A GLOBAL MARKETPLACE FOR AN INCREASINGLY GLOBAL INDUSTRY

US restaurant industry profits, employment rates and business conditions are all on the up according to a NRA report. There is also a surge in optimism among restaurateurs. It looks like the industry as a whole is entering an off-premises driven heyday.

Not all growth is created equal

What's behind this growth? The rise in off-premise dining points to a cultural shift driven by increased accessibility. Arlene Spiegel FCSI, founder and principal of Arlene Spiegel & Associates, says restaurants are no longer reserved for special occasions: "It's a way of life. Consumers are getting more of their food and meals outside of their own kitchens."

But is data around the restaurant industry's growth being borne out by consultants' experience on the ground? Spiegel is enthusiastic about the statistics on employment, which she thinks will continue to grow, "especially considering the minimum wage guarantee, attracting more professionals in the coming years." She points to the example of retailers such as Whole Foods and department stores such as Bloomingdales utilizing restaurants to create a luxurious atmosphere, driving "meaningful employment" in the process.

The consultants' perspective

What should consultants recommend to their clients to ride the restaurant boom, or get on it if they're missing out?

As much as innovation is driving the sector forward, getting the basics right remains crucial. Spiegel says the time-saving fruits of innovation can be used to make managers into "coaches and good-will ambassadors" – doing so creates a foundation to keep restaurants attractive to the most talented employees. ■