



# THE POWER OF LIMITED-TIME OFFERS

How Operators Are Turning  
Urgency Into Profit



# An offer you just can't beat.

Why should you care about mastering limited-time offers (LTOs)?



**7 IN 10**   
RESTAURANT GOERS  
**HAVE EATEN AN LTO**  
IN THE PAST MONTH<sup>1</sup>

**OPERATORS REPORT**  
AN INCREASE OF UP TO  
**25%** IN BOTH **REVENUE**  
AND **TRAFFIC**  
DURING MONTHS WITH A SUCCESSFUL LTO.<sup>1</sup>

**85%**  
OF PEOPLE WHO ENJOYED AN LTO WILL RETURN AGAIN,  
**75%** WILL TELL SOMEONE ABOUT IT!  


Use this e-book to prepare yourself with the trends and tips you need to create the next great LTO for your operation. For personalized help developing your LTOs, please contact your local Simplot representative or visit [simplotfoods.com](http://simplotfoods.com).



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# A little something special

## Harnessing novelty and urgency to drive traffic and sales

It's only human nature—as much as patrons like to order their old favorites, they're always ready to change it up if there's good reason. More and more, a great limited-time offer is proving to be all the reason they need.

By definition, an LTO in foodservice is a food or beverage that you can only get for a limited time. From premium burgers to seasonal drinks, FOMO (fear of missing out) can tip the scales in your favor and differentiate you from competitors.

An effective LTO can create a cascade of benefits, advancing both your menu and marketing strategies through repeat traffic and word-of-mouth enthusiasm.

### According to consumers, a good LTO inspires them to:<sup>1</sup>

**85%** / Return to order it again

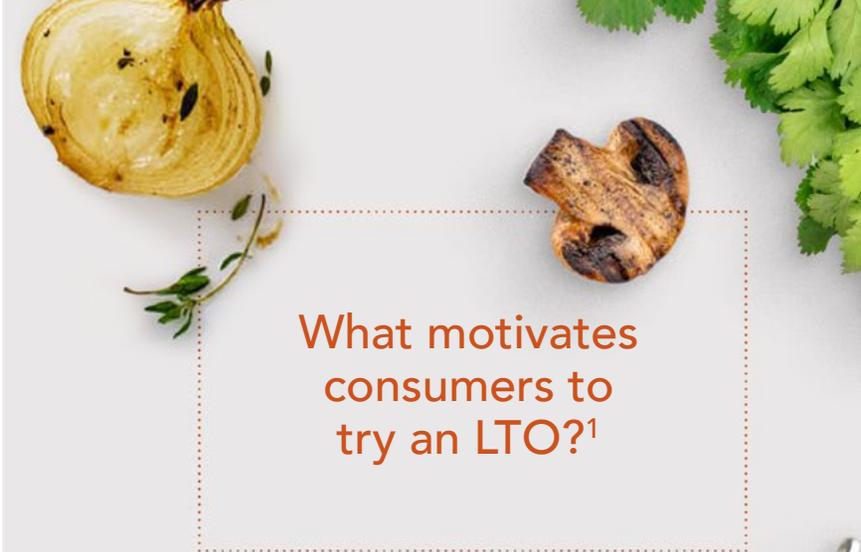
**75%** / Tell people about it

**71%** / Return to order something else

**56%** / Bring friends to try it

**34%** / Post on social media

If you're not offering LTOs yet, chances are you will be soon.



What motivates consumers to try an LTO?<sup>1</sup>

**42%**

"I wanted to try something new."

**30%**

"The item looked good in ad photos I had seen."



**15%**

"It was a better value, less expensive."

**28%** "It made sense for that time of year."

**24%**

"It was a particularly indulgent option."

# What's selling

## It's more than just seasonal LTOs

Research shows consumers are enthusiastic about LTOs in general, but hold a special place for those with premium ingredients and unique flavors. So while seasonal LTOs remain popular, don't limit yourself. And don't forget the number of beverage LTOs has risen more than 50% since 2010, so don't forget to include them.<sup>1</sup>



**Burgers, sandwiches, desserts, and pizza** are the most frequently selected types of food LTOs<sup>1</sup>



**Desserts** LTOs are now the second most popular food LTO among customers—since 2010, restaurants have increased their use of dessert LTOs by 28%<sup>1</sup>



**Sweet, indulgent drinks** are consumers' favorite type of beverage LTO (smoothies, milkshakes and slushies are the most popular)<sup>1</sup>

**The exclusivity of an LTO increases its appeal more than any other attribute.<sup>1</sup>**

"It was something I couldn't get anywhere else." (38%)

"It was a dollar/menu item." (30%)

"I knew it would return to the menu from time to time." (28%)

## Top 10 types of LTOs consumers are most interested in:<sup>1</sup>

- 82% Fresh ingredients
- 81% Premium/high quality ingredients
- 79% New/unique flavors
- 79% Seasonal flavors
- 77% New twist on a familiar dish
- 71% Rare or hard to get ingredients
- 70% Nostalgic items
- 70% Regional or local flavor profiles
- 69% Hand-crafted items
- 69% Indulgent over-the-top items

# Factors that contribute to successful LTOs<sup>1</sup>

Here are what operators say make LTOs a success from their standpoint. Operational considerations lead the way.



68%	Easy to train staff to make them
66%	Using ingredients I already buy in new ways
62%	Aligns closely with my current menu
60%	Requires minimal storage/space on prep line
57%	Originality, something truly new
53%	Premium menu pricing
48%	Expands my menu into new areas
48%	Being trend-forward
48%	Using seasonal ingredients
46%	Premium ingredients
45%	Combo/bundling opportunities
43%	Indulgent
41%	Tied to an event or holiday
40%	Classic, time-tested
38%	Low menu pricing
37%	Locally or regionally sourced ingredients
35%	Authentic ethnic/globally inspired items/ingredients
33%	Pushes boundaries for novelty (a giant sandwich build, etc.)
32%	Healthy
30%	Branded ingredients

# What makes great LTOs?

The basic formula of an LTO is well known, but there's more to creating an effective LTO than just adding pumpkin spice. Here are three main things to consider as you design your offer.

## What Operators Say Makes for a Successful LTO<sup>1</sup>

The upshot? Keep it simple.

- 68% / Easy to train staff to make them
- 66% / Uses ingredients I already buy in unique ways
- 62% / Aligns closely with my current menu
- 60% / Requires minimal storage space on prep line
- 57% / Originality, something truly new

### Nº1

#### A unique menu item

It could be a new take on a common ingredient, or a seasonal or premium ingredient. While your LTO needs to be unique to stand out from the crowd, don't go overboard. Make sure it's a menu item or special ingredient your patrons will be familiar with.

### Nº2

#### The duration of your offer

3 in 4 operators let their LTO run for a month or less to create the urgency required get people in the door.

### Nº3

#### Strategic pricing

Keep your LTOs' pricing in line with your current menu items. The "value/combo pricing" so popular during the Great Recession was a profit killer for operators and taught consumers to expect cheap food.

# What will it be?

## Advice for a better LTO development process

Research has shown that successful LTOs are closely aligned with an operator's brand, menu, operational capacity and the expectations of its patrons. Would it be unique for a pizza joint to offer a lobster LTO? Yes. A good idea? Probably not.

### Start with what you know

One proven strategy is to add a special touch to an already-popular, existing menu item—a premium ingredient or new twist on a flavor like truffle mac & cheese. This approach ensures that your customers are familiar with the item, and your kitchen can execute it smoothly. Place a priority on using creative combinations of ingredients you already stock to reduce supply disruptions and waste.

### Include your customers in the process

72% of customers want to contribute to the creation of LTOs. What better way to reduce the risk of a flop than by getting input and feedback right from the source?

### Keep up with the trends

It's all too easy—and risky—to get complacent. While we counsel against pushing LTO ingredients that may be too trend-forward, it's important to keep an eye on what's generating excitement with the dining public.

### Use prepared products

Given the scarcity of labor, operators should consider prepared products. For example, Simplot offers several LTO-ready fries, avocado, fruit, roasted vegetables, and grain products that slash labor and promote consistent execution.

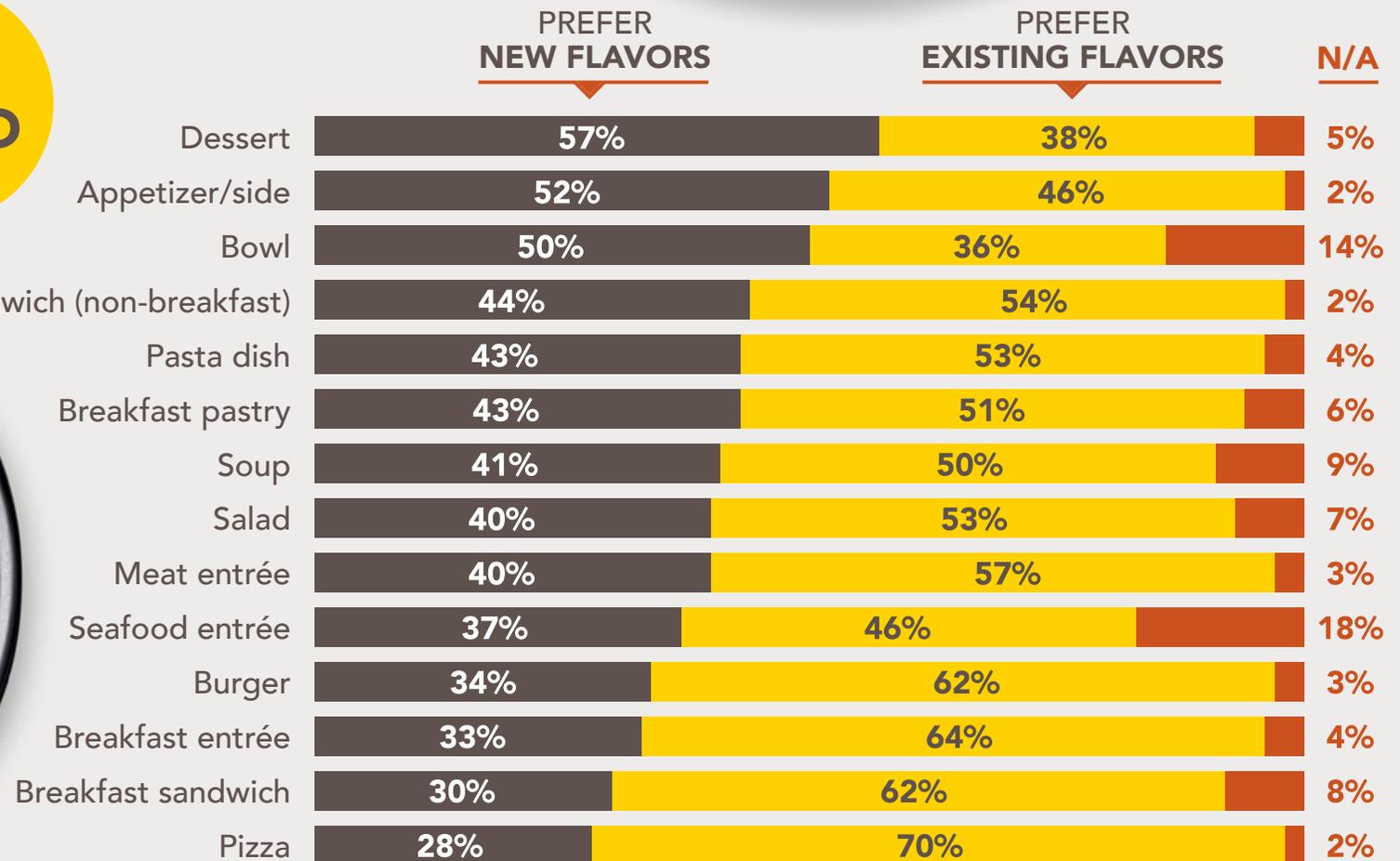
## Consumers' top preferred ways of participating in new LTOs<sup>1</sup>

1. Vote on flavors created by the restaurant
2. Give feedback during a taste test event
3. Vote on flavors submitted by customers
4. Submit ideas on restaurant website or app
5. Submit ideas on social media
6. Write it on a tabletop card



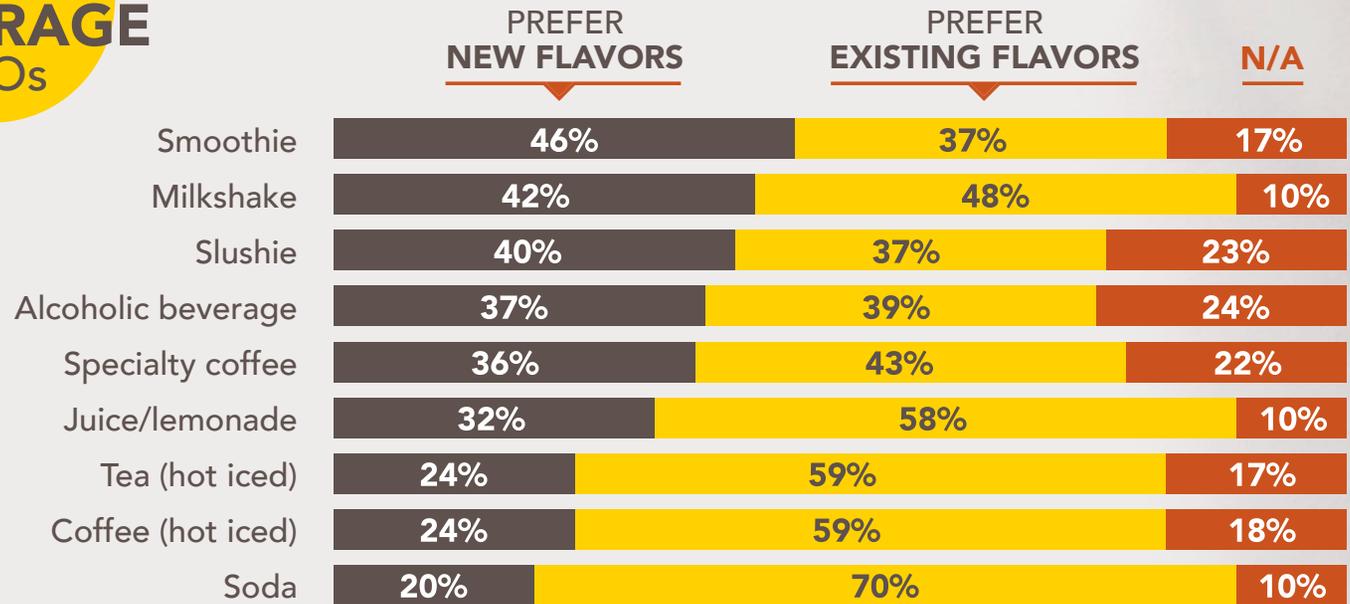
# A taste for something new

Customers are open to more adventurous options for desserts, appetizers and bowls. They tend to prefer familiar executions of pizza and breakfast items.



# A taste for something new (beverages)

Smoothies, milkshakes and slushies are ripe for innovation, but consumers would prefer to stick to their old favorites when it comes to soda, coffee and tea.



# What's worth it?

Consumers say they're more willing to buy LTOs tied to nostalgia, events/holidays and trendy flavors, but willing to pay more for premium ingredients, healthy ingredients and extra-large items.



## LTO FEATURES

- Nostalgic flavors/items
- Tied to an event or holiday
- Trendy flavors
- Branded ingredients
- Local/regional ingredients
- Global cuisine/ingredients
- Premium ingredients
- Healthy ingredients
- Extra-large size
- Celebrity tie-ins
- Trending on social media

**MORE LIKELY TO BUY  
WOULD NOT PAY MORE**

**WOULD  
PAY MORE**

**MAKES NO  
DIFFERENCE**

	MORE LIKELY TO BUY WOULD NOT PAY MORE	WOULD PAY MORE	MAKES NO DIFFERENCE
Nostalgic flavors/items	55%	25%	20%
Tied to an event or holiday	54%	18%	29%
Trendy flavors	50%	14%	35%
Branded ingredients	47%	16%	37%
Local/regional ingredients	45%	28%	27%
Global cuisine/ingredients	45%	20%	35%
Premium ingredients	39%	44%	18%
Healthy ingredients	38%	32%	30%
Extra-large size	31%	35%	34%
Celebrity tie-ins	31%	11%	59%
Trending on social media	30%	10%	61%

# Will it sell?

## How menu concept testing works

How do you really know if the wonderful LTO you just created will sell? It's a challenge for any chef, including those on our Simplot Culinary Team. Recently, we asked research firm Datassential to evaluate a number of our own recipes for consumer appeal, using their SCORES™ Express Screen menu concept analysis tool. SCORES™ impanels 300+ consumers who rate menu concepts on:

- 1 Unbranded purchase intent**  
(Would you order it?)
- 2 Uniqueness**  
(Is it new and different?)
- 3 Frequency**  
(Would you order it all the time?)
- 4 Draw**  
(Would you visit just for this item?)

SCORES™ then benchmarks these ratings against 2,889 other menu and sides concepts in its database to produce a composite score expressed as a percentile from 1 to 100; the higher, the better. For example, if an entrée scores 99, it means the concept outperformed 99% of the other entrée concepts in their database on the four criteria above.



These pancakes steal the show on breakfast and brunch menus. With a decadent house-made syrup, brûléed peaches and whipped cream, they look impressive and taste even better.



Need a new plant-based smoothie option for your menu? This one has a secret ingredient that makes it extra creamy; avocado pulp.



Loaded with tender, flame-roasted Fuji apples and baked into a fluffy, slightly-sweet pancake, this rustic dish earns a top spot on breakfast menus.



Tender beef short ribs cooked in a spicy-sweet peach and bourbon sauce and piled on a toasty slider bun. Serve up a trio as an appetizer or pair with crispy fries for a winning entrée.

# The golden LTO: Loaded Fries

## How to create a popular and profitable LTO with loaded fries

Fries draw a crowd all by themselves, but they also do double-duty as an inexpensive base for crave-worthy appetizers. The trend is called Loaded Fries. The elements of a bankable loaded fry LTO are simple:

### INDULGENT TOPPINGS

Americans are going one up on Canadian poutine, creating Instagram-worthy signature dishes with ingredients like crab, house-made aioli, truffle oil, parmesano reggiano and others (sometimes including the trim from their other menu items). Battered and coated fries stand up better to moist toppings and retain their crispness.

### DISTINCTIVE SHAPE

Start with a unique shape to differentiate yourself from the competitor down the street. Simplot SIDEWINDERS™ Fries are a great example of a unique shape, and many operators menu them for this reason. Even super thin cuts like the julienne 3/16" can become Signature Fries.

### ON-TREND SEASONINGS AND HERBS

Adding on-trend topical seasonings/herbs like rosemary, oregano, garlic and sea salt is another way we're seeing operators create signature dishes.

### PREMIUM SAUCES AND DIPS

Premium sauces are another way operators are meeting the growing demand for customization. People love their sauce nowadays and it isn't just ketchup and ranch. They can be inexpensive to make, but very profitable if priced correctly on the menu.

Over 60% of consumers are interested in loaded fries.<sup>1</sup>

For more on how to menu fries for profitability, download our **FREE** e-book, "[The Foodservice Operators' Ultimate Guide to Menuing Fries](#)".

[www.simplotfoods.com](http://www.simplotfoods.com)

# Marketing your LTO

## How to promote your delicious new invention

Like anything new, people can't buy it if they don't know it exists. This means promoting your LTO will be as important as the process that created it. For independents and small chains, your primary marketing channels will likely be in-store promotion and social media.

**In-store promotion:** Operators say the most effective include: menu inserts, table tents, posters, menu board photos and window photos. Train your servers well on your LTO, so they're ready to sell it from Day 1.

**Website:** Give your LTO prominent real estate on the homepage of your website.

**Email:** If patrons have signed up to hear from you, by all means, let them know about your LTO, and consider offering a coupon to sweeten the deal for your best customers.

**Social media:** 97% of operators are marketing LTOs on Facebook—67% consider it to be the most effective social medium. Instagram is used by 67% of operators, 25% of whom find it most effective.<sup>1</sup>

For more on social media, download our **FREE** guide to [digital marketing for restaurants](#).  
[www.](#) 

**TIP** The importance of good photography of your LTO cannot be overstated. Patrons are consistently drawn to great-looking food shots, so plan on investing in some tasty imagery to ensure your success.

See some DIY food photography tips here.

[www.](#) 



## CONCLUSION

# Things to remember

## 7 takeaways that add up to better LTOs

1

**Focus on creating compelling value, not discounted pricing.**

During the Great Recession of 2008, operators focused on creating combo/value meals that decimated margins and taught customers to expect a belly-full of food for \$2. It's a trap that many operators are still recovering from. Instead, focus on creating a unique experience your customers won't find anywhere else.

2

**Make sure your LTO is photogenic.** Pay attention to color, texture and presentation as you create your LTO, and pay for professional photography—it's worth it.

3

**Market on social media and in your restaurant.** And remember: LTOs marketed with photos drive 18% more purchase intent than those without.

4

**Keep it simple.** Operators say the best LTOs are the ones that are easy to execute and use ingredients they already have on hand. Consider using prepared products to cut labor and waste.

5

**Don't limit yourself.** Consumer interest is high in a wide variety of LTO items.

6

**Consumers want more than seasonal LTOs.** Seasonal LTOs remain popular, but those with fresh ingredients, premium ingredients and unique flavors rank at the top.

7

**Include your customers in the process.** It's a powerful way to inspire brand loyalty and avoid mistakes.



.....  
"Operators generally see up to **25% increases in revenue** and foot traffic during months in which they've launched a successful LTO."<sup>1</sup>  
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For personalized assistance developing your LTOs using our products, please contact your local Simplot representative or visit [simplotfoods.com](https://www.simplotfoods.com).



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**Simplot** potatoes | avocados | fruits | vegetables | grains

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