

Catering for the new workplace

The business and industry (B&I) segment was doing fine until a certain pandemic appeared on the scene and impacted just about everything. Now, as non-commercial operators continue to pick up the pieces, consultants are helping them reimagine and retool parts of their businesses – and discover opportunities they may never have considered.

DEMAND DOWN

The road back to normalcy will continue to be uphill. The B&I segment “was robust prior to Covid,” recalls Arlene Spiegel FCSI, president of Arlene Spiegel & Associates in New York City. Real estate, corporate and cultural organizations were investing in modernizing cafes with equipment and technology to keep tenants and employees engaged. Today, the occupancy of these buildings is 0% to 25%, and the demand for food is down. This has left many foodservice contract-management companies with the need to revise their agreements for the short term until occupancy is back to pre-Covid numbers. Contracts that were fee-based arrangements may now switch to a P&L or percentage deal.

GET TO KNOW CUSTOMERS

By implementing technological solutions in both the front and back of the house, not only can sales be grown via efficiency and speed of throughput, but customer connection can be improved. The analytics that are available through enhanced POS programs today can help operators know their customers better.”

Pre-Covid, employers kept the company café open to their employees exclusively. With occupancy down, says Spiegel, they are opening up the service to other tenants in the building. “When possible, operators are turning their foodservice into a ‘grocerant’ concept providing take-home meals, groceries and sundries to meet the needs of the employees still in the building.”

Going forward, Spiegel expects foodservice salad bars and buffets will need to be modified. Safe-distancing, signage, acrylic guards and full PPE compliance will allow guests to approach a food station, where an attendant will do the serving and plating. “This of course will increase the amount of labor required, adding pressure on the already slim margins.” ■