

TIME TO THINK ABOUT PROVIDING NUTRITIONAL INFORMATION?

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Times have changed! For most of the past 38 years that I have been working with food service companies to control their food and beverage costs, mere handfuls of clients have requested nutritional information for their menu items. In the past 3-4 years however, things have drastically changed. Now, one out of every three clients we work with are asking for it. Our nutrition module, once used only by schools, hospitals and markets is now being requested across all spectrums of the industry. This is due in part to a focus by consumers on healthier diets, but also has become the focus of the government – specifically the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The agency has taken an interest in legislating who needs to provide this information, and specifically what information they must provide.

The FDA has recently created rules for chain restaurants and other food service organizations providing food to the public. Depending on their size, they may be required to provide nutrition data for every item on the menu. So far, this rule does not apply to clubs, but consumers are starting to request this information from everyone. Many of our club clients have started providing nutritional information to their members upon request and we have clients in many other segments of the food service industry that are doing the same, even though they may not currently be required to do so.

The FDA rules require that either an analysis is done by an accredited laboratory, or by using software that works with the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) published nutrition databases. The USDA maintains two databases for nutritional information. The Standard Reference database contains 7,793 raw ingredients and is useful for things like produce, meats, seafood and other generic raw materials. The other database – called the Branded database – is a collection of manufactured items like pre-made sauces and other items that are made up of numerous ingredients proprietary to the manufacturer. This database contains 239,533 items. These databases are constantly expanding and the numbers presented here are as of September of 2018.

Some of the more powerful F&B Management systems offer a nutrition module, which allows users to cross-reference nutritional information to each food item they purchase. The nutrients are brought into the client database and associated with each raw ingredient. When recipes are constructed, the nutrients of each recipe ingredient are added together to form a total or composite amount of each nutrient. In addition to specific nutrients, calories, fat carbohydrates and protein values are calculated along with percentage of daily requirement values.

Rules for nutrition labels are very specific, and all labels must conform to the example shown. Therefore, the software that does the calculations should be able to produce these labels. In addition to labels, which may not be useful to clubs for anything other than grab and go packaged items, the software should also be able to produce reports that list this information in a way that could be provided to members and guests on request. There is no required format for the reports, so different systems will print different types of reports, and should be examined to determine if they would be appropriate for hand outs.



“A KEY COMPONENT OF ANY NUTRITION MODULE SHOULD BE THE ABILITY TO IDENTIFY ALLERGENS AND DISPLAY THEM ON LABELS AND REPORTS.”

Nutrition Facts		
Dinner Salad Bqt		
1 Servings per container		
Serving Size	227 (227g)	
Amount per serving	308	
Calories	% Daily Value*	
Total Fat	23g	30%
Saturated Fat	4g	20%
TransFat		
Cholesterol	9mg	3%
Sodium	654mg	28%
Total Carbohydrate	22g	8%
Dietary Fiber	5g	17%
Total Sugars	7g	
Includes 0g Added Sugars	0%	
Protein	5g	
Vitamin D	0mcg	0%
Calcium	95mg	7%
Iron	3mg	15%
Potassium	654mg	14%
* The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.		
Contains: Egg, Gluten, Tree Nuts		
Ingredients: Lettuce, Tomatoes		

Another key component of any nutrition module should be the ability to identify allergens and display them on labels and reports. This capability helps protect members and guests against consuming items to which they may be sensitive or allergic, but it can also protect the club from associated liability. By printing reports on menu items that identify allergens, glutens, MSG or other components diners may be trying to avoid, servers can also be educated to inform diners. Many restaurants now ask diners if they have any food allergies or dietary restrictions before taking the order.

As I mentioned, only in the past few years has this information become more frequently requested. This trend is expected to continue, and at some point may even be mandated by the government for all food service organizations as opposed to the limited set now required to provide it. Systems which allow inventory tracking and especially recipe costing are the ideal way for food service operators to gain this capability. Stand-alone nutrition systems, while effective in providing the required information, also require double effort.

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