

FoodManagement

Survey: How College Dining Operators Use Social Media

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Ninety-five percent of college/university foodservice operators say they use social media to connect with their customers, according to the College & University Social Media study survey by the Y-Pulse, LLC, research organization. Furthermore, 85% say social media tools are very important or important for promoting foodservice venues.

When asked to select the media they use to communicate information to students, on average, 91% of operators reported using Facebook, 32% MySpace, 22% Twitter, 1% FourSquare and 5% LinkedIn. Slightly more than half (56%) of respondents said they were putting out information about foodservice operations on a Web site, and some campuses are even using customized apps for foodservice venues.

“Campus foodservice operators are definitely ahead-of-the-curve when it comes to embracing social media because they are so closely in-touch with their students,” says Y-Pulse Co-founder Sharon Olson. “Like true explorers they are trying things out to see what works and what doesn’t, and they are willing to report what they’ve discovered.”

Topping the list of things operators found to be positive about social media use was its effect on operations. Not only did respondents say using social media made their operations appear more relevant and responsive to customers, but they also said it helped improve operational efficiency by lowering the numbers of routine information requests and helping students do more things themselves, such as filling out interactive forms. Respondents also said social media enhanced how they connect with students and helped to boost student responses to promotions and special events.

The primary negative aspects of social media cited by respondents are bad press and the immediacy of the medium causing mistakes and misinformation to multiply rapidly.

Meanwhile, 49% of students surveyed reported being largely positive or neutral about foodservice use of social media to connect with them. Only 6% reported they felt negative or very negative about the practice.