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Luring millennials with coffee and tea

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Operators engage adventurous millennials with coffees and teas that are exciting, customizable. Sponsored by S&D Coffee & Tea.

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Restaurant operators recognize the power of the millennials. The food and beverage preferences of these high-frequency customers will drive the industry for decades to come.

Defined by Pew Research Center as being individuals between the ages of 18 and 34, the millennials have surpassed the baby boomers to become the nation's largest living generation, now exceeding 75 million.

Operators who are successful in selling this group coffee and tea – two of their favorite beverages – know what makes them tick.

A demand for customized offerings is one of their major motivators, according to Sally Sparks, vice president of consumer insights for Food & Drink Resources, a menu and product development company based in Centennial, Colo. Thus there is an opportunity to sell them coffee and tea brewed in ways that they perceive as individualized and “made-for-me.”

Espresso is an obvious way to do that, Sparks says. So is pour-your-own affogato, a take on the Italian dessert beverage in which the patron douses a scoop of ice cream with hot coffee. “If you can serve a beverage or a food in an interactive situation, it really resonates with millennials,” Sparks says.

Also worth exploring are French press and pour-over coffees, as well as custom-flavored, hand-shaken iced coffees and iced teas.



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When millennials select brands and concepts with which to engage, they demand transparency, authenticity and a sense of relationship, Sparks says. In regard to coffee and tea, that involves sharing the backstory with them about where the beans or leaves come from, how they were processed and how they fit the company's values.

"The point of telling these stories is to build a relationship with millennials," says Sparks. "You are sharing information about you and your company, how you do business and what you think is cool about it."

One of the most fertile opportunities for reaching millennials with coffee and tea relates to their open-mindedness and curiosity about global cuisines. "They have driven a lot of experimentation in the industry," says Sparks. "They are just much more willing than other generations to mix and match and explore ethnic flavors."

Sparks sees opportunities for operators to mine Latin American, Cuban, Middle Eastern and Asian cultures for coffee and tea styles, flavors and preparation methods. "There is a lot more diffusion of all the different ethnic flavors coming through," says Sparks.

Millennials are ethnically diverse, which allows them to incorporate eating habits from many cultures and "confidently face the vast array of ingredient options available," according to Foodways of the Younger Generations: Millennials & Gen Z 2016, a report by The Hartman Group, a Bellevue, Wash.-based market research company.

At Latin Beet Kitchen, a new Latin inspired, health minded, quick casual eatery in New York, many of the beverage and food offerings have been designed with millennials in mind.

Co-owner Roger Torres, with his brothers, co-chefs Jaime and Felipe Torres, constructed Latin Beet inside their Raymi Peruvian Kitchen restaurant. He admits to being a little older than the millennials, but nevertheless is savvy about them.

"They are customers who want a lot more information," says Torres. "They want to eat and drink healthy and they want to know where all the ingredients come from."

Latin Beet serves breakfast and lunch using only high quality organic, gluten-free and non-GMO ingredients, Torres says. Menu features include toasts made with organic bread and various toppings and arepas — organic white corn cakes — with vegetable, cheese, salmon and egg fillings.

The coffee program is distinguished by coffee beans flown in from Colombia, roasted locally and served at the restaurant within 10 days of processing. "This is the freshest coffee you can get," says Torres.

In addition to serving familiar espresso-based coffee drinks such as cappuccino and latte, Torres says he and his brothers "are more or less the only ones in America" serving authentic Latin American café con leche, which is made with brewed coffee and hot milk.

Along with "cow-made milk," as the menu puts it, Latin Beet offers coffee drinkers housemade nut milks made from almonds and cashews. In the future Torres anticipates flavoring nut milks with cinnamon, turmeric and lucuma, a sweet Peruvian fruit with a unique flavor.

Millennials at Latin Beet are also responding to aromáticas — Latin style fruit and herbal teas — and bottled kombucha, the tangy, fermented tea beverage, in flavors such as ginger lemon and cayenne.

Living up to the high standards that millennials demand can be challenging for restaurant operators, Sparks says, adding, "But once you engage with them and win their loyalty, they are very loyal to you."

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