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Lifestyle

Thanks to technology, food is ready for its closeup on social media

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Did that picture of foie gras you just posted on Facebook appear fuzzy? Or did your lunchtime taco look tasteless on Instagram?

Not to worry.

Foodie, a new camera app for iPhones and Androids, offers a bounty of features designed to make even your mashed potatoes look like a masterpiece. Foodie is from Line, a messaging and social media platform.

Along with a choice of 24 filters and lighting adjustments, Foodie includes an auto mode for soft-focus backgrounds. In other words, that gourmet hamburger you just shot can be featured as the main event, while the surrounding french fries are blurred. Pictures also can be uploaded directly to social networks like Instagram, Twitter and Facebook.

Foodie joins other food apps such as Platter, Foodspotting, Dysh and SnapDish, driven by the trend of photo-snapping foods, which is turning everyone into aspiring food critics.

With the ease of mobile technology, photo uploading has become the most popular activity on social media platforms. According to photo-sharing site Instagram, users shared an average of 70 million photos per day in 2015. The Mintel Group, a market research firm, found that 29 million folks had posted food pictures, or food-stagrammed, in one month.

So why are we posting pictures of paella?

For one, food is social. Once upon a time, when you had a great meal, you'd describe it later to friends after you got home. Nowadays, friends are with us everywhere -- virtually, if not physically. Social media allows the solo diner to turn his experience into a social event.

And for as long as cameras have been around, we've taken pictures of things that are important to us. For some, food itself is paramount and reveals something about ourselves to others.

Moreover, recent research published in the Journal of Consumer Marketing indicates that taking a picture of our meal can literally make it taste better.

Grace Carlson, 18, of Mullica Hill, posts photos of the food she's eating about four times a month on Instagram and Snapchat.

"It's fun to show people how good the food looks," she said.

Her 11-year-old sister, Ashley, posts nearly twice as many food pictures, usually from outings at Panera Bread or Starbucks.

"I want people to wish they were eating what I'm eating," Ashley said.

As food-stagramming proliferates, restaurants, nationally and locally, are seeing how posting platefuls to social media sites builds brands and boosts sales. Chains such as Taco Bell and Shake Shack have 750,000 and 250,000 Instagram followers, respectively.

Director of operations Chris Mentzer of Rastelli Market Fresh said customers post food from his Evesham and Deptford stores all the time, and he's not complaining.

"Some people send photos of food to say, 'Hey, look where I am,'" said Mentzer, noting the obvious. "But those same pictures are another avenue of advertising for us."

What's more, his daughter, Alyssa, the stores' marketing manager, uses camera apps for their Facebook page when she shoots dishes of sushi, pasta or burritos from their kiosk stations.

She said the apps help eliminate glare.

“Uploading pictures definitely helps drive business. One time, right after I posted pictures of our meats, about 75 people came in. And they all said they saw our pictures online,” she said.

Executive pastry chef Robert Bennett of Classic Cake in Cherry Hill also welcomes clients snapping and posting pictures of his creations.

“I’ve never understood why some people mind,” he said, referring to some restaurateurs who discourage the practice.

For others, sharing food photos is more about offering advice, said Maureen Brett of Philadelphia. She likes to post pictures of new and favorite meals she has tried.

Still, others just see the personal moments, or jest perhaps, in sharing the mundane moments of life.

William Mcilmail, a chef originally from Moorestown, said since he relocated to his brother’s house in Belmont, North Carolina, his nieces get a kick out of boasting to Mcilmail’s other siblings about the good grub they’re eating, courtesy of Mcilmail.

“They like rubbing it into their faces and saying, ‘Haha, we live with a chef,’” he said. “But they’ve also posted pictures of burned bread. ... Yeah, it was one of my burned pieces.”