

### 3 Steps to Attract Millennials (and Their Kids)

In the always-evolving restaurant industry, one fact remains constant: Going out to eat is a family affair. As long as restaurants exist, families will use them as a means to get out of the house and indulge in a mini-vacation.

Of Millennial parents surveyed, 60 percent said they were highly satisfied when allowing their children to pick where to eat, compared to 53 percent of non-millennial parents who said the same.



With more Millennials venturing into parenthood every day, it is important for restaurants to develop a firm understanding of what it takes to become a family favorite. The key is simply starting with the whole family, not just the individual. Here are three lessons for restaurants focused on accomplishing just that:

#### 1. Encourage food with benefits

How can restaurant brands provide health benefits to both children and their parents? Millennial parents have a strong understanding of what is and what is not healthy.

As more brands are embracing authentic messaging, food labels, product packaging and menu lists must provide more transparency in regards to what the meal contains. Millennials favor wholesome, antibiotic-free ingredients for both themselves and their children. Restaurants that cater to this preference will up their chances of gaining the business of Millennial-led families.

#### 2. Span across the flavor scale

Millennials are always interested in trying new flavor profiles. Spicy, zesty and exotic flavors tend to win with this cohort of young parents. Restaurants should take advantage of their willingness to go on these flavor adventures by incorporating more and more exotic recipes.

Millennials are also highly influenced by what they see in their surroundings. For example, trendy cooking shows, Instagram and Pinterest greatly influence the flavors a Millennial seeks out. Kids, on the other hand, aren't as predictable. Have you tried to get a four-year-old to branch out beyond mac-and-cheese or chicken fingers? Not easy. With this in mind, it is important that restaurant brands have a wide scale when it comes to flavor. From very basic to wild and exotic, restaurant brands today must have a balance in order to win with the entire family.

#### 3. Remember that kids like to customize, too

It is no secret that customizable brands are winning with Millennials (look no further than Chipotle and Starbucks for proof). Millennials constantly seek out ways to make products more unique for them and are willing to pay the premium for brands that follow through. Especially when it comes to menu items. Think about top fast-casual brands that are fully integrating with customization mindset.

Children have grown up in an era where the tools they need to make decisions for themselves are readily available. They want to excel in their differences and look for brands to give them exactly what they want -- that means at the dinner table, too.

Source: Jeff Fromm and Adam Van Paris for the Business Journal

## How to Build Family Loyalty at Restaurants

Experts and operators say restaurants need to look at the big picture - atmosphere and service, along with menus - to foster family loyalty.

**That family loyalty** can lead to large-check repeat business, said Julie Casey, who has worked with such big brands as Outback Steakhouses and now consults on family experiences as chief executive of Radius Three Marketing. "Moms with kids going out to eat are willing to drive farther to a restaurant than other consumer demographics," Casey told a National Restaurant Association show audience in Chicago.



**Families are willing to drive**, on average, 15.2 miles for a good family-dining experience.

Guestmetrics found that of 600 kid-specific food items it analyzed, nearly 40 percent of sales came from just five items: chicken fingers, burgers, cheese pizza, chicken tenders and grilled cheese sandwiches.

**Some restaurants are providing two kids menus**, such as younger and older versions at Texas Roadhouse. "It is two different price points, and it's even different choices as well," said Casey, who has conducted research on kids' programs since 2007.

**Other restaurants offer parents the option of having dishes "toddler-chopped,"** which saves them the time of cutting up items for the kids. "We tell our staff to not only ask if they want the food for kids brought out first, we also ask them if they want the kitchen to cut up the food before it's served," said Scott Wise, president and chief executive of Pots & Pans Production with seven-unit Scotty's Brewhouse and other concepts in Indianapolis, Ind. "Your kitchen is probably going to hate it, but the parents love it."

**While the menu is important**, other factors, such as atmosphere and service, play a big part in family loyalty, said Casey. "It is cross-departmental, it is cross-functional," she said. "It is not something that's just a new kids' menu, and you say that's family loyalty -- it's not. It's big picture. It's menu. It's service. It's amenities."

**The friendliness of the staff also enhances the experience**, said Casey, whose surveys have found that parents like servers to talk with the children. "You can go back to your restaurant tomorrow and require every single one of your staff members to talk to every single kid that walks in the door, and I promise you that those families will be leaving and telling everybody how friendly the staff at your restaurant is - just by that one action," she said.

**In addition, activity sheets that the kids can take home should be a part of a restaurant's children's program.** "That's a huge, huge door opening for a restaurant," Casey said. "They are going to take your brand home with them if this is better quality."

Source: Ron Ruggless for Nation's Restaurant News