Planning ahead and upcoming regulatory changes: Around the Table in November

A Strategic Guide for Minnesota Restaurants

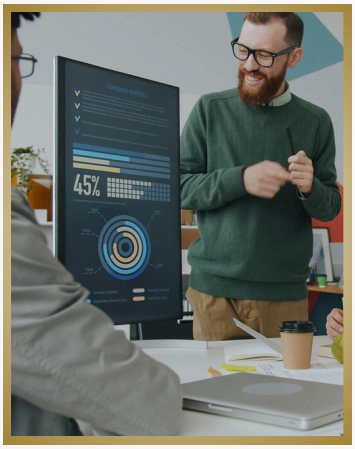
Prepared in partnership with Performance Foodservice Minnesota and Hospitality Minnesota

'Tis the season, and guests are coming into it mindful of their spending. Our Morning Consult poll this summer found 93% of Minnesotans say price is critical when choosing where to eat, and more than half are dining out less. They aren't skipping the holidays. They're choosing fewer, better occasions. Be the one they choose.

What's new this season



- **The table is getting bigger.** OpenTable reports group dining up 11% over last year. Build a group menu now, and let parties of eight or more book online instead of waiting on a callback.
- **Dinner is moving earlier.** Seatings between 4 and 5 p.m. are up 13%, and half of diners say they want more early-evening deals. A holiday happy hour fills the early book without discounting your prime time.
- **One night only sells out.** Diners want experiences they can't get tomorrow. A ticketed chef's table, a single-night menu, a cookie-and-cocktail class. Limited, prepaid, and you know your covers before the doors open.
- **The holiday is moving home.** Smaller gatherings at home are growing while big nights out are slipping. Sell the at-home weekend: heat-and-serve holiday dinners, party trays, a host package with dessert and a bottle.
- **Comfort, with a twist.** Pot pie, meatloaf and shrimp cocktail are back on menus, often with a global spin. Familiar dishes are easy to sell and cheap to make well.
- **Hotels and resorts: sell the stay with the party.** Pair a banquet with a room block. Up north, package winter weekends and New Year's Eve before calendars fill.



Put AI to work this December

About one in four operators uses AI today, according to the National Restaurant Association. That's still an early-mover advantage. You don't need a tech team to start.

- **Answer every call.** AI phone answering takes reservations and answers questions about hours and menus while your team is slammed. In December, a missed call is often a missed party booking.
- **Forecast from your own history.** Forecasting tools, many built into your POS, turn last year's sales into a staffing plan and an order guide. Less over-ordering, fewer overstaffed Tuesdays.
- **Price rooms by demand.** For hotels, AI revenue management is the most proven tool on the market. Rates move with demand, not with a spreadsheet updated last week.
- **Start with what's free.** A general AI assistant can draft holiday menu descriptions, a first pass at review replies, a party-package email, or a training sheet in Spanish. Read everything before it goes out. It should sound like you.

Protect the margin.

- **Plan your beef buys now.** USDA's September outlook forecasts beef and veal prices up 9.4% this year. The cattle herd is still shrinking, so tight supply is expected to carry into 2027. Restaurant menu prices overall are forecast up 3.5% this year and 2.6% next. Sit down with your PFG rep this month to plan December orders and lock in what you can.
- **Price off today's costs, not last year's.** In the Minneapolis Fed survey Hospitality Minnesota partners on, 96% of operators reported higher wholesale prices, yet 20% held or cut their own prices anyway. Meanwhile, 93% of Minnesotans told our statewide poll that price is critical when they choose where to eat. That is the squeeze. Build holiday menus and party packages from what your food costs this week.
- **Protect your large-party bookings.** About 3.2% of U.S. restaurant reservations were no-shows over the past year, according to the 2026 No-Show Index from reservation platform Resos, which tracked more than 300,000 U.S. bookings. When the no-show is a holiday party, you lose a full table's worth of covers on one of your busiest nights. Per-person packages, a food and beverage minimum, a deposit and a clear cancellation window protect that revenue.
- **Keep the gift card sale in your building.** Gift cards are one of the most popular gifts of the season. In the National Restaurant Association's most recent holiday survey, 59% of adults planned to give one. But more than half buy them at grocery stores and big-box retailers, not from the restaurant itself. Make it easy to buy from you: keep cards at the host stand, mention them when you drop the check, and put a gift card button at the top of your website. Then give guests a reason to buy more. For example, for every $50 in gift cards, add a $10 bonus card good January through March. You get the cash in December, and the bonus card brings them back in your slowest months.

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Before the Legislative Session

1The 2027 Legislative Session opens January 12. Invite your newly elected representatives in before then. Give them three numbers: what you pay in swipe fees, how many people you employ and what your margin really is.
Not sure who represents you? Look it up on the state's Who Represents Me? finder (*gis.lcc.mn.gov/iMaps/districts*). Then call us. Hospitality Minnesota can help coordinate the visit, from the invitation to the talking points.

What changes January 1

- Statewide minimum wage: $11.87 an hour for all employers. The 90-day training wage for workers under 20 rises to $9.68.
- Minneapolis: $17.02 an hour for all employers.
- St. Paul: $17.02 for 101+ employees, $16.37 for 6–100, and $14.25 for 5 or fewer. On July 1, the 6–100 rate rises to $17.02 and the 5-or-fewer rate to $15.00. Count every worker toward your size, including part-time and seasonal.
- Paid Leave: No change. The premium stays at 0.88% of wages, and you can still deduct up to 0.44% from employee pay.

Update your payroll and workplace posters before the first pay period of the year. Free state posters, including the new 2027 minimum-wage poster, are at dli.mn.gov/posters. Minneapolis and St. Paul require their own city posters as well.

On the calendar

- **ProStart Stars of the Future** — Thursday, Nov. 19, 5–9 p.m., Renaissance Minneapolis Hotel The Depot. Meet the student chefs who are the future of our industry.
- **Day at the Capitol** — Wednesday, Jan. 20.
- **Stars of the Industry Awards Gala** — Thursday, Jan. 21, Mosaic, Minneapolis.
    - *Nominations have been extended to Friday, Nov. 13. Nominate the person on your team who deserves it, with specific examples of what they've done, using the Stars of the Industry nomination form, linked to the QR Code on the right! Questions? Email andrea@hospitalitymn.com.*

We're thankful for you

Every November, I'm reminded what this industry really is. It's the cook who came in on her day off. The front desk clerk who found a stranded family a room at midnight. The owner who paid the team before paying themselves.

This has not been an easy year. You kept your doors open, your people working and your communities fed. You showed up at the Capitol, answered our surveys and told your stories when it would have been easier to stay quiet.
From all of us at Hospitality Minnesota: thank you. It is a privilege to work for you.

✂ A MEMBER OFFER FROM PERFORMANCE FOOD GROUP ✂

PFG COVERS 20% OF YOUR DUES

For PFG customers who are not yet Hospitality Minnesota members

Join Hospitality Minnesota by December 31, 2026 and Performance Food Group will pick up 20 percent of your first-year membership dues.

Contact the Hospitality Minnesota team at hospitalityminnesota.com to get started.

Get 20% Off Your Dues, Courtesy of Performance Food Group (PFG)

No, this is not a marketing glimmick. It's real savings. PFG has seen up close what this association does for operators at the Capitol and in their businesses, and they believe in it enough to put their own money behind getting more of you in the room.

Call Angie at (651) 925-4011 before December 31 and she'll get you signed up.

SCAN THIS
TO LEARN MORE AND TO JOIN HOSPITALITY MINNESOTA

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