

Brand new dawn

Quinoa porridge, eggs Benedict, the spicy breakfast burrito and the rise of the Cereal Killer cafés all show that good old bacon and eggs have had their day. *Anne Bruce* looks at a breakfast menu for more modern tastes

If the word “breakfast” conjures up a mental picture of an early morning full English fry-up, it’s time for a rethink. Breakfast has become a hotly contested sales opportunity, with novel food-to-go and special diet options on the menu.

Hip new breakfast-based concepts, such as the two London Cereal Killer cafés, which serve an all-day selection of 120 breakfast cereals from around the world, and café Foxcroft & Ginger, which sells dishes such as black rice porridge with quinoa, banana and coconut milk, are grabbing attention.

The modern breakfast menu is limited only by the operator’s imagination – there’s a place for everything, from porridge pots to gluten-free muffins, artisan sausage baps to a Bloody Mary.

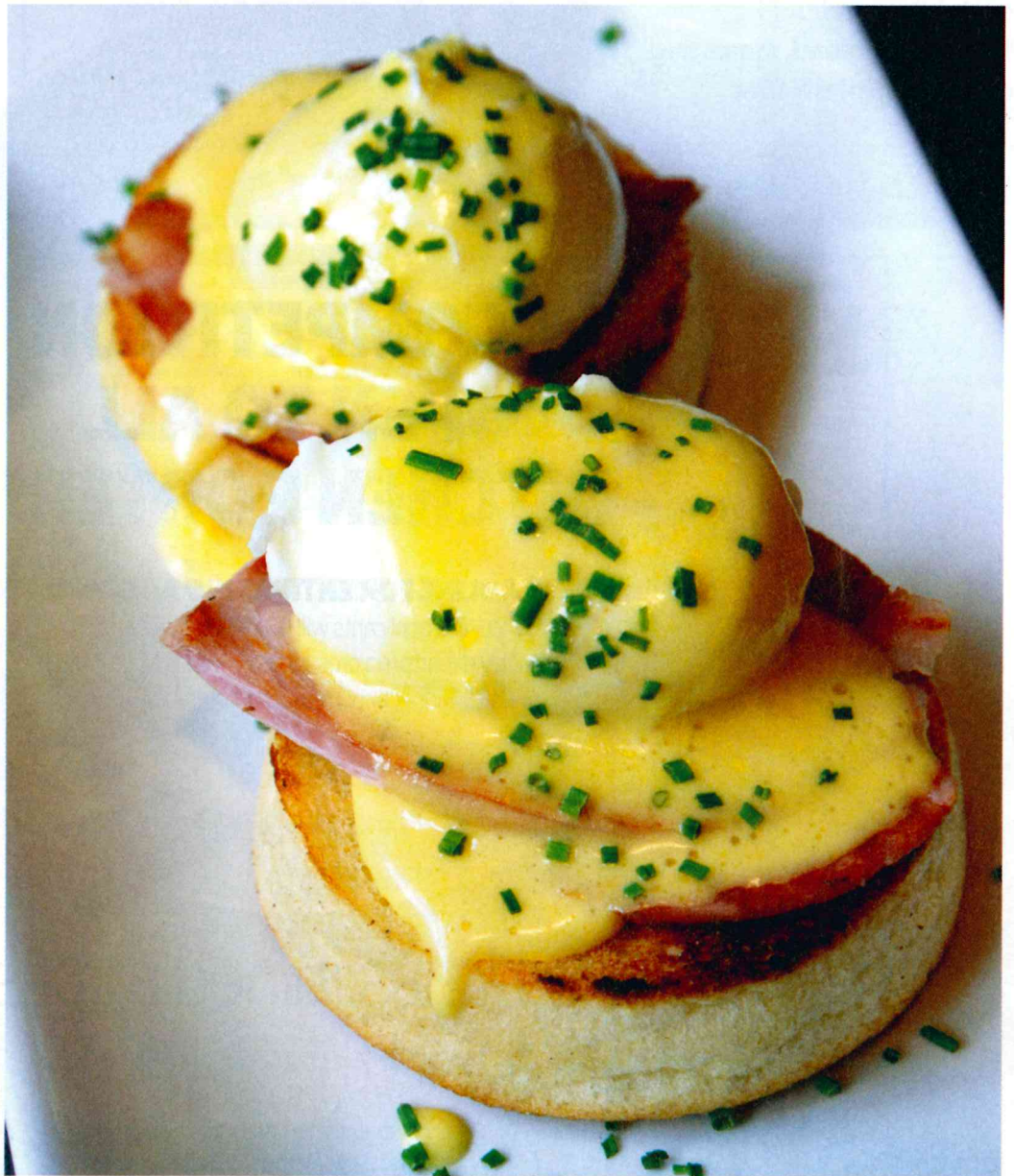
But while you must innovate to stay ahead of the competition, the traditional favourites still remain popular when it comes to the first meal of the day.

Steven Pike, managing director of customer focus company HospitalityGEM, says breakfast was once seen as a minor opportunity and a quiet part of the day. However, this is no longer true, with pubs and casual dining operators getting in on the act, offering food-to-go such as porridge and breakfast muffins as well as eat-in options.

Wagamama, for example, has launched a Japanese-inspired breakfast menu, offering anything from a full English to Japanese sticky white rice and miso soup.

The company’s research suggests that dwell times at breakfast in some venues are approaching the length of those at lunchtime, encouraged by people using it as an additional meeting opportunity.

Pike warns: “Remember, breakfast is not like dinner, and most people require prompt service in order for it to not hold up the rest of their day. Through the work we





have done with our clients, we have found that service standards can often show a sharp variability first thing in the morning, and stretching management and focus across the whole day can be a particular challenge.”

Breakfast customers are worth investing in as the company’s mystery shopping activity suggests they can turn out to be very loyal once they find somewhere they like, he adds.

Luxury options

Dave Edwards, head of out-of-home sales for Mission Foodservice, says that, along with a rise in the popularity of brunch and artisan cafés, the price consumers are willing to pay for their breakfast is creeping up to match lunch or dinner.

That means that operators can afford to be creative and offer luxury options. The breakfast burrito is becoming a staple on many UK menus and is set to continue to grow in popularity throughout 2015, he says. Tortilla wraps can be offered with sweet and savoury breakfast fillings, giving consumers wide and convenient choices, and caterers an easy-to-produce breakfast offering that can be prepared in advance.

BPEX butchery and product development manager Keith

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Fisher says: “Busier lifestyles and an increased focus on health have seen lighter and on-the-go options, such as hot filled sandwiches and wraps, become more important at breakfast.”

Outlets need to view the breakfast offering as a way to tap into a new demographic for their business. Providing a high-quality breakfast – at an affordable price point – will encourage diners to return with their families for dinner, he explains.

Establishments should also be quick to capitalise on the emerging brunch trend, with breakfast-inspired pies, pasties, Scotch eggs and quiches.

Sue Guilfoyle, national account manager at JJ Food Service, says there has been a huge increase in demand for porridge oats. Healthier drinks are also in high demand, particularly vegetable drinks, which are also performing well with hotel and spa customers, she reports. “There is good scope for these healthy juice options to be picked up by a wider range of food outlets.”

Retro American-style dining is still popular, she says, and the company has seen an uplift in American pancake and waffle sales. One customer, Temptations café in Clerkenwell, London, has just launched a retro-American



◀ brunch concept, which includes a chicken and gravy waffle option.

There is also an emerging Mexican trend for breakfast – for instance, Bad Egg near Moorgate station in London offers a Bloody Mary and spiced-up options including beans on toast with pulled pork and kimchi, and tacos filled with scrambled eggs and Korean red pepper paste.

Another customer, the Queens Rooms in Buckhurst Hill, Essex, will be introducing a new gluten-free section. It will include American stacked pancakes made with spelt, capitalising on the increase in the demand for special diet options.

Guilfoyle says: “At the very least, adapt your breakfast offer to include on-the-go options. Some of the best ideas have come from people taking risks.”

Something for the weekend

In staff restaurants, different foods do better on different days, says Jacqui Mee, director of food at Olive Catering Services: “On a Monday, a lot of people will go for

Five ways to grow breakfast sales

- **Serve healthier options:** ensure you have fresh fruit, yogurts, vegetable juices and more on offer.
- **On-the-go:** make it easy for guests to grab breakfast on the move – whether it’s a breakfast wrap or a porridge pot.
- **Spice it up:** some of the most popular breakfast concepts are Mexican and Korean-inspired. If you’re not ready to put kimchi on your eggs just yet, offer spicy sauces instead.
- **Take a risk:** how are you differentiating your offer from your competitors?
- **Go gluten-free –** could you boost sales with a gluten-free offer?

Source: JJ Food Service

fruit and yogurt, whereas Friday tends to be the day when people will treat themselves to a full English or a bacon roll – and this is still the busier breakfast service in the majority of cases.”

Porridge is probably the most popular breakfast dish throughout the week and all year round, and it is good for margins. Some sites will offer two different types of porridge a day: a healthy option with quinoa, for example, and a gourmet porridge with premium toppings, like an apple and cinnamon compote.

Full English breakfasts can be profitable, as items such as eggs, tomatoes and sausages are relatively low-cost, she says. “Caterers simply need to be aware of what tariff they are charging and make sure the items which are more expensive are used wisely. We do still offer a full English breakfast at around 60% of our sites. Without doubt, though, its popularity has declined over the years, because of changes in people’s working hours and the shifts in eating habits.”

Innovate to appreciate

Every Wednesday at every Olive staff restaurant, there is a breakfast special – anything from cheese scones to eggs Benedict. Every site has to think outside the box to vary their offering.

Olive recently launched super scramble bars, where chefs cook scrambled eggs to order using induction cookers. Customers can choose from a variety of breads, as well as toppings like smoked salmon or roast tomatoes.

Julie Harper, head of food and beverage at the Redefine BDL Hotels chain, also asserts that a flexible approach is key to ensuring a successful breakfast service.

The group’s trendy Holiday Inn in Camden Lock hosts a pop-up lounge which plays cartoons and children’s movies during breakfast in school holidays and at weekends, prolonging the length of time customers spend in the restaurant during breakfast.

The hotel has also introduced a pancake station, which serves fresh pancakes cooked in front of guests. The Holiday Inn waiting ▶



team even create fun designs on the pancakes for children.

At its Crowne Plaza Manchester Airport hotel, breakfast begins at 4:30am each day. The hotel has introduced a juicer, allowing guests on an early morning flight to make their own fruit juice to take with them. Matt Byram, general manager at the hotel, adds: "Vegetarian options, gluten-free breads and a range of juices are all more popular than ever before. As a team we also focus on providing the highest levels of customer service to keep guests from heading straight for the airport."

Meanwhile, Jon Usher, head of UK sales and marketing at Burco Commercial, suggests that operators can aid profit margins with a little lateral thinking.

"Take something as simple as toast, for example. Although it is served as standard with a full cooked breakfast, it can also be served as an additional, cost-effective, profit-boosting menu item with jams, Marmite or spreads. It's easy to serve as a take-away option and can also attract time-poor customers looking for something quick and easy to eat on the commute to work."

Rachel Shoosmith, marketing



manager, Lantmännen Unibake UK, says that mini formats may help to tap deeper into the breakfast category. Indeed, 23% of bakery goods buyers say that miniature baked goods are more appealing to them than regular sizes. The company's mini range includes a selection of mini fruit lattices and mini croissants.

Natalie Cross, out-of-home manager at Taylors of Harrogate, says that using the right tea can also boost sales at breakfast. She says: "Certain teas work better with certain breakfast options. Scottish Breakfast tea works really well when paired with a hearty

porridge, and full-bodied Assam tea complements wheaty flavours, so is best served with toast, tea-cakes or pastries."

For the breakfast operator, the 1950s Egg Marketing Board advertising slogan, "Go to work on an egg", could be said to apply to all aspects of breakfast – except now caterers need to go to work on making breakfast relevant for a new generation. Artisan bakers Foxcroft & Ginger – who opened the capital's first poached egg bar on 18 June, serving dishes including poached eggs with béchamel, truffle oil and nut crumble – are certainly having a crack.

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