

Keep Guests in the House Longer by Extending Your Bar Food Menu

Partnering with food trucks is one über-trendy way to keep guests in your kitchen-less bar, buying more drinks as the night progresses. In some cases, bars even use food trucks to make a profit off the food. But if you want to keep it in-house, and you've got a kitchen, why not keep it open late at night to make some extra cash on the food and the drinks guests will continue purchasing once their appetite is satisfied? Plus, if you're the lone bar in the area with late-night eats, you can attract a new crowd that others can't, which means more bar sales and more loyal customers.

"There are some patrons who will be introduced to your bar or restaurant only at late night, and it's a good idea to use this opportunity to get them to come back during regular hours," says Arlene Spiegel, founder and president of New York City-based foodservice consulting firm Arlene Spiegel & Associates. "Since most patrons visit bars with friends, the food, atmosphere and drinks are a great time to create memories about your brand."

To Close or Not to Close?

When crafting your late-night menu, you first need to decide whether you should keep your kitchen fully running, shut down portions of it or shut it down completely and offer convenient snacks like cheese trays or chips instead. Take a deep look at your clientele, and also at your current menu.

Some bars' entire kitchens stay open until the bar closes, while others opt to close early, simply offering snacks the bar staff can handle preparing. "I see lots of cheese platters, charcuterie platters, Mediterranean platters and chip 'n' dip platters that can be plated, held and served at the bar when the chef goes home," Spiegel says.

Change Is Good

If you choose to keep your kitchen fully operating at night, try to at least switch up your menu, whether that means offering fewer items or just adding some new twists. Spiegel suggests offering breakfast dishes for those coming into your bar in the post-midnight hours.

Offering after-midnight bar snacks can be invaluable for your business. Late-night noshes help keep guests drinking on a fuller stomach, which means more money and less trouble for your staff, while also building customer loyalty and attracting new guests, making your spot the place to be from open to close.

