

FAST FOOD FOR THOUGHT

In the fast-food market, the expectation of great service matched with quality food and a memorable experience continues to rise, finds Retail Focus.

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The fast food industry is currently benefitting from two trends in the UK, according to market research firm Euromonitor. Firstly, it seems that busier lifestyles are making people less willing to cook for themselves, with many attracted to fast food by its affordable prices. In addition, the quality and diversity of fast food available continues to improve, and a growing focus on health and quality is encouraging players to adapt their offer.

In terms of global brand owner, McDonald's is leading the way in the UK fast food market, accounting for 15 per cent value share in 2015, finds Euromonitor.

Across the UK, McDonald's restaurants are undergoing a transformation that will provide the foundations for current and future changes to the company's menu and service experience. 'The big changes focus on providing customers with more choice as to how they order and pay, adapting how the food is prepared and served, and offering new technological features to create an environment that is even more welcoming and enjoyable,' says the company.

In August last year, McDonald's began trialling table service in 14 restaurants across England, and by the end of 2016 it is

expected to be available in more than 400 restaurants across the UK. The company is also installing self-order kiosks, where customers can browse the menu and check the nutritional information of each meal before completing their order and paying by card.

'Investing in our customer experience is paramount,' says Paul Pomroy, chief executive officer, McDonald's UK. 'Customers' expectations remain high as tastes continue to evolve. Our response is a multimillion pound investment in the next chapter of the McDonald's UK story.'

The fast food restaurant chain has also been moving away from the use of red and yellow in its branding (colours often associated with speed and efficiency) in favour of more natural colours, such as green (often connected to health and the environment) as more and more people look for healthier food options.

'With our community becoming increasingly more health conscious, we are seeing a shift in what "fast food" means,' says Ruth Carpenter at CADA Design. 'Fast food has been redefined, focusing on healthy, high protein/low carb replacements.'

The interior design consultancy has more than 25 years experience in the

Above: KFC Newcastle, featuring the latest format by I-AM, created especially for bustling city centre locations.

hospitality sector, working alongside the likes of Itsu, Chip+Fish, Roast, Mori and Pret. In 2015, it was tasked with translating the American Potbelly Sandwich Shop brand (which started out as an antiques shop in Chicago specialising in rustic potbelly stoves) to suit the UK market. The first site opened in Westfield Stratford last summer with a vibrant yellow shopfront and light interior featuring carefully chosen antiques, playful photography and info graphics that narrate the history of the brand.

'The expectation of great service, matched with quality food and a memorable experience continues to rise,' notes Pete Champion, group partner and creative director at London-based design agency I-AM. 'The gap between casual dining - going out for a midweek dinner - and fast food is closing, with elements of more premium offers contributing to the rise of the contemporary "fast casual" offer proliferating with brands like Five Guys.'

The design agency has worked closely with KFC to develop a new

Right & below: McDonalds is rolling out Samsung Galaxy tablets across its UK restaurants, with help from SOTI, in order to provide customers with the 'Experience of the Future'.

format especially for city centre locations that reflects the brand's updated look and feel, and forms part of its plans to expand significantly by 2020. The design sets a new standard, featuring a contemporary, friendly and informal atmosphere with bar stool seating, a new material palette, and new artwork complemented by wire-mesh chicken installations perched in the lobby.

'Style wise, we evolved the fast food feel to a warmer, textural and fast-casual impression, with more variation in materiality (metal combined with timber and leather) and colour,' explains Champion. 'Overall, variety, warmth and texture was dialled up, combined with a more stripped back sensibility in order to express and reflect the honest warmth and joy of the brand's positioning as the original and best in the world of great fried chicken.'

The quick service restaurant category is evolving all the time, with new chains launching and arriving from overseas, says Cheryl Flink, chief strategy officer for Market Force Information, which has published a study into Britain's favourite fast food restaurants and coffee shops. According to the findings, US burger chain Five Guys, which launched in the UK three years ago, has taken the top spot from last year's winner Nando's, while Gourmet Burger Kitchen (GBK) is placed third, followed by KFC. The study looks at the specific attributes that drive satisfaction, analysing factors such as speed of service, food quality and value for money.

'The Five Guys approach is one of simplicity and honesty,' says a spokesperson at Blacksheep, the design studio behind the UK restaurants. 'We took this sentiment and reflected it within the design, where open kitchens dominate the spaces and the raw ingredients, stacked potato sacks and peanut oil, are often on display. A combination of seating zones and types caters to diners' differing needs and the solid oak tables and chairs communicate and reinforce the premium offer at Five Guys.'

The UK burger bar market is now estimated to be worth £3.286 million (up 22 per cent from £2.801 million in 2011), according to market intelligence agency Mintel, with three in five Brits found to have visited a burger outlet in the three months to July 2016.



Delivering the goods

With the rise of third-party online ordering portals such as Deliveroo, Just Eat and Supper, more restaurants in the UK, from fast food chains to Michelin-starred restaurants, are exploring home delivery options. Burger King, for example, began trialling home delivery in 2015 with a national rollout expected later this year, while Pizza Express is thought to be opening 150 delivery sites over the next five years.

'The desire to have food delivered has increased dramatically with the use of mobile phone apps enabling food to be ordered at the touch of a button,' says Robert Rosser, creative director at retail design agency Studio Tait. 'Companies like Just Eat and Deliveroo are almost becoming admired brands in

themselves. Almost every fast food brand has embraced the digital revolution in some respect, whether individually or in partnership with a third party, and this allows companies to grow without necessarily increasing their staff numbers or seating capacity.'

But, whether dining in, taking away or ordering online for home delivery, creating consistent branding and level of service is of utmost importance, maintains Rosser. 'This needs to be reinforced with great shopfront signage, wayfinding, advertising and digital presence,' he says. 'Fast food is getting faster and good digital communication has become an essential component in growing and driving success.' **Rf**

Below: US burger chain Five Guys has been named Britain's favourite fast food restaurant, three years after launching in the UK.

