicated they were on track to meet their expected growth this year, 13% expected that they would not hit their growth targets and the remaining 11% weren't sure.

Are you on target to reach your expected growth this year?



76% Yes



13% No



11% Not sure

Business Outlook

Very similar to our spring 2017 survey, just over half of the respondents indicated they are very positive about their outlook looking ahead. 27% responded that they are slightly positive, 16% were not sure and just 4% were either slightly or very negative in their outlooks.

How positive/negative are you about your business' outlook?

53% Very positive

27% Slightly positive

16% Not sure

3% Slightly negative

1% Very negative



Food Trends

In our spring 2017 survey, 28% of respondents indicated that healthy eating would be the most popular food trend throughout the year. And in our most recent survey that number has increased to 30%, suggesting that as we progress into 2018, healthy eating is still going to be the number one food trend consumers are looking for. Underpinning the top food trend is the second most popular answer—demand for vegetarian food. Of course, meat diets can be healthy, but it's clear the top two trends we see in this survey are closely linked. It would seem there will be no let-up in demand for more vegetarian options to be on your menu.

Small plates and sharing dishes didn't appear at all on our spring 2017 survey and yet it was the third most popular response in this survey, suggesting the rise in popularity for this trend has been sharp, and will continue to increase. Home cooked food dropped off from 17% to 11% in autumn 2017, while locally sourced produce decreased from 23% to 10%, suggesting that food provenance and ethical eating may be dropping off slightly.

What do you think is the next evolving food trend?



30% Healthy Eating



15% Vegetarian Food



13% Small Plates/ Sharing Platters



12% Other



11% Home Cooked



10% Locally Sourced/ Sustainable Cooking



5% Allergen Free



4% Street Food

Vegetarian and Vegan Food

Despite the demand increasing for vegetarian food, over half of respondents indicated they had three or less options on their menu to cater for this demand. 8% of respondents indicated they didn't provide any vegetarian options at all while 6% confirmed they only offered vegetarian food. Just over a quarter of respondents offer between four and eight options for vegetarians and 8% suggested they served 8 or more vegetarian dishes.

How many Vegetarian or Vegan options do you have on your menu?



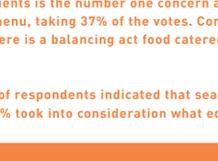
52% 1-3



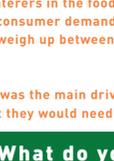
26% 4-8



8% Over 8



8% None



6% Entire Menu

Menu Considerations

The cost of ingredients is the number one concern among caterers in the food industry when considering changes to their menu, taking 37% of the votes. Combined, consumer demand and trends took 26% of the vote, indicating there is a balancing act food caterers must weigh up between cost and catering for new demands.

Just under a fifth of respondents indicated that seasonality was the main driving force behind changing their menu and 12% took into consideration what equipment they would need to provide the new menu.

What do you consider when changing your menu?



37% Cost of Ingredients



20% Consumer Demand



18% Seasonality



12% Equipment Needed



7% Other



6% Trending Led

Impact on Cost

Underpinning the cost of ingredients as a consideration for changing your menu, over 60% of respondents indicated the current trend towards healthy eating was impacting their profits and/or costs. It would appear there is a general squeeze on margins as food caterers look to respond to the latest food trends that consumers are looking for.

This reflects the results from the previous Pulse survey in which 65% of respondents indicated the cost of raw ingredients had risen sharply since the UK voted to leave the EU.

Is the rise in more nutritionally focused eating impacting margin/costs?



61% Yes



39% No

Digital Marketing

When it comes to marketing your business, word of mouth is still considered the most important factor for the catering industry. However, the influence of digital marketing continues to grow, meaning it is increasingly important for caterers to have an online presence. If you combine the votes for social media (28%) and a business' own website (20%), the two outweigh word of mouth on its own by 48% to 34%.

Other forms of marketing that took a share of the votes were email advertising and pavement advertising at 4% each, third party delivery apps at 2% and direct mail at 1%.

Which form of marketing has benefited your business the most?



34% Word of Mouth



28% Social Media



20% Own Website



7% Other



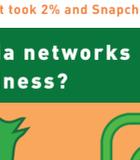
4% Pavement Advertising



4% Email



2% Third Party Delivery Apps



1% Direct Mail

Social Channels

The single biggest social media platform for caterers is Facebook. Over 50% of respondents indicated they used this platform more than any other. Of the other social media channels, Twitter took 20% of the share and Instagram took 18%. LinkedIn was next on 7%, Pinterest took 2% and Snapchat took 1%.

Which of the following social media networks have you used to market your business?



52% Facebook



20% Twitter



18% Instagram



7% LinkedIn



2% Pinterest



1% Snapchat

Most Important Channel

Facebook's popularity for caterers is marketing further with 81% of respondents indicating it was the most important social media channel for their marketing efforts. 10% of respondents indicated Twitter was the most important and Instagram took a 7% share. LinkedIn took 2% of the votes, 1 person indicated Pinterest was the most important and Snapchat didn't receive a single vote.

Which social network do you consider to be the most important to your marketing efforts today?



81% Facebook



10% Twitter



7% Instagram



2% LinkedIn



<1% Pinterest

Impact of Social Media

93% of respondents indicated social media has had a positive impact on their business when asked directly. One respondent suggested the medium has had a negative impact and the remainder of people indicated it had no impact at all on their business.

Overall has social media had a positive or negative impact on your business?



93% Mostly Positive



6% No Impact



<1% Mostly Negative

Social Audience

The total size of a caterer's audience on social media predominantly sits within the 251 – 1,000 bracket and 1,001 – 10,000 bracket. 20% indicated they had a following of less than 250, whereas 12% had more than 10,001, with 3% of that number having over 100,001.

What is the total size of your business' social media audience?



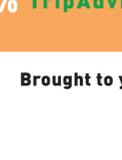
9% 1-100



11% 101-250



34% 251-1,000



34% 1,001-10,000



9% 10,001-100,000



3% Over 100,000

Customer Review Websites

Websites that allow your customers to review your business are another digital dimension that the catering industry needs to be aware of. TripAdvisor was way out in front with over 70% of respondents indicating the website has had a positive impact on their business. 22% were unsure whether or not review websites had a positive impact and only minimal respondents indicated that Yelp or Trustpilot had affected their business positively.

Which review websites have had a positive impact on your business?

72% TripAdvisor

22% Don't Know

3% TrustPilot

3% Yelp

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