

Food trucks set to roll into UK as mobile units become the in place to buy lunch

Food trucks are taking the US by storm as the coolest places to eat as operators cash in on the concept of offering high-end, innovative street food at drive-through prices in a variety of changing locations.

Foodservice consultant Peter Backman says the trend could take off in the UK as the image of mobile catering starts to undergo a much-needed revamp. "Mobile units have the benefit of being relatively cheap to set up and run and are able to move to meet consumer demand. This new type of food truck is a far cry from the old-style greasy spoon mobile catering unit - these are smart, sassy, innovative and serve great food," he said.

While the majority of US food trucks are independently-owned single units, some are becoming small chains with up to 10 trucks. National brands such as Taco Bell and Dunkin' Donuts are also moving into the market.

Mobile catering is far from new, but the revamped and improved food trucks have brought a new lease of life to the American catering sector, with units serving several hundred customers a day and specialising in anything from chicken dishes, pizza, burgers, tacos, Indian, and even cupcakes. Many offer innovative, quality food while others carry an environmental or sustainability message or design eye-catching trucks. Food trucks are found in large urban areas, although some authorities do prohibit them. Trucks typically park for around 90 minutes over lunch and then move on. Locations change daily so that customers are offered a choice of new concepts.

A list of the top 10 food trucks recently published by QSR magazine includes names such as The Buttermilk Truck, The Grilled Cheese Truck, Nom Nom Truck, Rickshaw Dumpling Truck and Solar Waffle Works. Many are located on the West Coast, with bases in Seattle, Texas and LA while others can be found in New York City and Washington DC.

With low start-up costs and high margins, the success of food trucks depends on creating a high demand in a concentrated area in a short space of time. Adding to the social cache of food trucks is the fact they have used social media to communicate their whereabouts. Followers are informed of their location via Twitter, Facebook and Myspace, with GPS tracking expected to follow as websites such as FourSquare make it easier to track mobile vendors.

While upmarket food trucks can already be found in the UK, particularly in London, Backman suggests we could see the phenomenon taking off more widely - particularly amongst US-owned brands such as KFC, Taco Bell and Dunkin' Donuts.

Backman has recently returned from the National Restaurant Association show in Chicago. Asked what eating out trends he observed in the US, he commented: "The rollout of the food trucks really struck me as exciting and new and a trend likely to be replicated in the UK. There is also much use in the US of Groupon, the voucher model whereby customers make a payment for a discount either on-line or via an app and if enough customers sign up the discount goes ahead. Customers get larger discounts because the operator is guaranteed a set return. A couple of restaurants I visited were buzzing with customers using Groupon. The concept is in the UK already, but is likely to grow in popularity.

"Mexican food is also going from strength to strength in the US. While we have seen the beginnings of this here, I'm certain that there is still much growth to be seen in this market in the UK. There were also the more unusual innovations on show at this year's NRA - gluten-free milk was the one that stood out most!"

(ends)

For further comment or to interview Peter Backman please contact: Linda Pettit at Tilburstow Media Partners on +44 17 3782 3721 or +44 79 7378 9853 or email Linda@tilburstowmedia.co.uk.

Alternatively contact Peter Backman on:

Office: +44 20 8349 0162 Mobile: +44 77 8524 2809

Email: peter@horizonsforsuccess.com

Website: horizonsforsuccess.com

Twitter: twitter.com/peterbackman

For URL for RSS feeds log-on to: <http://www.horizonsforsuccess.com/index.php/rss/>

EDITOR'S NOTE

Horizons is an analyst and specialist information consultancy for the foodservice and hospitality sector. Its manager director, Peter Backman, is an expert on the structure and dynamics of the foodservice sector, and its supply chain, in the UK and internationally. Horizons helps its clients make better business decisions by providing accurate and detailed information about the foodservice market, its trends, and opportunities. The company provides consultancy services, workshops and statistical information based on its model of the sector and database of key accounts across Europe.