

The 12-Step Definitive Guide To Updating Your Menu

A fresh and exciting menu can attract new diners, delight the regulars, and boost revenue. But as anyone in the foodservice business can attest, menu changes can be a little unnerving. After all, what if you make the wrong move? There are certainly challenges to consider, but with the right action plan you can minimize uncertainties and pave your path to success. Skip the nerves and head right to the payout in 12 clear-cut steps.

1

Understand why you want to update your menu

Before you put the time and energy into revamping your menu, make sure you know why you're doing it. Understanding your motivation is an important first step because it helps you articulate your goals and better define success. Just remember that goals should be SMART — specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-based. Saying, "I want to drive more revenue," isn't very actionable. You're better off setting SMART goals like, "I want to drive \$100,000 in incremental to-go revenue by the end of this year." Just make sure it's realistic and attainable.

S

MEASURABLE

A

REALISTIC

T

M

ATTAINABLE

R

TIME-BASED

2

Create a business case and then poke holes in it

Understanding the rationale behind a menu change is essential. But how can you be certain that updating your menu is actually a good idea? To start, put together an informal business case. This is essentially an argument in favor of the changes you have in mind. To create a strong case, think through the risks and benefits, gather information about your competition and target audience, and note any roll-out details. Then, pull in colleagues and trusted industry peers to challenge your position and test the strength of your argument. You'll be amazed at how this simple exercise sheds light on obstacles and opportunities you may not have otherwise considered.

3

Brainstorm and capture menu ideas

Chances are, you and your team have a lot of menu ideas. Whether you hold formal brainstorm sessions or give yourself and your team room to think, it's important to create an environment that inspires creativity. Once the fresh menu ideas start flowing, just make sure to capture them in a convenient place, such as a pocket notebook or the notes section of your phone. If you want to really stay organized, plug your most flushed-out ideas into a spreadsheet. This gives you a searchable library of ideas and allows you to add filter-friendly columns for details like entree type and ingredients. Find what works for you, but whatever you do — write those ideas down.

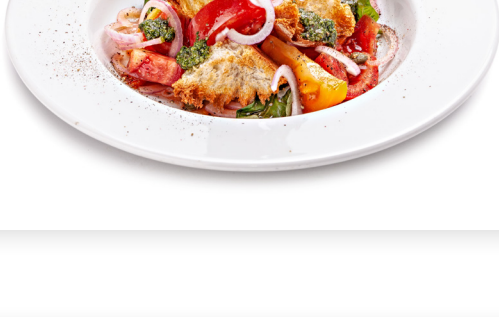
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Establish evaluation criteria

Just because you have a tasty entree idea doesn't mean that it should automatically make it onto your menu. Taste matters, but you also need your menu items to be profitable, realistic to execute, and aligned with your restaurant concept. To make the decision process more manageable, set clear-cut parameters that you can use to qualify and disqualify ideas. For example, do ingredients need to be in season? Or, what's the magic number of starters, entrees, and desserts permitted on the menu? Just remember, don't bend the rules as you go along; it's better to tweak menu ideas to fit within your parameters.

5

Cost your top menu picks



Nothing should ever make it onto your menu without you knowing exactly how much it costs to produce. To do this, take a look at each item you want to include on your menu and break the dish into its individual ingredients and quantities. Then calculate the raw food cost of the dish. With this information, you can determine how much you need to charge to make money on a dish. Or, if there's an ingredient that's cutting into your margins, you'll have that visibility you need to find an affordable substitution.

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Map out equipment load

The last thing you want is a beautifully crafted menu that falls flat because of unnecessary bottlenecks and delays in the kitchen. To combat this common pitfall, map out your equipment load. Grab a sheet of paper and create a box for every piece of equipment and station in your kitchen. If you have multiples of the same equipment type or station, give them each their own box. Then, go through your menu item by item. Assign each component of each menu item to the box representing the piece of equipment or station that is needed during production or holding. At the end of the exercise, you should have a fairly balanced distribution of items in each box. If not, you may need to adjust your menu or explore other equipment solutions to ensure workload is balanced across your kitchen line.

Equipment map example:

Oven 1

- Flatbread
- Bruschetta
- Roasted cauliflower

Oven 2

- Flounder
- Pizza special
- Stuffed mushrooms

Fry station

- Calamari
- Eggplant
- French fries

Induction cooktop

- Chicken
- Piccata sauce
- Pasta

Holding 1

- Wild rice
- Potatoes
- Mixed veggies

Salamander

- Steak sandwich
- Garlic bread
- French onion soup

7

Determine new equipment needs

If you need new equipment to support your menu, you'll want to start sorting that out sooner than later. But, before you bring on another piece of equipment, think about your operation as a whole. Outside of the new menu item or items you need to produce, what else could your equipment purchase solve? If you're tight on space, equipment that's compact, ventless, or multi-purpose is helpful. If you're worried about menu flexibility down the road, look for solutions that accommodate a variety of food types and tasks. Or, if you just need to infuse a little speed into things, pay careful attention to equipment with features and capabilities that support faster cook times, automation, and programmability. Whatever the case, think beyond your immediate menu needs to accomplish more with each equipment investment.



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Write out your recipes



Document the exact recipes for each menu item, complete with ingredient quantities, cook times and temperatures. While the kitchen will eventually make these dishes from memory, having an exact recipe to follow encourages them to be precise and produce more consistent results. Also, since there's less "winging it," your kitchen won't use up extra ingredients, and your dish will remain at the budget you calculated during the costing phase. Lastly, if you have programmable equipment, having a written record of your recipes makes setting up your preset cook times and temperatures a breeze.

9

Write and design your menu

The physical menu you put in front of your guests — whether it's on the wall, your website or a sheet of paper — deserves your utmost attention. While it's an easy step to overlook, your menu is one of your best sales tools. Take the time to wordsmith the descriptions for each menu item so they are both accurate and enticing. Also, give menu design some serious thought. Careful use of whitespace and a thoughtful approach to colors, fonts, and layout can make your menu more approachable and easy to read. Furthermore, the look and feel of your menu is an extension of your brand; make sure it represents who you are as an establishment.

MENU FIRST IMPRESSIONS



casual

fun

trendy



upscale

elegant

special

10

Ensure your team is ready to go

The success of your menu has a lot to do with the team behind it. Ensure your entire team is trained and educated on what's expected of them. Bartenders, hosts, servers, and register operators must know what's on the menu and how to describe it. Managers need to know what's changing, so they can program equipment, update the ordering system, and swap out menus. Kitchen staff must be trained and practiced on new equipment, processes, and execution. You get the idea — nearly every staff member is impacted by a menu change, so think through all scenarios and get everyone up to speed before your new menu rolls out.

11

Promote your new menu

Whether you've completely overhauled your menu or simply updated a few items, it's important to create buzz and awareness with existing and potential customers. There are millions of ways to do this, but to start, think about the "lowest hanging fruit." What effective (or potentially effective) promotional opportunities are the simplest and easiest for you to execute? Maybe you have a strong following on social media, and photos of your new menu items will get people excited. Or perhaps you have an existing relationship with a local publication that would love to do a feature on your new menu concept. Think about what's within your reach and go for it. The key is to get the word out.

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Assess, measure, adjust

Your updated menu doesn't have to be a blind leap of faith. If you're methodical and data-driven about tracking the profitability and popularity of each menu item, you can make faster and smarter decisions around which items to keep, to rework, or to replace. To make this analysis easier, assign each menu item to one of the following categories so you can better evaluate next steps:

HORSE: Items with low profitability and high popularity that should remain on your menu, but may require price or ingredient changes to increase margins

STAR: Items with high profitability and high popularity that should remain on your menu

DOG: Items with low profitability and low popularity that should be removed from your menu

PUZZLE: Items with high profitability and low popularity that need further assessment to identify a solution

NUMBER SOLD

HORSE

STAR

DOG

PUZZLE

PROFITABILITY



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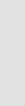
When it comes to updating your menu, there's a lot to think through. At Ovention, we are not just oven experts — we are also deeply rooted in the culinary world and have the commitment and know-how to help you build and grow your business. If you need additional tips on updating your menu or you have another foodservice-related question, our culinary consultants are eager and ready to help.

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