

Menu Planning & Writing

Introduction

The menu is probably the key focal point of any food service operation and is very often the number one food service salesman and as such, should regularly be examined, changed, analysed and improved constantly from the viewpoint of content, design, merchandising, and marketing.

As a printed communication, the menu should be looked at in terms of a piece of paper on which words, drawings, designs, colours, illustrations etc., are printed and therefore it should look attractive, and be clean and colourful, as it is a representation of, and reflective of, the quality, style and general appearance of your establishment.

The mere appearance of your menu can condition a customer to order more, however a dirty, soiled, poorly printed, and hard to read menu creates a first impression that can be disastrous.

An attractive, colourful and clean appearing menu which, in addition, is easy and entertaining to read, sets up the proper mood for the customers, having them more inclined to like your operation and its cuisine before even ordering!

Your menu is not only reflective of your establishment and cuisine but it is **the major merchandising tool** and must be written and produced to **sell**.

It should sell what you want to sell the most of, not only in terms of specific items but, more importantly, in terms of profitability, with high margin items gaining prominence in locale.

All menu pages should be fully utilized as each page should be viewed as an advertisement for your establishment and vacant pages could be used to sell additional products or services through in-house cross marketing.

A Few Pointers to Get Started

Artwork and Design

An attractive looking menu is just as important as attractive décor or fine service, and the style or appearance should match the décor or “lifestyle” of your restaurant.

Logical Layout

Any menu layout should follow the logical eating and drinking sequence of a meal, and should flow in a logical layout sequence – top to bottom, left to right and in page sequence.

Type Size & Style

It is most important that type size is big enough so that the average customer can easily read your menu under the prevailing lighting conditions.

Hospitality Consulting & Services

Providing Professional **Independent** Assistance

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Care should be given to the type style for presentation and readability, ensuring adequate spacing and no over crowding.

Copy That Sells

The way in which a menu is worded demonstrates culinary flair and professionalism. What you say about what you serve is critical and should include how each dish is prepared, how it is served, the quality and any other special features. Ensure that menu descriptions are not too lengthy, are written in simple and understandable English and that there are no spelling mistakes!

Merchandising

Your menu is a major merchandising tool and can communicate numerous other offerings. It should include all basic information relating to your operation such as address, phone number, days open, etc etc but can also include other promotional material such as function and outside catering information, or takeaways.

Menus and Marketing

Listed items, charges and special features are the whole focal point of the entire food service operation. Menus must be constantly changed to reflect changes in cost structures and the changes in public tastes and expectations. Retaining old menus in the misperception of saving costs, could be the most expensive "saving" you will ever make.

Creative Menus Get Attention

Does your menu look different or does it look like every other menu? An exceptional menu will have unusual design, good use of colour, exciting paper selection, and an unusual shape or fold and therefore an unusual creative menu will advertise your operation as different and creative in both cuisine and service.

Menu Copy

Descriptive menu copy can be simple or elaborate but should add interest and sales value to any menu. House specialties should be emphasized and carry "hard sell" copy to facilitate greater sales and to establish authentic character for the operation. *As to the actual writing of menu copy, the putting together of words, phrases and apt expressions, the best advice for inexperienced operators, is to secure the use of professional talent, usually through an advertising agency, or through the services of a hospitality service provider.* ***The writing of a menu is too important to be left to an amateur.***

Menu Planning

Good menus are those which provide appetizing, nutritious meals at prices which are acceptable to the customers and at the same time cover operating and service costs. Many factors must be considered when planning menus, including nutritional requirements, availability of food product, seasonality, stock levels, service and preparation times, customer demographics, religious and cultural beliefs, and any special dietary requirements such as vegetarianism.

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Menus must be balanced in food choices, be honest about ingredients, be technically correct, and must not create false customer expectations.

It is usual to decide first on the special, meat and main dishes to be served, and building the remainder of the menu round these dishes being conscious at all times of the production and likely selling costs of individual dishes.

Every meal should consist of foods chosen from the Five Food Groups

- Meat
- Milk and Milk Products
- Fruit and Vegetables
- Bread and Cereals
- Fats and Oils

Consideration must also be given to service presentation including the use of colour, variety of flavour, and variety of textures.

Common Menu Mistakes

1. Menu size too small to accommodate all dishes, resulting in crowding, too small type, and no descriptive copy.
2. Too small type making menu reading difficult.
3. Lack of descriptive copy
4. Mixture of languages – French, German, Italian etc on English menus
5. No “special position” for high margin dishes
6. Omission of profitable on-sales such as liquor
7. Sequence – the menu should be listed and organized in a logical dining sequence.
8. Clip-ons or daily menus which, when attached to a regular menu, cover some printed portion of the menu. Customers, in most cases, will not lift up a clip-on to read under it.
9. Daily specials being a duplication of an item already on the menu
10. Hand written, poorly organized, poorly laid out add-ons.

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The Most Common Mistake

Many food service outlets fail to list the most basic information such as Address; Phone Number, Days Open, Hours of Business, Credit Cards Honored

Descriptive Copy for Menus

Listed below are some commonly used descriptive words or phrases

A fragrant mixture of	Delightfully different	Nourishing
An assortment of	Delicious	Oven Baked
An Intriguing blend	Distinctive	Old fashioned
Authentic	Delicately	Piping hot
A medley of	Deep fried	Poached
Baked golden brown	Epicurean	Roasted
Brochette	Fresh	Seasoned
Braised	Farm fresh	Skewered
Broiled	Flaky	Savoury
Choice Cut	Fluffy	Steaming
Classic	Fragrant	Sauteed
Charcoal	Glazed	Sweetened
Chunky	Grilled	Tender
Crisp	Gourmet	Traditional
Creamy	Home baked	Tasty
Catch of the day	Juicy	Tossed
Continental	Marinated	Tangy
Deliciously seasoned	Healthy	Wholesome

A range of useful terminology may be found at www.cafecreosote.com/dictionary

Further Assistance

For help in designing, planning and building your next menu or for any further assistance, please call Brian of Hospitality Consulting & Services on 0412 525 805 or email brian@hospitalityconsult.com.au

Please visit our web site www.hospitalityconsult.com.au and view the various benefits that we can provide to assist you in attaining a more profitable food service operation

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