

London calling: food and innovation

Unplugged networking events took the MAPIC roadshow to London twice this year to unpack the latest news, views and insights from the UK retail and F&B sectors.

Mark Faithfull reports on the discussions and debate

THE CHANGING face of F&B and the rise of authentic, independent chains were two of the key topics at a breakfast briefing in London in March, during which James Hacon, managing director of Think Hospitality, examined “the trend towards brand inversion” that is spawning a proliferation of mini sub-brands. “There has been a focus on consistency over individuality,” he said. “But now, many smaller brands have achieved consistency while retaining individuality.”

This would be reflected in a definite split between “food for fuel and food for experience”, Hacon added.

Eric Partaker, co-founder and CEO of Mexican chain Chilango, focused on the increasing importance of food delivery. He said Chilango had maintained its profit margins by optimising its relationship with

delivery services. Depending on the site, delivery now accounted for up to 35% of Chilango’s sales. “Although there is some cannibalisation, mostly it’s extending the radius of our customer base,” he added. “One of the biggest logistical issues has been how to organise the kitchen around delivery and in-restaurant dining, and how the space is divided for pick-up riders coming in.”

Hacon added that a number of F&B operators were now looking at separate entrances for pick-ups and dining, as consumers became “channel agnostic” about how they order and eat.

Innovation, the current plight of the UK retailer market, flexible leasing and technology were all on the agenda at a MAPIC Meet-Up in London last July, which was held in Hammerson’s headquarters.

In the age of digital, much has been made of developer ‘labs’, set up to drive retail innovation.

James Hacon, Think Hospitality:

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F&B briefing: James Hacon (left) and Eric Partaker talked F&B evolution

Karen Harris, managing director of intuDigital at UK/ Spanish landlord intu Properties, said that intu’s innovation arm — which has retained its own identity — focuses on delivering ideas quickly and on pragmatic budgets. New concepts are tested live, enabling Harris’ team to ascertain what’s successful, what’s not and which products or services should be refined and retrialled. “That speed of process and delivery involves collaboration across teams and has really helped deliver a culture shift within the business as a whole,” Harris added.

In terms of determining investment, Sophie Ross, integration director at UK REIT Hammerson, said the company starts by identifying customer needs and wants, and then searches for the technology and potential partners to implement them. Despite some initial resistance to rolling out concepts in a relatively untried state, she said this approach is now well established and accepted.

CONFERENCES & EVENTS AT MAPIC

F&B RETAIL MARKET: OVERVIEW & UPCOMING TRENDS (By invitation only)
Wednesday 14 November - 19.30-20.00
Salon La Côte - Carlton Hotel