

# Some Changes Are for the Better, But Big Challenges Remain

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It appears that we're slowly climbing out of the Great Recession, but economists and other experts warn that we're moving forward into a "new reality," not returning to the way things were before the 2008 financial meltdown.

The managers and administrators of corporate and campus dining, conference and other hospitality services need to re-evaluate and realign their organizations and systems to meet the new, still evolving circumstances.

The "new normal" is dominated by two basic, interrelated and apparently long-term trends.

- **Thrift:** Both companies and individuals have learned that they can do more with less – spending less, but spending it wisely – and gain better returns, whether in the corporate treasury or the individual's pocket.
- **The Big Green Movement:** Sustainability and all it entails, from conservation of resources to locally-sourced food and healthy dining, is here to stay and is becoming a more and more important element of on-site dining programs.

Alongside and within these two dominant themes, other trends are emerging that affect dining and hospitality operations. Some are challenges to be met; others are opportunities to exploit, and many are a combination of both.

Chief among the mixed blessings is the growth of innovative mobile communications systems. Now, anyone with a cell phone can get menus and place orders with many restaurants and fast food outlets for pickup or delivery. The on-site operator can do the same and has the advantage of being closer and hopefully, quicker in filling an order.

## Working Online 'Necessary'

The other side of advancing mobility is that employees and students don't have to be in the office or classroom to work.

"Each year, communications technology [is] making it easier and more efficient to work remotely," Shane O'Neill, writing for Computerworld UK, says. "In 2011, tools like shared digital workrooms, telepresence and on-line employment platforms . . . will make working on line not only easier, but also necessary to do business." Someone working or studying from home isn't going to be a dining service customer.

"Consumers will not be in retreat [in 2011] but instead will be redefining value to better fit a world in which economic risk can no longer be ignored," says a report from The Futures Company, a consulting and research firm that concentrates on consumer values and attitudes.

## Thrift Meets 'Greenness'

"While consumers will attend to the impact of their choices on . . . the environment, energy, the community and other people, more attention will be paid [to] their own time, energy, attention, health

and emotions,” the firm forecasts.

That’s where thrift and sustainability intersect and affect on-site dining services. A person concerned about health also in concerned about the source, content and preparation of the meals she/he consumes. The café customer expects healthy foods, locally sourced, freshly prepared and affordable. That’s the new definition of value.

Operators can capitalize on this increasing awareness by not only buying local products and biodegradable disposables, recycling, conserving energy and other practices – some of which are very cost-effective – but also letting customers know what you’re doing for their good health and the environment.

## **Upstairs to the Farm**

“Local food” can be found very close to home by any organization with some open space on its campus where some vegetables and herbs can be grown. For some city restaurants, the open space is found overhead. A rooftop garden won’t supply all of an operation’s needs, but will demonstrate a commitment to healthy foods. The U.S. Department of Agriculture is planning a rooftop garden to supply its own in-house dining service, for example.

*First in a series about how the “new normal” is changing and challenging on-site dining and hospitality services.*

*Clarion’s **Fresh & Natural** concept is a way your hospitality services can be greener and more efficient. For information, contact Angela Phelan, senior vice president, 973/544-6223 or [ALP@clariongp.com](mailto:ALP@clariongp.com) or Tom Mac Dermott, president, 603/642-8011 or [TWM@clariongp.com](mailto:TWM@clariongp.com).*