

Prospects

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The point of view

The lunch break in an age of innovation

For some years now, innovation has been breaking into our day-to-day lives and new technologies have been changing how we consume and eat. As a vital part of our daily routine, the lunch break is not immune to these influences. In fact, it could even reflect wider changes in society: having long been devoted simply to eating, it's now a time when a growing number of activities are crammed into a shorter and shorter time frame. Against this backdrop, start-ups and major groups alike are dreaming up ever more innovative solutions. Amid shifting consumer expectations and a renewed focus on quality and the need to protect social ties, below is an overview of innovative product and service solutions.

Variety, simplicity and speed

Consumer expectations as regards the lunch break are increasingly varied: originally simply a time to eat, it is now the focus of a growing range of activities (sport, personal meet-ups, shopping, administrative tasks, etc.), leading employees to seek greater flexibility and choice when it comes to food options. As well as more and more activities being crammed into this short time, the location of the lunch break has also changed: it can now take place at your desk, with colleagues, while travelling, etc.

While these behavioural changes certainly don't signal the end of the company canteen or lunch at home, they have opened the market up to new entrants, not to mention major meal delivery companies like **Uber Eats** and **Deliveroo**.

For example, **Nestor** has since 2015 been offering a service that is concentrated in terms of location (business districts), content (a single menu) and time (between noon and 2 p.m. Monday to Friday). **Dejbox** has adopted a different approach, opting to focus on delivering meals to people working in outlying areas – a bet requiring ultra-rigorous logistics to serve customers in these scattered areas. In a sign of the success of this start-up, founded in 2013 in Lille, **Dejbox** now has over 200 employees and generates annual revenue in excess of €20 million.

Meanwhile, start-up **Captain Marcel** (hosted at Village By CA Paris) operates under a different business model, with a solution that goes beyond automated distribution and into automated catering using dispensers that offer healthy, varied and balanced meals based on carefully selected products. This is a practical solution for people who work far away from standard catering solutions.

Lastly, for the busiest among us, **Feed** might just have found the answer. Its products, in the form of drinks and nutrition bars, are designed to replace an entire meal by providing just the right dose of carbohydrates, proteins, lipids, fibre and mineral salts.

An increasing focus on quality

We can all remember eating a soggy sandwich on the run or lunching in an uninspiring canteen. When it comes to taste, most innovators agree that consumers want to eat well.

Consumers are increasingly aware of the content of their plates, paying more attention to trackability and leaning towards organic foods and nutritional quality. Under the EGalim Act¹, by 2022, mass catering providers run by legal entities governed by public law will have to obtain at least 50% of their products (by value) locally, from organic farming or with a quality label (subject to a minimum of at least 20% organic products).

Quality also means adopting a more stringent approach to nutritional value: innovative fledgling company **i-lunch**, hosted at Village By CA Paris, combines workplace delivery with balanced, healthy meals, with each and every **i-lunch** meal designed by a chef and a nutritionist to provide a calculated amount of nutritional value.

Lastly, consumers are increasingly sensitive to food waste, including outside the home: **Sodexo** has launched a food waste reduction programme, WasteWatch, powered by start-up **Leanpath**. The project, which relies heavily on data analytics, is to be rolled out across 3,000 group sites over the next year.

The lunch break: an important opportunity to strengthen social ties

Lunch is also still a time to relax with friends, and a number of companies are seeking to capitalise on this social interaction aspect.

For example, this is one of the approaches adopted by **Lunchr**, a start-up that is digitalising the lunch break with its paperless meal vouchers. Unlike the sector giants, **Lunchr** has the advantage of offering users reductions based on how many people are eating: as good a way as any of encouraging people to spend time together!

Finally, the lunch break can also be a networking opportunity: **Colunching** describes itself as a social network for meal-based meet-ups with fellow business people. The idea is to have big get-togethers to discuss predetermined topics.

If they want to hold onto their customers, companies targeting the lunch break market more than ever need to innovate and adapt to new lifestyles and increasingly varied consumer expectations. ■

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¹ Act 2018-938 of 30 October 2018 in favour of balanced business relationships in the farming and food sector and healthy, sustainable food accessible to all.

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