



Smarten Up on Mobile Apps

5 ways to get business done on the go

BY KATE ROCKWOOD

From service management to food delivery, tech-savvy restaurant managers are using apps to drive the front and back of the house.

Have your fingers at the ready to check out these worthy finds.

WHAT THE HEALTH
Makes health inspection scores searchable

What it fixes: You got a great score and want to brag about it.

What the Health is an app that gives consumers access to restaurant health inspections. It can drive traffic to high scorers but also keep lower scorers on alert.

How it works: The GPS-driven app has a search function and shows nearby restaurants, along with their health scores and reports. For states that don't assign letter grades, What the Health's algorithm crunches the data and assigns one. Available for 10 states to date.

What it costs: Free.

SHIFTGIG

For finding the right staff—start

What it fixes: Whether it's nabbing an additional bartender for the holiday rush, a cook to fill in when half the kitchen gets the flu or an army of servers to handle a temporary promotion, finding short-term staff sucks—especially on a moment's notice.

How it works: Shiftgig offers workers who have been vetted and background checked—for tonight, if need be—with just a few taps. Workers have covered more than 50,000 shifts since the app first launched.

What it costs: Free for workers. Restaurants pay a per-shift fee.

MINTSCRAPS

Reduces the problem of wasted food

What it fixes: Food waste isn't just a drain on the planet, it's a drag on your bottom line. Nearly \$165 billion worth of food hits the dumpsters every year, according to the National Resources Defense Council. The Mintscreens app helps eateries track trash, recycling and composting, and reduce waste.

How it works: Tap the app every time you toss something in the trash, and Mintscreens will discern real-time waste generation patterns to help streamline operations. You'll get a weekly report calculating the amount of money the kitchen is squandering along with customized suggestions for reducing it.

How much it costs: Restaurants pay a subscription fee based on their size and the amount of waste tracked.

SHIFT MESSENGER

Talking with staff from afar

What it fixes: If you and your staff are up to your eyeballs in Post-it notes and phone lists, Shift Messenger might save your sanity.

How it works: The free messaging app lets you divvy staff into separate phone lists for easy group messaging. Anyone can initiate a group or private message, so it's easy to encourage peer-to-peer shift swaps or send memos. Users have to shell out for texting charges or swap their private phone numbers with their co-workers.

What it costs: Free to download and use.

VELOCITY

Turn tables faster while winning over millennial diners

What it fixes: Velocity's pay-at-table app promises to slash the time between diners deciding they want the bill and leaving the restaurant. On a busy night turning tables faster can mean more revenue and less annoyance from impatient diners. A plus: Velocity also claims that app users spend 14 percent more, on average.

How it works: Diners download the app and check in at a participating restaurant. Once they finish the meal, their card on file is automatically charged, along with a user-set tip. Users can also split the tab, either by amount or percent.

What it costs: Fees vary by operation. ■

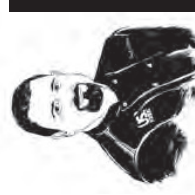
Kate Rockwood writes for a variety of publications, such as *Inc.* and *Fast Company*.

DEAR FOOD FANATIC

Seasoned advice on the front and back of the house

Q Our restaurant has an additional dining room that sits empty all too often. Any ideas?

A MONTHLY COOKING DEMOS ARE A GREAT WAY TO SALVAGE SLOWER NIGHTS AND SPREAD THE WORD ABOUT YOUR RESTAURANT. Set aside 20 minutes to teach participants how to make an appetizer and entree that is easy to duplicate at home. Charge a reasonable set price to cover costs, and make sure to include a drink. Guests get a taste of your restaurant and your dining room, which they'll be more likely to remember for future private dining events.



FOOD FANATIC

Jamie Cochran is a Food Fanatics chef for US Foods from Hurricane, Virginia, who's always down for trying new restaurants.



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Follow the Food Fanatic on Twitter for more tips.

Q. It seems we are always doing more with less: we're running a skeleton crew, and time is always limited. It's hard to find inspiration under this pressure. Any ideas?

A. It's easy to check the internet, but who has the bandwidth to filter through endless recipes? Carve out pockets of time to take care of yourself. Clearing your mind through a small walk before or after work can foster big ideas. Look to your staff and guests for inspiration by asking what gets them excited about food. If you live in a close food community, consider hosting fellow chefs on a night you're closed for a roundtable discussion with food and drinks.

Q. My employees are always taking smoke breaks. I know smoking is a way for them to deal with the daily stress of our busy restaurant, but how can I control the breaks and still keep the peace?

A. Every restaurant faces this issue, and unfortunately there's no easy solution. I once tried to ban smoke breaks, but that did not go over well. The best you can do is limit breaks during off-peak times and required work is never neglected. Just make sure your staff never smokes in public view—it's unprofessional and bad for business.

Q. My staff isn't pushing our new beverage program. Our craft beers perform well, but the staff still relies on the old standbys. How can I get them pumped to sell?

A. Arming your staff with education is the best way to increase sales. Plan a staff training and tasting session

that includes everyone—especially if you're using mixes, purees and infusions. Have employees team up to work hands-on with new ingredients and techniques. Track team sales, offering incentives like a prize or a special team dinner as a reward.

Q. I want to change up my menu with trendier dishes, but I'm afraid of scaring off regulars who make up a big portion of my current business. What do I do?

A. Unless you're planning an entire concept overhaul, you don't need to flip your menu completely in one swoop. Ease dishes into your menu as specials. Figure out which dishes are your top sellers and keep those as standbys or secret menu items. Start with menu variations that can riff off some of your classics, so it's easy to make a regular feel special if they request it. Eventually, most customers will probably pick up what you're putting down. It just might take a little time.

Q. Our health department says I can't cut and wash my produce in the production kitchen sink unless we sanitize the area every time we switch to any other products like proteins. I get why it's important, but it's time consuming. What can I do to save time and labor?

A. Consider installing a system that automates the cleaning process. The cost upfront will save you money in the long run. Depending on your budget, you might also want to consider purchasing pre-washed and pre-cut products that will spare you labor and help keep costs in check. ■

Got a question for the Food Fanatics?

Send your challenges, comments and suggestions to ask@FoodFanatics.com.