

Think like a peacock!

University caterers need to think like a peacock to attract students in 2015, writes Hannah Somers, design consultant for Catering Design Group

Creating a successful food destination for students starts by having great insight into current and future food and interior design trends, while also keeping a shrewd eye on what is happening on the high street.

Casual dining enjoying a renaissance
Recent statistics from the NPD Group show that casual dining restaurants have attracted an extra 47 million visits each year in comparison to five years ago, making it the fastest growing sector in the eating out market. Why? Because it's informal, offers good quality food, good value and high levels of service.

The brands that are leading the casual renaissance are Nando's, Wagamama, Yo! Sushi, Zizzi and Giraffe, all of which have an extremely loyal student following.

Provenance is king

Provenance will continue to be at the forefront of consumer thinking. It is all about the use of fresh, seasonal produce from local and ethical sources. Leon, another favourite with students, is a good example of this. Leon set out to change the face of fast food as we know it. Its philosophy is: "Why can't fast food be good food?"

Let the street be your inspiration

Gourmet junk food and street food are perhaps the biggest trends to sweep the UK in recent years. It's all about a few dishes done very well. The trend has revolutionised the burger, introduced us to concepts such as hot dogs served with champagne and taken the humble chicken to celebrity status.

It's casual, fast and snappy, where diners pay a little more for quality and a memorable eating experience. Simple offers in this style would not only be very on trend for universities, but also assist the catering teams by reducing light equipment requirements.

Creating a destination

University caterers need to take design very seriously if they are to successfully compete with the high street. The interior space needs to work so much



harder to capture the imagination of students to secure buy-in and loyalty. The challenge for caterers is ensuring the dining space stands out from the crowd. The way to achieve this is to think like a student. They want to eat and drink in an environment that mirrors the style and aspirations of the brands they are loyal to.

Think like a peacock

'Peacocking', a term taken from the urban dictionary which means 'dressing for attention', pretty much sums up the attitude caterers need to adopt to appeal to students. In the same way peacocks use their feathers to lure a mate, great interior design will inspire students. It starts with the student journey from the moment they walk through the door, right up until the time they leave. It's about creating an extra special feel that mirrors the aspirations they want to be a part of when on the high street.

The feel good factor

The ambience of your restaurant is critical to achieving this feel and current trends are moving towards zoned spaces to create interest and movement around an eating space.

If you get the ambience right, it can

create a feel good factor and a sense of ownership for the students.

What's your story?

Storytelling is the buzz word in interior design in 2015 and is at the very heart of creating a destination. Students love a story and especially one that teaches them about the history, culture and values of their university.

Design is an extremely powerful tool in the art of storytelling and doesn't need to be expensive. Involve the students from the outset; this helps to get their buy-in and for them to take ownership of the space. Consistency is key and these themes should translate throughout your operation, from the styling of food, staff uniforms, menu presentation and signage.

How do caterers achieve the look?

You don't need to go over the top to create your destination. Use neutral tones and bring it to life by adding splashes of strong, bold colour and pattern across fabrics, cushions and accessories. 'Mis-matched' furniture, fabrics, textures and finishes are great tools for universities looking to create a quirky, edgy look.

Think like a fashion buyer

Creating a destination to rival the high street may be about thinking like a student and being more fun, quirky and glamorous. However, the key for caterers is how you use these trends to make them relevant to your catering space. Draw inspiration from the high street, your local area, and trends, and then take time to review your operation.

“The interior space needs to work so much harder to capture the imagination of students to secure buy-in and loyalty”

It's a bit like fashion - we often wonder who on earth would wear those outrageous catwalk creations, but nine times out of ten they make their way into the shops courtesy of fashion buyers who cherry-pick elements of a design with the widest appeal for consumers and translate them into a high street must-have.