The Effect of Menu Design on Consumer Acceptance in the Foodservice Industry

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INTRODUCTION

The menu is the heart and soul of a restaurant. Without the menu, many customers would be confused as to the purpose of the establishment. Customers are able to mentally categorize a restaurant and derive an expectation based solely on the evaluation of the menu. A restaurant's foundation is built on the menu. From said menu, food is purchased and stored, equipment is purchased and maintained, and labor cost is established. The appearance of the menu must accurately reflect the establishment and be aesthetically pleasing to draw in customers and thereby create revenue. Thus, revenue generation rests on the shoulders of the menu (1). If the menu cannot bring in customers on its own, then the restaurant will ultimately struggle. Subtle differences in menu design are able to elevate revenue by up to 10% (2). The design of the menu directly reflects how customers perceive the restaurant. The simple act of posting the menu outside of the restaurant allows customers the opportunity to exam the menu and determine for themselves, in that brief moment, whether or not they are going to dine there. What is a customer looking for? How is it possible to entice customers to eat at one particular establishment and not choose one of the many other options on the same block? Despite the initial efforts and costs of developing a new and improved menu, the subtle enhancements of defining a target audience, developing an appropriate lexicon, and tailoring the overall appearance will create a marketable menu that increases profitability and customer loyalty.

AUDIENCE

The audience of a restaurant is the foundation for the overall style of the restaurant and thus the style of the menu. Tailoring your marketing efforts to the incorrect audience can affect the customer loyalty. When customers go to a restaurant expecting a certain feel, style, type of food—and then they receive something different, the ultimate result is unhappy customers.

Unhappy customers will, in the long run, decrease revenue. For example, a child-friendly restaurant must cater to the interests of the children. By having a menu that targets the parents, children did not accept the food as the restaurant predicted they would. Simple changes of the menu to target the children encourage feelings of comfort in the restaurant. As long as the children are comfortable, they will be themselves and eat what they desire (3).

Any restaurant will benefit from maintaining currency in food trends and incorporating them into the menu of the restaurant. Some food trends include healthier diets, global flavors and social ethics (animal rights and organic/environmentally friendly foods) (4). By incorporating these known trends into the menu, the customer becomes more loyal and will return with greater frequency.

AESTHETICS

The overall appearance and design of the menu will heavily influence a customer's decision to dine at that particular establishment. In the industry, the time taken for a customer to evaluate the menu is known as the flip-factor. The *flip-factor* is 30-second time interval that a customer uses to quickly browse a menu and determine whether or not to continue reading the menu. Capturing your targeted customer's interest in this brief moment is crucial in order to gain their business and welcome them into your restaurant.

Reflecting the personality of the restaurant through the paper texture, size, and color choice is vitally important—is it funky and hip, elegant and refined, or earthy and sustainable? The personality of a restaurant can mold customer's expectations of the quality of the food and possible trends that they value. The menu is the first impression of the entire restaurant; make sure it counts (5).

Paper: Color, Texture and Size

The simple feel of the menu can trigger a customer's thoughts of the quality of the restaurant. The thickness, texture and durability implicate quality. Determining the color choice printed on the paper by how the final, printed ink will appear on the selected paper is important. Paper will alter the color of the printed menu. For example, a blue menu design printed on top of parchment will change the text color to green. Before mass-producing menus, verify the color variance on the selected paper (5).

To maintain the appropriate-size paper for the menu, consider the following specifications: the size of the table, the items on the menu listed, whether the menu will be double-sided or a three-panel menu, whether beverages and food are all on one menu or on separate menus, etc. For example, although printing multiple menus will carry an additional production cost, having a smaller dessert menu and/or a drink menu set on the table will allow the customer to view it throughout the meal. By so doing, the probability that the customer will purchase additional items is increased—which adds to customer satisfaction and general revenue. In addition, into consideration the comfort of the customer while browsing through the menu will help establish the needs of a restaurant (5). In addition, the menu must comfortably reside on the table as well as in the hands of the expected clientele. A children's restaurant or a bar and grill should have smaller, more manageable menus while an elegant lodge for the elderly would benefit from a larger and more spacious presentation.

Font

The font style and size is a part of the décor of the overall restaurant—providing a glimpse into the theme of the restaurant well before the customer receives their food. Legible

font is important: 12-point is ideal. Additionally, font readability needs to correspond to ambient lighting in the restaurant. A dimly lit restaurant may require a larger and/or more bold typeface. As in a formal paper, headings and subheadings should differentiate from content in both font and weight. Overall, the font should be readable, should reflect the restaurant's ambiance and should assist in highlighting desired food items (5).

WORD USAGE AND FORMATTING

Words are powerful. The way that words are applied and arranged reflects the feel of a restaurant. Researchers debate whether longer, more elegant words are beneficial in giving the impression of quality food or whether using shorter, simpler words can heighten customer readability and therefore understand the product (2). The lexicon should match the target audience intellectually and visually.

Simple phrases will attract customers. For example, "[f]or [t]wo" denotes items catered to couples. This psychologically attracts the targeted audience of those who are on a date—a deep well of revenue-generation for any restaurant (6). The usage of phrases to attract specific customers is subtle, yet highly effective tool that personalizes the restaurant and increases overall revenue when used correctly.

Visual tricks can encourage the customer to purchase more items from the menu. One such trick is known as bracketing. Bracketing items allows the menu to offer various sizes of an item at different prices. For example, a salad is set at a certain price and is offered as a half-salad at a lower price. This gives the appearance of discounts and will broaden the salad audience of the restaurant by offering a secondary opportunity for purchase to those who prefer smaller

salads or a secondary entrée. Also, the smaller portion makes it feel like the customer is not only saving money but also calories (if they are interested in doing so). Another example is forming boxes on the menu to emphasize special items, profitable items, or dishes that the chef would like to promote. Utilizing boxes attracts the eyes of curious customers and those looking to find new menu items. Another example is utilizing centered justification. Placing prices in an orderly manner by using right-justified columns allows the customer to look at the prices immediately and start comparing prices to other dishes. Centered justification allows the prices to be scattered about and *gently* encourages the diner to order what he or she actually wants. A good way to relieve the pressure of purchasing a pricier item is by omitting the dollar sign by the numerical price (6). Overall, the subtleties of utilizing words and formatting the menu can increase a customer's urge and willingness to purchase certain items from the menu.

TECHNOLOGY

Our ever-growing technological world is increasing in prevalence even in the foodservice world. Depending on the style and target audience of the restaurant, the utilization of online menus and app menus available to smart phones involves a new aspect of menu design. Some restaurant establishments catering to the college crowd now have options of ordering food online either by their website or smart phone app. This allows their establishment to be more accessibly available to students and achieves a friendly *grab-and-go* foodservice (7). The future of foodservice leans towards website and app accessibility. Many business seeking convenience will thrive on this aspect, but what will happen to the personable atmosphere that a restaurant gives? With more restaurants leaning towards computer and cellphone technology to advertise their menu and deliver their food, seated customers and diners may go the way of brick-and-mortar electronic stores in this digital age (8).

CONCLUSION

The menu is the first glance into an entire establishment. Accurately representing the overall personality, style, and ambiance of the restaurant is important and achievable by simply designing the menu to match it. This can be timely and costly, but in the end it will capture a customer's attention and generate more revenue. The subtle enhancements of defining a target audience, developing an appropriate lexicon, and tailoring the overall appearance will create a marketable menu that increases profitability and customer loyalty.

ANNOTATED BIBLOGRAPHY

3) Anonymous. Heading your way. Foodserv Dir. 2004:17(10)
Audience is important. If you confuse audience of the menu, then the customers will not be satisfied and will not order that much. It is important to evaluate the customer's wants and needs and cater to them.

2) Anonymous. Menu Makeover. Foodserv Dir. 2011:24(8)
Even though making over a menu can be costly, it is important to do so in order to entice customers. With a good looking menu that attracts the audience, customers will feel satisfied with the style of the restaurant and enjoy their food accordingly because the menu reflects the food.

4) Anonymous. Menu Trends. Foodserv Dir. 2008: 21(12)
It is important to stay up to date on the latest food trends and incorporate them into the menu. Many customers will appreciate it and it is possible to keep and maintain customer loyalty and satisfaction.

1) King, Paul. Fine-tuning the menu. Foodserv Dir. 2008:11(4)
Fine-tuning a menu can do more than raise awareness; it also can raise revenue. By making the simple adjustment to the menu, it is possible to entice the customer and increase their satisfaction. This helps promote customer loyalty.

McCall, M., & Lynn, A. The effects of restaurant menu item descriptions on perceptions of quality, price, and purchase intention. J Foodserv Bus Res. 2008;11(4)
Word choice and formatting of the menu is an easy way to help direct the reader to where you want them to be reading. By doing so, you can encourage customers to purchase specific items of food that may be more costly.

Riell, Howard. [41]By design: appropriate menu aesthetics promote spending, strong restaurant image. Nat Restaur News. 2011.
Font style and paper color/texture/look give the menu its personal touch. It is important for the menu to have the right style in order to reflect the audience.