

HOT TOPICS

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Welcome to the Digital Version of Hot Topics!



Fads vs. Trends — and how to tell the difference

by Dave Rolston

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Mom’s fried chicken—with a side of memories

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Winner! Winner! Chicken Dinner!

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The Dinner Bell, McComb, Mississippi

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FADS vs. TRENDS — and how to tell the difference

by David Rolston
President and CEO



When I was in my teens, I was, like most young people, eager to appear “cool.” At that time, bellbottom pants were in vogue—and the more outrageous the better. I found some red, white and blue material (then my favorite colors) and convinced my mother to do the tailoring necessary to transform a simple pair of blue jeans into a major fashion statement. My friends and I were extremely pleased with the result.

That was quite a while ago and, although I occasionally wear jeans to the office, I doubt very much that my fellow workers here at Hatco would consider it cool if I showed up in my old bellbottoms. The simple fact is that, although jeans have progressed through many trends ranging from work pants to casual attire to designer versions, bellbottoms were a relatively short-lived fad.

Fads, which I would define as short-lived but highly charged enthusiasm, have always been with us and a part of every culture. They range from the harmless, such as hula-hoops, to the potentially dangerous or financially harmful like the “dot.com” bubble of the 1980s. For the most part, they remind us that, given the right circumstances and enough peer pressure, people can make some really bad decisions.

From a business perspective, certain industries such as fashion can be said to be built on fads. Each season the new collections of the leading designers make the previous year’s clothing obsolete—at least for the fashion conscious. Even heavy industry is not immune. The enthusiasm for fins on automobiles reached a ridiculous extreme in the late 1950s and, more recently, home builders created ever larger “McMansions” until the more sensible among the public realized the cost of upkeep.

Separate from fads but tangentially related are trends, which represent the slower paced but more logical evolution of tastes and products. For instance, in the foodservice industry, the once explosive growth of high-end coffee shops featuring a wide variety of flavors has matured. Major players remain and continue to grow, but out of the initial fad a trend emerged in the public taste for flavored coffees, which continues and now includes convenience stores, quick-serve restaurants, and retail products for home use.

Throughout our industry, we constantly strive to be aware of trends for a good reason. Not only is our customer base continually searching for new flavors, new experiences, and assurances of more wholesome selections, but the ability to identify an emerging trend can be the key to becoming an industry institution.

Because it is up to Hatco as a foodservice manufacturer not only to meet but to anticipate our customers’ needs, there are several ways in which we work with them to quickly and efficiently enable them to take advantage of an emerging trend. These include:

- Design capability. Our years of experience in working with customers to design the best solutions to their product needs enable us to develop and build the equipment they need in time to meet their target deadlines.
- Versatility. One of Hatco’s greatest strengths is the versatility that we build into the products that we offer. For instance, many of our warmers can be equipped with a wide variety of different sized pans. Our Ovention products store literally a thousand programs that will cook food to perfection, and our toasters handle bread, bagels, muffins, sweet rolls, and many other items. We like to think that the products we make can work well with not only today’s food favorites but those that have not yet been developed.
- Long life. By incorporating only the finest materials and the latest construction techniques, we ensure that our products will provide years of service. We think of every customer purchase as an investment and strive to deliver the greatest ROI possible.



By assisting our customers in responding quickly and effectively to market trends with equipment that can handle food offerings as they change, we can help them to meet the needs of the market both now and in the future, enabling them to move forward with confidence and avoid the “bellbottoms” of foodservice.



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MOM'S FRIED CHICKEN— WITH A SIDE OF MEMORIES

Comfort food might just be the ultimate dining “experience”

No matter how far away from home life takes us, whether in miles or years, the fastest way back just might be found in the taste of the dishes we grew up with. The idea of comfort food is enshrined in virtually all cultures. In the United States, we hear the expression “as American as Mom and apple pie.” A popular Christmas song describes the “man who lives in Tennessee” heading home to Pennsylvania for pumpkin pie. Although the foods and preparations vary from country to country and from person to person, the one thing that they have in common seems to be an association with nostalgia: these are the dishes that remind us of the meals that we most enjoyed when we were growing up.

Recent industry surveys identify comfort food as an emerging trend, but the reality is that a number of restaurants have built highly successful reputations offering their customers a core menu of identifiable dishes that are called for again and again.

It's not surprising that ethnic specialties rank high with the descendants of immigrants. As many nationalities have melded into the American fabric and traditional neighborhoods have undergone change, it can be difficult to find the basic ingredients for particular recipes. Likewise, schedules and lifestyles preclude the time necessary to prepare some of the most popular foods.

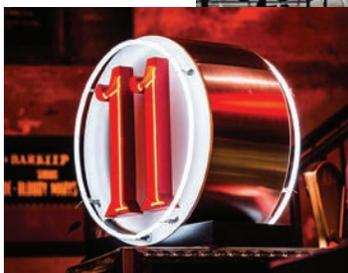
Bradley Rubin is the owner of Chicago's Eleven City Diner*, a restaurant that many of the 6,000 to 7,000 guests per week associate with comfort food. Although the menu is varied and continues to evolve, some of the most popular specialties include Eastern European dishes brought to this country by Jewish immigrants. Bradley, whose preparation for opening a restaurant included a 'round-the-world motorcycle trip that exposed him to many different cuisines, comments, “Our most popular dishes include corned beef and pastrami sandwiches, eggs and omelets, and our beloved matzo ball chicken soup. We serve a full breakfast menu all day because, in a city like Chicago, different shifts start and end at different times.”

On the subject of so-called “comfort food,” Bradley comments, “I associate that term with food that makes us feel good—not just diner food. It's an individual matter, and the choice has a lot to do with what area of the country someone came from and what they grew up eating. Basically, it's what makes us happy, and that can mean different things to different people.”

Despite the popularity of the core items, Bradley sees the definition extending over time: “We review our menu twice a year and don't hesitate to make changes. People today are more health conscious and open to new flavors. We also offer an increasing number of accompaniments for basic dishes.”

On a personal level, Bradley's favorite meal is grilled ham steak with pineapple—just the way his mother used to make it.

Perhaps no cuisine has contributed more to the American idea of comfort food than the foods of the South. The international popularity of such dishes as fried chicken, pecan pie, and hot biscuits demonstrates that what were once regional specialties have now found a worldwide audience.



Photos courtesy of Eleven City Diner



Cracker Barrel Old Country Store was founded and continues to grow based on the mission of “Pleasing People®” which the brand lives out by serving traditional favorites and other Southern-influenced dishes with a full serving of hospitality and charm.

A menu built on choice and variety from the beginning offers “better for you options” as well as craveable signature entrees like “made from scratch Chicken n’ Dumplings” and seasonal offerings

*A new location in Los Angeles is planned for 2018.

continued from "Mom's Fried Chicken"

like "Salmon Patties."

Customer loyalty is visible in the popularity of the restaurant, with an average of one thousand guests a day coming through the doors of each store.

Mark Williamson, Director of Strategic Initiatives, has found the combination of comfort food and genuine hospitality a "recipe" for success and expansion: "The chain has recently opened its first unit in California. Cracker Barrel is able to take our mission of Pleasing People just about anywhere and the west coast is certainly no exception. The authenticity of the brand is a key ingredient that our guests have come to love



and expect. For example, our décor is made up of 100% authentic Americana memorabilia; every store has 900 to 1,000 pieces of these authentic artifacts that decorate our walls. We maintain an ever-growing inventory that enables us to reflect the individual identity of every community we're in."

As times change and tastes mature, the definition of comfort food will likely take on more meanings. As more meals are eaten out of home, later generations may be less attached to "foods that Mother cooked" than to foods that Mother brought home or that we ate when we were out. One sure thing remains: when we

need to experience the flavor of childhood or the taste of security, that special dish—and the memories and feelings it brings—will take us back home. ■



Photos courtesy of Cracker Barrel

WINNER! WINNER! CHICKEN DINNER!

World over, chicken is an all-time favorite food

From the humble chicken soup to an elegant Coq a l'orange, there is a chicken preparation to satisfy every taste. Foodservice prognosticators tell us that chicken is increasing in popularity—and no wonder. There is the exquisite contrast in both flavor and texture between the chicken skin and the meat within. Another key factor: the ability of the meat to absorb other flavors. Easily marinated, chicken can acquire tastes that range from curry and teriyaki to more delicate combinations of spices and wines.



The increasing public preference for healthier foods makes chicken a natural choice. Stripped of the skin, the meat contains very little fat (although in fairness, chicken fat—often referred to in Yiddish as schmaltz—is a staple in many ethnic dishes).

In his 1972 volume *American Cookery*, noted chef James Beard stated: “There was a time when chicken was a Sunday dinner dish and could be found in most homes stuffed and roasted, stewed with dumplings, or fried and served with cream gravy. Now it is a daily food . . . propagandized for its low-calorie count.”



From colonial times, chicken has been a staple of the American diet, with preparations reflecting different regional and ancestral traits. They range from Capitolade of Chicken (a chicken hash served by Jefferson at Monticello for breakfast), Maryland Fried Chicken (chicken in creamy gravy), Chicken Burgoo (a Kentucky specialty), Brunswick Stew from North Carolina, Georgia’s Country Captain—a curry and tomato preparation—and, of course, Southern Fried Chicken.

Perhaps no recipe has occasioned as much argument as the proper preparation of Southern Fried Chicken. Partisans of different varieties are extremely insistent on how the dish MUST be prepared. Author William Styron quoted in the *Artists’ and Writers’ Cookbook* states, “. . . at least one and a half hours of sober, selfless, undeviating effort must be spent in order to produce a satisfactory result . . . you cannot go into the other room and booze it up with your waiting guests.”

Perhaps the most flowery tribute to the simple chicken was penned by columnist and cookbook author Elizabeth Robins Pennell in her chapter “Spring Chicken”: “The gentle little spring chicken is sweet and adorable above all its kindred poultry. . . . It is the very concentration of spring; as your teeth meet in its tender, yielding flesh, you think, whether you will or no, of violets and primroses, and hedgerows white with may; you feel the balmy breath of the south wind; . . . and, for the time being, life is a perfect poem.”

All the fuss aside, the best expressed reason for the popularity in any form of this rather unassuming bird was recorded by the Civil Rights icon, Malcolm X, in his autobiography: “Everybody likes chicken.” ■



THE DINNER BELL

McComb, Mississippi

Down home food served family style



Since 1959, lovers of Southern-style food have been pulling up a chair at the giant Lazy Susan tables at McComb's The Dinner Bell restaurant. Planners of such traditional dishes as fried chicken, steak and gravy, dumplings, field peas, and—the house specialty—fried eggplant enable diners to sample the full range of local specialties.

According to André Davis, whose family has owned and managed the restaurant since 2003, “Seventy percent of our business includes repeat customers, and nine out of ten of them come up from Louisiana. Of course, we return the favor and go down to Louisiana for seafood. Although most folks enjoy our regular staple dishes, we do vary the menu several times a week and provide an even more extensive variety on Sundays.”

In addition to the regular customers, The Dinner Bell has become a local tourist attraction. Some years ago, a tour bus from Wisconsin got lost, and the riders ended up stopping at The Dinner Bell. They enjoyed the experience so much that now the bus line schedules two regular trips each year.

As André says, “No matter how far away you come from, you’ll always feel at home at The Dinner Bell.”

For further information, visit The Dinner Bell website at www.thedinnerbell.net or phone 601-684-4883. ■



SWEET POTATO CASSEROLE

Serves 10-12



Photos and recipe
courtesy of The Dinner Bell
in McComb, Mississippi
www.thedinnerbell.net

Ingredients

8 average size sweet potatoes (1 large and 1 medium can of sweet potatoes may also be used)
1 Tbs (13 g) vanilla
3 to 5 Tbs (38-63 g) sugar (to taste)
1/2 stick (56 g) margarine or butter
3/4 Tbs (9 g) cinnamon (or more as desired)
1/4 Tbs (2 g) nutmeg (or more as desired)
1/4 Tbs (4 ml) orange juice
Marshmallows

Instructions

Boil or bake potatoes until tender. Peel and mash well, removing all strings. Add all ingredients and mix well. Spray large long casserole with cooking spray and fill with mixture. Bake at 350°F (176°C) until hot (approximately 30 minutes). Remove from oven and put marshmallows on top. Place dish back in oven for marshmallows to brown.



Not just another “DRY WELL”

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Available in standard (1- to 6-ganged units) and slim styles (2- to 4-ganged units), Hatco’s Dry Heated Wells provide dry convected heat to obtain the most accurate and consistent holding temperatures. The lack of cumbersome plumbing restrictions also delivers greater flexibility and lower installation costs.

Features include:

- individual thermostatic controls for each well and a separate On/Off switch to retain settings
- easy-to-service design
- uniform convected air flow for efficient heat transfer
- ¾-inch NPT brass drain for easy cleanup.



Bring the latest in food holding technology to your operation with our new Dry Wells. Flexible, reliable, and easy to operate and maintain, they will keep you out of “hot water.” Visit our website at www.hatcocorp.com or contact your Hatco representative. ■