

CREED

THE FOODSERVICE COMPANY

Trends Report 2026

ACCEPT THE CHALLENGE



The key insights
shaping the out-of-
home market for 2026
and how operators can
lead the change



INTRODUCTION

This report provides a concise overview of current consumer behaviours, priorities, and preferences, while spotlighting the key trends expected to shape the industry throughout 2026. As well as offering actionable guidance on how these trends can inform your strategic planning and innovation initiatives.

OUR APPROACH

"The market has undergone a significant transformation in recent years, prompting operators to evolve their offerings to stay competitive to meet shifting consumer expectations. Looking through the consumer lens again this year, we've found that many of the industry's challenges remain persistent, continuing to place pressure on operations.

For Creed Trends 2026, we've captured the current landscape with our overarching theme: Accept the Challenge. This is underpinned by six key influencers. To succeed in today's market, operators must embrace change with confidence and agility."

Gabrielle Evans, Insights Executive



Macro Trend

ACCEPT THE CHALLENGE

The UK food landscape stands at a crossroads between cost-of-living constraints and a craving for joy. In 2026, survival isn't enough. Operators must evolve, and understand the changes within the market. The challenge isn't just to endure but to survive, thrive and lead the change.

69%

of British consumers say hospitality plays an important role in their communities^[1]

Current Food Inflation:

+4.5%

with a forecasted drop to **+3.1%** by the end of 2026

Looking ahead to 2026, the UK is expected to enter a phase of slow, steady growth amid ongoing economic uncertainty. GDP is forecast to dip slightly before recovering in 2027, with inflation remaining above the Bank of England's 2% target until then^[2]. Key pressures, including trade disruptions, persistent inflation, tighter fiscal policy, and rising employer costs, will constrain consumer spending and business investment.

Market sentiment is increasingly shaped by short-term shocks rather than long-term fundamentals. Confidence remains fragile and reactive, with consumers spending cautiously but still seeking value. Operators should focus on delivering experiences that balance affordability, quality, and emotional resonance^[3].

[1] CGA, The Social Value of Hospitality, 2025, [2] EY, Summer Forecast, 2025, [3] GfK, Consumer Confidence, 2025



Create Value

THE NEW MEANING OF VALUE: FAIR, HONEST, & WORTH IT

76%

of consumers are very value-led^[4]

78%

of consumers associate great taste with good value for money^[4]

58%

of consumers believe that excellent service contributes directly to a sense of good value for money^[4]

Consumers want quality they can justify, affordable luxuries they can emotionally reward themselves with.

Value has evolved, and there is an intersection between value and quality; consumers cannot have one without the other. Value, now the third biggest driver, influences over one in four occasions and continues to grow. Highlighting the need to clearly communicate and deliver value for money^[5].

When dining out, consumers define good value primarily by great taste, followed by fair pricing (not cheap, but justified), then great service,

and experience. Quality is increasingly being a marker of good value, and having good quality ingredients that improve the taste of the food is a sure way to deliver value to keep your consumers^[4].

Operators should offer a fair price for the dishes being served, and the quality should reflect this. Introduce ‘Smart Indulgences’, affordable luxuries consumers can justify emotionally with the ‘I deserve this’ mindset. It’s about expected quality at a fair price. Consumers now see value as the sweet spot between cost, experience, and satisfaction.

Expected Quality • Indulgence • Perception

CREATE
VALUE

CHEEKY MONDAYS
FROM 5PM - ORDER ANY BURGER OR MAIN OR SALAD AND GET A 175ML GLASS OF HOUSE WINE OR A PUDDING ON THE HOUSE!

Loungers

Run an evening deal on Mondays to attract footfall throughout quieter periods of the week.



^[4] Lumina Intelligence, UK Eating Out Report, 2025, ^[5] Deloitte, The Value-seeking Consumer, 2025, ^[6] CGA, Consumer Pulse Great Britain, 2025

OUR OBSERVATIONS



“Food innovation can be an overwhelming task, and it is hard to know what approach to take, but the biggest successes can be found by focusing on the smaller items and innovating around the edges. Take one element of a dish and focus on that, enhance its quality, flavour or format, taking it from good to great!”

Rob Owen, Executive Business Development Chef

PizzaExpress

Launched Pizzanaise, introducing a versatile dip to enhance dine-in and takeaway experiences. This increased add-on sales, and engagement through Instagram promotions and videos showcasing its use.



76%

of consumers agree that authenticity plays a major role in where they choose to eat.

It’s no longer just about the food. Provenance of ingredients, décor, staff knowledge, and ingredients true to their origin feed into perceptions of quality^[6].

ALL DAY BREKKY

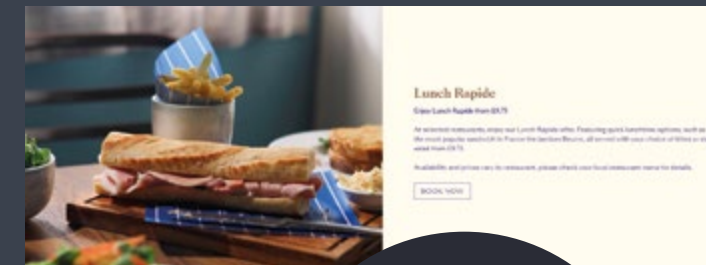
Breakfast done properly. We look high and low for the best suppliers and ingredients. Our meat? Outdoor-bred and reared. Our eggs? Free-range. We cook them up for you right here. Tuck in.

New! The Full Monty 16.95
Boston’s biggest ever breakfast. A whole vintage cheddar cheese and baked bean sourdough toastie, topped with two Old English sausages, streaky bacon, fried eggs, homemade hash browns, roasted flat mushroom, slow-roasted tomato, smoky tomato jam 1634 kcal

The Boss Breakfast
Old English sausage, homemade hash brown, mushroom

Boston Tea Party

Highlight suppliers that they are proud to work with, emphasising the quality of their ingredients.



Côte

Launched a new weekday promotion offering guests five of its most popular dishes for just £10 to drive value-led engagement during the week.

Redefine Experience DINING THAT CONNECTS & CAPTIVATES

67%

of consumers agree eating and drinking out is as important to their social life as it was a year ago^[8]

Dining is about more than food; the market is driven by consumers' inherent need for connection.

Occasions have become slower-paced, resulting in a higher dwell time. Menu innovation plays a key role in creating this environment, and the food offered should reflect this.

Hospitality provides opportunities for socialising unmatched by other

74%

of consumers say they would visit a venue that provides an elevated experience^[9]

sectors; to enable this, diners are seeking communal experiences beyond traditional sharing platters^[10]. Experience-led dining is on the rise, blending sensory storytelling with digital engagement. Dishes should be designed to not just taste good, but to photograph beautifully to share online as part of the social occasion.

Customisable • Shareable • Socialise

REDEFINE EXPERIENCE



^[8] CGA, The Social Value of Hospitality, 2025, ^[9] CGA, More than a Meal, 2025, ^[10] More in Common/Unilever Food Solutions Research Poll, 2025.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

1

Establishing different areas or 'zoning' can broaden appeal and versatility including quieter, work-friendly spaces and social-focused areas. Pubs are starting to incorporate this to drive appeal for consumers with a variety of missions.

2

To capture the audience who are looking for something new, we have seen a rise in **multisensory dining experiences**, which give an immersive experience to activity-driven consumers.

3

When carrying out menu innovation, consider **shareable, social media-friendly dishes** that encourage social dining.



"Experiential and premium casual dining concepts are growing in popularity. Success depends on quality, strong branding, loyalty, authenticity, and transparency, while delivering memorable, shareable experiences. These factors boost engagement, expand reach, and create differentiation and resilience in a competitive market."

Gabrielle Evans, Insights Executive



Dave's Hot Chicken
Attracted months of long queues with its LA-inspired design featuring graffiti, 80s music, and TikTok-driven social media appeal.

Operators are investing in experiential spaces that translate well on social media

Dishoom
Incorporates storytelling into its brand identity and restaurant design and hosts 'Dishoom Presents' events with personal narratives and historical talks.



Green Intelligence SUSTAINABILITY MEETS ACCOUNTABILITY

57%

of consumers are willing to pay more for locally sourced ingredients^[11]

45%

of consumers express strong concerns about making environmentally friendly choices^[12]

In 2026, the definition of ‘green’ goes beyond the plate; it’s about proving responsibility through transparency.

Environmental, social and governance principles are reshaping how operators build trust and loyalty.

Menus are increasingly climate-conscious, favouring locally grown, seasonal produce that celebrates colour and reduces food miles. Environmental Social Governance (ESG) now extends further: businesses are expected to back their commitments with **measurable impact and verifiable data**. Governance sits at the heart of this, from publishing carbon reports to adopting

traceable supply chains and ethical sourcing standards.

Local and seasonal sourcing will continue to appeal, while immersive dining experiences that combine sustainability with storytelling will differentiate brands^[12].

Businesses must follow clear values embedded in company culture. Operators must make commitments to a safe workplace from supporting employee wellbeing, fair employment practices and providing opportunities for career progression.

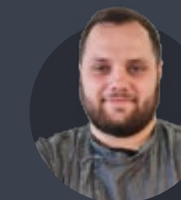
^[11] Lumina Intelligence, UK Eating Out Report, 2025 ^[12] VYPR, Consumer Horizon, 2025

Awareness • Transparency • Governance

GREEN INTELLIGENCE



CHEF NOTES



“ESG and health are closely linked through the use of seasonal, colourful and organic produce that enhance both nutrition and menu appeal. Beyond meeting consumer demand for nourishment, sustainable cooking should celebrate the natural rhythm of the seasons, with greens and oranges during summer months and purple and root vegetables featuring on the menu throughout autumn and winter.”

Joseph Oliver, Business Development Chef

Wagamama
Collaborated with the Sustainable Restaurant Association to audit plate waste. Implementing portioning tools and best practices to cut food waste in kitchens.

Marston's Pubs
Teamed up with Attensi, a gamified simulation training platform, to boost staff engagement and develop skills that elevate the guest experience.



Rainforest Alliance
Launched a Regenerative Agriculture certification for coffee. Helping consumers identify coffee that contributes positively to the environment and farming communities.



Wahaca
Adopted a ‘less but better’ approach, switching to exclusively using British regenerative beef and publishing annual ESG reports to track supply chain emissions, cutting their carbon footprint by nearly 60% since 2022.



CARBON ON THE MENU

We want to help you make food choices that are better for the planet, so we've added the carbon impact of our dishes to our menu.

We've partnered with the climate experts at **My Emissions** to do the calculations and share this information with you.

[Find out more](#)

Embrace Digital

AI & AUTOMATION ARE REDEFINING HOSPITALITY

66%

purchased a specific menu item after seeing it on social media or online^[13]

33%

of leaders plan to spend on technology to support employees' experiences and wellbeing^[14]

26%

of consumers now use AI tools to learn more about a venue^[15]

Technology is now the invisible backbone of hospitality. From AI-powered forecasting to voice ordering, digital innovation helps teams work smarter and deliver more personal, efficient experiences.

Operators are increasingly integrating AI into operations. The shift is no longer about if AI will transform the sector, but how fast and how broadly it can be deployed.

Social media is reshaping how operators engage consumers. Platforms like TikTok and Instagram now drive behaviour,

influencing venue perception in ways unimaginable a decade ago. Its also important to recognise how social media has enhanced the speed of trend adoption, resulting in overnight viral sensations. In order to stay relevant with younger generations, operators would benefit from having a strong understanding of digital trends. Research highlights this impact, with 72% of consumers having visited a venue after seeing it online, and 66% having bought a specific drink or food item because of social media^[16].

Harness AI • Operations • Automation

EMBRACE DIGITAL

Honi Poke
Leverage AI to boost sales, using real-time data to tailor menu suggestions based on weather conditions and customer habits.



^[13] CGA, Bars in 2035: Insights from the leaders, 2025, ^[14] CGA Business Confidence Survey report 2025, ^[15] CGA Optimising Brand Reputation in Hospitality, 2025, ^[16] CGA, Global REACH Survey, 2025, ^[17] More In Common/Unilever Food Solutions Research Poll, March 2025.

Tips

- ✓ EXPERIMENT WITH VIRTUAL ASSISTANTS FOR 24/7 CUSTOMER QUERIES.
- ✓ DEVELOP A BRAND PRESENCE ON SOCIAL MEDIA TO APPEAL TO THE YOUNGER AUDIENCE.
- ✓ UPSKILL TEAMS IN DIGITAL LITERACY TO BALANCE AUTOMATION WITH HUMAN TOUCH.



"AI-powered search is reshaping how consumers make decisions, creating deeply personal and emotionally driven experiences. To stay ahead, operators must quickly adapt, using AI to better understand consumer needs in this new age!"

Jack Bestwick, Business Development Chef



"The rise of AI-assisted hospitality brings new efficiencies while allowing teams to focus on what matters most: customer experience magic!"

Gabrielle Evans, Insights Executive

AI IN ACTION

- 1 Digital ordering via touchscreens, kiosks, or apps reduces friction, speeds up service, and often boosts transaction value. With AI-driven personalisation and data analytics, operators can now leverage digital platforms to encourage larger orders and maximise revenue.
- 2 Robotics and automation in back-of-house operations ease labour pressures by eliminating repetitive, low-value tasks. Investment in this area also helps overcome language barriers and speeds up training and onboarding in a high-turnover sector.
- 3 Popeyes uses an AI-powered workforce management solution from Sona. This technology automates scheduling, freeing up time for managers and allowing employees to focus more on the customer.

North Star Housing

Partnered with The National Robotarium to create a robot barista to serve drinks to residents at the Stockton Housing Complex.



Evolve Health FUNCTIONAL FOOD FOR BODY & MIND

44%

of consumers are health-conscious^[18]

55%

of consumers are willing to pay more for minimally processed foods^[18]

51%

of consumers avoid some or all UPF as much as possible^[18]

Health in 2026 is about balance, function, and feeling good.

Consumers are seeking food that supports their body and mind without giving up pleasure. **Wellness has become a social currency** and is used to enhance personas both online and offline.

The protein-obsessed era is evolving. Consumers have shifted from chasing macros to celebrating variety, embracing diverse ingredients for holistic health and functional balance. Functional ingredients

will now be in focus, such as probiotic foods along with mood boosting ingredients^[19]. The emergence of wellness and indulgence must be recognised, with **indulgent drinks with functional benefits are making their way onto menus^[18]**.

There is a growth in the amount of health-conscious consumers, while the anti ultra-processed movement has augmented demand for whole, natural foods, including vegetables.

Mood-boosting • Simplicity • Functional

EVOLVE
HEALTH



^[18] Lumina Intelligence, UK Eating Out Report, 2025, ^[19] Mintel, 2026 Food & Drink Global Predictions, 2025.



"Think beyond the 'High in' claims and elevate your messaging to 'rich in diversity' to align with consumers' search for nourishment."

Gabrielle Evans, *Insights Executive*

While there is a rise in **mindful eating**, there is a polarisation in the market with consumers turning to sweet temptations and comfort foods. Consumers are led by convenience, that is where we see the divide amongst the market, some consumers eat to eat, others eat to nourish. Therefore, **health must be accessible** to those who seek it.

We're seeing a clear shift in how operators position themselves, from being purely food and drink providers to becoming broader lifestyle hubs. Aiming to create holistic experiences that cater to lifestyle needs, such as offering wellness activities, social spaces, entertainment, and community engagement.



GAIL's

'Knead for Speed' run club, partners with wellness groups across London to bring people together for morning runs that finish at their local Gail's. Creating a wellness ritual and connection, and sense of community around its bakeries.

Tips

- ✓ HIGHLIGHT FUNCTIONAL BENEFITS: GUT HEALTH, ENERGY, SLEEP, MOOD.
- ✓ ADD PROBIOTIC DRINKS AND FIBRE-FORWARD DISHES.
- ✓ KEEP HEALTHY OPTIONS ACCESSIBLE AND FLAVOURFUL.



Tortilla teamed up with JAB boxing club for its Pack and Punch event, to launch their new protein pots and salads. Placing the product in an authentic post-workout context, created shareable cultural content, and achieved 6.5M organic reach.

Ignite Flavours FUSION AND FAMILIARITY

74%

are prepared to spend more for exciting new food concepts[20]

40%

of consumers say they want to try something new when eating out[21]

The big flavour story of 2026 is fusion with familiarity: reimagining classics with global twists that feel adventurous yet safe.

Half of British consumers agree that they would like to try emerging cuisines if they had the opportunity to sample them[22].

Consumers are looking at global cuisines with a sense of discovery, valuing purposefully blended traditions and flavours with innovations. Try experimenting with incorporating world flavours into traditional formats. Regional cuisines are

also becoming recognised and celebrated with a growing appetite for authentic experiences and deeply rooted culinary traditions[23].

Research indicates that while diners continue to seek the comfort and familiarity of traditional dishes, especially during uncertain times, they're equally drawn to culinary experiences that offer a creative twist. Consumers are looking for meals that not only reassure but also surprise and delight, blending nostalgia with innovation.

Authenticity • Fusion • Adventurous

IGNITE FLAVOURS



[20] CGA, Consumer Pulse Great Britain, July 2025, [21] Lumina Intelligence, UK Eating Out Report, 2025, [22] CGA, Britain Food Insights 2025, [23] Unilever Food Solutions, Future Menus, 2025, [24] CGA, Britain Food Insights, 2025

OPERATOR ACTIONS

1

Experiment with cross-cultural mashups.

2

Balance bold and comforting flavours.

3

Tell a story behind each dish: the origin, culture and people.



"Consumers are exploring food with a new sense of adventure, driven by curiosity, cultural fusion and a desire for sensory excitement. Flavour in 2026 is bold, story-led, and emotionally charged"

Rob Owen, Executive Business Development Chef

Consumers are not only eager to try new flavour profiles but also willing to pay a premium for dishes perceived as authentic. This highlights the importance of authenticity in capturing consumer interest and delivering a standout dining experience[24].



EMERGING FLAVOUR TRENDS FOR 2026:



Korean, Malaysian, Nigerian and Peruvian are set to emerge in 2026. Along with established flavours like Regional Southern Americana and Regional Italian (Sicilian and Calabrian).

Consumer Insight

DIFFERENT GENERATIONS, SAME DESIRE: QUALITY THAT CONNECTS

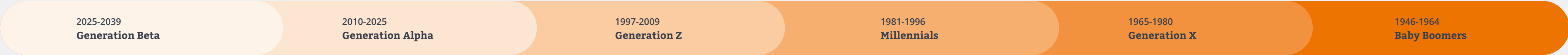


Socioeconomic Status
While generational preferences influence food choices, socioeconomic status (SES), defined by income and social grade, is a key driver of consumer behaviour, spending power, and trend engagement. SES impacts how consumers interact with major food trends, so it must be factored into strategy.

To address varying spending power:
* Affluent areas benefit from premium offerings and experience-led formats.
* Lower-income quintiles require strong value propositions that also meet expected quality to maintain appeal and relevance.

A barbell strategy, balancing premiumisation with accessible entry-level pricing is essential to appeal to both ends of the market.

UNDERSTANDING GENERATIONAL DRIVERS HELPS TAILOR YOUR OFFER:



To effectively prioritise core food and drink trends, it’s important to identify your target segment and age demographic. Each generation has unique dining preferences, shaped by distinct values and spending habits that influence their choices when dining.

When reviewing your food and drink provision, tapping into these generational priorities is essential for creating offerings that resonate and connect authentically with each audience.

Gen Alpha (2010 - 2024) - The “AI-Native” generation, raised on tech, voice, and on-demand everything. They are already known as a generation with influence; 63% of UK Gen Alpha parents say their child has a big influence on household meals[25].

Gen Z (1997 - 2009) - They’re quickly becoming known as the generation of “a little less” less patience, less loyalty, less real-world experience, and fewer rules or boundaries.

They expect brands to speak their language: playful, disruptive, and unfiltered. To capture their attention, you need to be bold and impactful.

This generation has fueled the rise of hard refreshers and dirty sodas. Their shift from late-night clubbing to daytime bottomless brunches reflects a craving for novelty and flavor.

Millennials (1981 – 1996) – This generation tends to prioritise convenience, quality and a foodie culture, viewing food with a blend of practicality and indulgence. They are more likely to snack instead of eating traditional meals and value both high-quality ingredients and a good story behind the food[28].

Generation X (1965 – 1980) – A quality-driven generation, loyal, and embracing digital convenience. They tend to balance convenience and home cooking, they often favour comfort food and familiar cuisines, but are willing to try new flavours and global cuisines[29].

Baby Boomers (1946 – 1964) - Generally prefer cuisines but seek health, familiarity and quality in their food choices. They seek traditional foods, and their eating habits are often guided by health and ageing concerns rather than sustainability. Their lifestyle reflects stability and routine, with consistent mealtimes and moderate indulgence through snacking[30].

[25] Mintel Meet Gen Alpha: The Next Generation of Food Consumers, 2025, [26] Egg Soldiers 2026-2027: UK Food & Drink the Gen Z Trends Handbook, 2025, [27] CGA How to Win Spontaneous Spend in Food, 2025, [28] Mintel the Impact of Millennial Buying Trends on the Consumer Landscape, [29] Creed Foodservice, Care sector Solutions: How to prepare for the next generation, 2023, [30] Statista, Consumers Who Actively Try to Eat Healthy in the UK in 2023/24, by Generation, 2025



Creed's Perspective

FROM SURVIVING TO LEADING CHANGE

Consumers want value, crave experiences, demand sustainability, and expect technology to make life easier, all while seeking health and flavour without compromise.

Operators that thrive will be those that adapt boldly and lead with confidence. The challenge isn't just to keep pace, it's to set the pace. This year, it's time to Accept the Challenge.

PARTNER WITH CREED FOODSERVICE TO EXPLORE THE 2026 TRENDS FURTHER AND DISCOVER HOW WE CAN HELP YOU.

The Team to support you:

Rob Owen *Executive Business Development Chef*, Gabrielle Evans *Insights Executive*, Joseph Oliver *Business Development Chef*, Jack Bestwick *Business Development Chef*

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