

Restaurant Menu Strategies Going Forward into 2021

Our new normal is developing in front of us. What your menu looked like a few months ago is most likely not the menu you will have this summer and going forward. The paradigm shift for restaurateurs is coming fast and menu changes started in March for many operators. As we move forward, menu strategies new and old will converge as we adapt to the right mix of price points, value, menu items and differentiation that will appeal to consumers.

This document is a guide to developing a competitive menu that will excite guests and allow you to grow your revenue. Here is a step by step outline to get started.

STEP ONE: Competitive Analysis. Find out what your competitors are doing and get a copy of their menu. Do research in restaurant trade journals with similar concepts. Look at specials, combos and other promotions that they are doing as well. Choose your top five to seven competitors.

STEP TWO: Current Menu Analysis. What are your top sellers? What are your most profitable items? Which items are hard to execute or have a high cost of goods? What items do your guests crave and which items get the most complaints? The answers to these questions will guide you to make smart decisions for guest satisfaction, operation efficiency, employee proficiency and profitability.

STEP THREE: Business Model. Depending on your business model, there are several business verticals available to you. Beyond dine-in business, will you continue to offer or start offering delivery, catering, curbside pickup, take out, family meal, grab and go and grocery/pantry items? And for these areas of the business, will you adopt self-delivery or rely on third party delivery?

STEP FOUR: Supply Chain. Will you be able to source what you need? The current supply chain is in an upheaval. Reach out to your suppliers and confirm that you can source the items you need, and whether the prices will be acceptable.

STEP FIVE: Take Trends into Account. Comfort food is going to make a comeback. Shared apps will take a back seat to snacks. Guests will crave the items they cannot make at home. A variety of family meals, combos and meal kits are now popular. Do those trends fit your concept? Catering will shift to individual servings in the form of box lunches and dinners versus buffet style setups. Lastly, value is going to be key. Most of your guests will have felt the financial impact of COVID-19, so it is important to have offerings that are a clear value for them.

STEP SIX: Putting It All Together. This is the tough part. You will have to factor in what is going on in your segment, how your business model has changed and external factors like supply chain. Take the high profit, high purchase items and start there. Keep popular items that guests crave without making any changes. Fill in the rest of the menu with items that fit your brand and meet the new needs of your guests. Do not go big, just keep your menu at the same size or smaller. This will allow you to be nimble as the business environment continues to change over the next twelve months.



Menu Best Practices

MENU ITEM DEVELOPMENT

Guest input is critical to the success of any menu item. Start the menu item off as an LTO (limited time offer) or special. Menu items need to earn their place on the menu. Do not rely solely on staff or restaurant leadership input. You must factor in guest feedback.

Costing is another factor that is frequently overlooked. What is the waste factor for the menu item and ingredient costs? Do the ingredients have seasonal variability in price and supply? Is additional equipment needed to execute the item? What affect does the menu item have on labor?



TRAINING

A successful menu rollout is dependent on the entire staff knowing the details of sourcing, preparation, storage, plating/packaging, costing and how the new items taste. If your staff is not wowed by the new menu items, neither will your guests. Involve suppliers where it makes sense in the process. Put the entire process on a schedule that you share with your staff, suppliers, marketing and PR companies as appropriate.

Training should not stop the day after the menu is rolled out. Continue training and doing knowledge and execution surveys to ensure the menu is being rolled out as best as possible. Keep the team updated on potential issues and shortfalls. Be prepared to make adjustments. Every menu rollout has hiccups and requires some update to procedures, products and processes at some point.

MARKETING AND PR

When you make the changes, get the word out to your existing customers through social media and other marketing strategies. Your PR team can focus on signature dishes and those menu items that have a big “wow factor”. Your existing customer base will get excited about the changes and the “new news”. The PR will bring in new guests that will be excited about the changes with the menu that they will see as on trend and a good value.

BAR

Managing beverage programs currently and into 2021 has a host of challenges. Once you can serve individual alcoholic beverages again in most markets, you will have to balance between keeping up with current cocktail trends and offering affordable drinks. Expect a higher demand for low-alcohol/no-alcohol bar beverages. Consumers will continue seeking fresh ingredient driven beverages and healthy (low carb/low calorie) options.

Costing each spirit down to the ounce and analyzing cocktail prices is more important than ever. Consider adding a tier slightly above ‘well’ spirits to add perceived value to the menu and utilizing this tier for specialty cocktails. Beverage costs vary from concept to concept but should average around 25% for wine, 23% for beer (draught and bottle/can) and 17% for spirits. High volume, affordable spirits should run a lower average cost to allow for competitive pricing on higher tiered spirits.



Goliath Consulting Group is a national restaurant consulting group based in Atlanta, Georgia servicing independent, chain and franchised restaurants. The staff is versed in all aspects of menu development from menu item creation to design of the menu. In addition to menu development, the company offers a full line of consulting services touching every part of the restaurant business.

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