

DELIVERED WHOLESALE

PERSONAL SHOPPER

ASIDE FROM DELIVERING PRODUCTS TO YOUR DOOR, YOUR WHOLESALER CAN BE A SOURCE OF WISDOM WHEN YOU NEED IT MOST

EDITORIAL: Charlotte Mellor

From coffee to turkey, whisky to lettuce, a wholesale delivery can give you all of the ingredients you need to feed and water your guests. In the last year alone, well-informed and advanced menu planning has been increasingly referred to as the making of a successful restaurant.

Such recognition is correlated to many current events and concerns, such as the aftermath of Brexit, reducing waste and consumers looking to moderate certain food groups or cut out ingredients altogether. Taking these factors into consideration has led to a wave of new products and ranges from wholesalers that can be delivered right to your door and that will cater your customers' wants and needs. Because what's the point in having a menu, or a store room, or fridges and freezers full of products, if they're not desired by your target audience?

"Wholesalers that offer expert advice are invaluable to chefs and other customers as they can bring real authenticity to the menu," says Stuart Turner of SushiSushi. "Not only this, but wholesalers have inside knowledge about the current market trends and can share ideas, inspiration and advice. Due to the nature of their work, they speak to lots of operators, so have a broad perspective of what works well on a menu – as well as what doesn't."

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A PLATED FOOD TOUR WITH BIDFOOD

What's on the menu?

The goal for all wholesalers is to be a one-stop shop for catering products that are going to sell well. To ensure this, these products obviously need to be in high demand with your customers. Therefore, wholesalers need to know your restaurant and your customers inside out.

Wholesalers are communicating their ability to do this in a variety of ways. The most hands-on wholesaler will work directly with the operator to discuss their restaurant, its theme and its cuisine, however regional, niche or specific.

"We have visited Michael O'Hare's restaurant, The Rabbit in the Moon in Manchester, a number of times to help them introduce some niche products to the menu," says Turner.

Other activities might include regular menu reviews, market trend reports and even food tours.

"Taking customers on food tours helps to inspire menu creation and offers valuable insight into new food innovations and high street trends," says Nicola Holden, business development controller

at Bidfood. "Operators can learn a lot from this hands-on approach; trying new foods and interesting dining experiences can help spark ideas that they may not have thought about before."

A more general approach, but one that can overhaul a wholesaler's offering, is the introduction of new products and ranges in response to market trends, that are available to all operators. A new line of gluten-free dough balls means that operators can cater to the growing gluten-free market, while offering premium options of standard products gives operators the choice of offering a point of difference and the opportunity to upsell. One of the biggest pressures on wholesalers is to offer a wide range of local produce – and we're not just talking British-made.

"Booker has the ease and flexibility to work within the local markets our branches serve to identify important local suppliers," says Stuart Hyslop, Booker Group's managing director for catering and small business. "This means we can work with these local suppliers to ensure we offer the best choice, price and service we can. The most recent example of this is gin, where as well as having a national range, Booker also has a small number of products relevant to a small number of markets such as Tarquin's gin in Cornwall, Slingsby gin in Yorkshire and Adnams Copper House gin in Suffolk."

Wholesalers that offer local produce are more able to suggest seasonal options to chefs. Seasonality itself doesn't just mean spring, summer, autumn and winter, because seasonal produce doesn't behave in this way. For operators that want to focus on seasonal and local produce, they need to take note from wholesalers that are constantly updating their offering throughout the year.

"Choose a wholesaler who supplies locally sourced produce whenever seasonality permits, as well as fresh fruit, vegetables, salads and herbs regularly

"Taking customers on food tours helps to inspire menu creation"



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“This is just the latest in a number of food safety issues”

delivered from leading markets and leading suppliers,” says Rob Owen, executive development chef at Creed Food-service. “If wholesalers say fresh produce is subject to seasonality and availability, that’s normally a good indicator that the supplier is sourcing locally.”

One of the things Casual Dining Magazine hears a lot from wholesalers is that their service is not just about the products. As a member of the catering industry, they offer real industry guidance, respond to current issues and work with operators to combat any effects. This is where wholesalers can add real value.

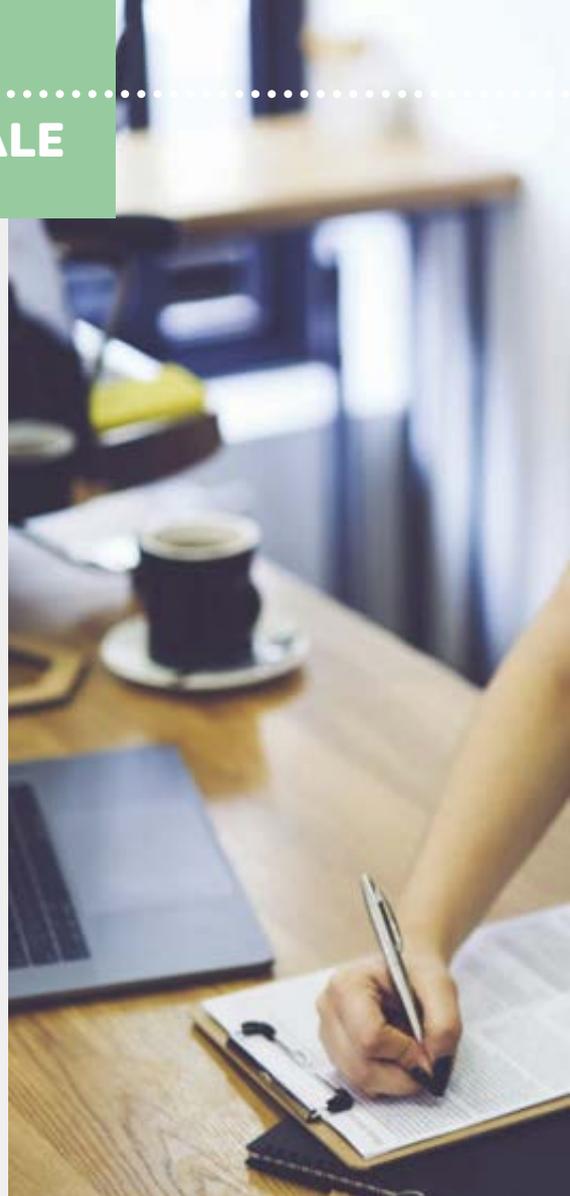
Assistance beats resistance

During times of change and uncertainty, operators and wholesalers should be able to work together to

support each other. As the sector is aware, businesses are facing increasing rates across property and food, while consumers are tightening their budgets. Consumer spending reports may suggest that eating out is a priority for them, but as confidence in the UK economy continues to fall, how long will this last?

To avoid putting increased costs onto the customer, operators should be able to work with their wholesaler to provide an alternative solution. Strict menu planning has been credited for being effective in this way.

“Wholesalers can add significant added value for customers by supporting and inspiring menu development, menu cycles and concept development,” says Owen. “Creating scratch-made dishes with premium ingredients,





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reviewing the cost of dishes and identifying product swaps or finding ready-to-serve alternatives, can help achieve commercial objectives and deliver great food to customers.”

If proper menu planning is practised, the savings in costs should go hand-in-hand with a reduction of waste. Operators that are conscious of this may want to seek a wholesaler that is active in such an area. Activity can include the redistribution of surplus food to those in need, the use of recycled packaging and renewable energy, and a proven reduction of waste that ends up in landfill. This can complement a chef's own work in this area.

As part of his strategy to raise awareness of global food waste, chef Massimo Bottura opened Refettorio Felix in London in collaboration with The Felix Project, which collects surplus food from wholesalers and retailers to be redistributed and turned into hot meals and food parcels.

“Chefs have risen to celebrity heights,” says Bottura. “I believe we, chefs, can reflect these lights to illuminate the most

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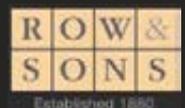
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pressing issues facing society today. Cooking is a call to act.”

On another note, a great wholesaler will also help to provide peace of mind with absolute product transparency – particularly crucial in today’s world of dietary requirements and allergies.

“When it became a legal requirement for establishments serving food to be able to respond to customer allergen queries, it was, understandably, a daunting prospect for many of our customers,” comments Jennie Fisher, director of customer engagement at Brakes.

As we’ve seen in recent times, product knowledge can be the difference between peace of mind and public scandal. The latest story to hit the headlines has been the discovery of egg-based products contaminated with residues of Fipronil, which is unauthorised for use around food-

producing animals in the EU. These eggs weren’t British, which has created further argument for the use of local, British produce both in and out-of-home.

“This is just the latest in a number of food safety issues connected to eggs produced outside of the UK in recent years,” says Ian Jones, chairman of British Lion Egg Processors. “Consumers clearly want retailers, caterers and food manufacturers to use good quality British ingredients that are produced to high standards of food safety, but in some prepared foods this is not the case.

“As we approach Brexit, shoppers are growing increasingly concerned about the ingredients used in manufactured food and now, more than ever, want and deserve transparency on food packaging. The egg industry believes that this is a great opportunity for retailers to listen

to the concerns of their customers and reassure them by specifying the use of British eggs.”

With consumers already on high alert when it comes to animal products following the horsemeat scandal, it’s vital that your wholesaler can assure you of the origin, life cycle and complete contents of what you’re buying, including any pesticides or antibiotics that may have been used. Of course, with ingredients that can pose a threat to the health of your customers, this is even more crucial.

Clearly, your relationship with your wholesaler is one of the most important you can have in these testing times. No, it is not just a warehouse full of products, but, as an extension of your team. It should be knowledgeable, trustworthy and passionate about the industry, ensuring that you can have full faith in their products and services. 