



Is the Fast-Casual Bubble Due to Burst?

When quality fast-casual dining first took hold, experts debated its longevity, but diners always have the final say. Through their purchases, social media postings, and in the choices they continue to make, they have proclaimed fast-casual is here to stay.

“Millennials love fast-casual and they are a growing group within the hospitality world,” says Michael Schulson, CEO and founder of restaurant group Schulson Collective, who also recognizes how the shrinking lunch hour is driving people to fast-casual. “People are also eating out more than ever so they need more options, especially during the day when fewer people have extended time to dine out for lunch.”



The proof is in the sushi. Diners are embracing DK Sushi, Schulson’s new fast-casual restaurant inspired by his sushi bar and izakaya, Double Knot. DK Sushi is in the remodeled food hall at the University of Pennsylvania and one of 10 others nationwide in the Schulson Collective portfolio from the Philadelphia-based restaurateur. For the quick-service concept, chef Kevin Yanaga crafts à la carte items and signature sushi sets, and guests make selections from touch-screen kiosks. The result is an upscale sushi meal without the long wait or formal surroundings.

“The guests love DK Sushi because it’s a way for guests to experience my restaurant Double Knot, but on a smaller scale,” he says. “We use the same high quality fish but it is just less formal at DK Sushi.”

Why do so many great chefs with upscale dining seek the fast-casual solution? The answer is in brick-and-mortars.

“Fast-casual allows us to build something more substantial, as you can open many restaurants with the same brand, while a free-standing restaurant can only have one, maybe two, locations in each city,” says Schulson, while acknowledging that longevity is dependent on making each a great experience for diners. “A fast-casual concept can have multiple locations within a city, but in the end, it is still the same, as a restaurant and its design, food, value, service and hospitality are important.”

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