

Menu Engineering Made Easy

Bar and restaurant operators give a lot of thought to the items on their menus. But the design of the actual menu itself is often an afterthought, and it's not created to optimize sales and boost profits for the establishment.

"Many operators put items on the menu that they like, as opposed to creating signature items that appeal to the specific constituencies they want to attract," says Arlene Spiegel, a restaurant consultant in New York City.

Spiegel also suggests creating a "halo" on a few items in each category and calling out important attributes, such as a small-batch distiller, housemade bitters, local food, and grass-fed beef.

It's a good idea to offer separate menus for some items, too, Spiegel says. Doing so allows guests to focus on the stage of the meal and cuts through the clutter of menus that are too big. "And it keeps the excitement for the next course," she adds.

Beers, wines and cocktails can go together, and should be presented when guests are seated, if they're eating. Coffee/tea/dessert drinks should be presented after a meal and can be combined with the dessert menu, she advises. For the food menu, the only beverages included should be beer and wine, Spiegel cautions.

As for the design of the menu itself, it's extremely important. Menus range from



calligraphy on quality paper to laminated reusable menus. "Whatever the choice, it needs to reflect the attitude of the brand and the experience the guest is expecting," Spiegel says. "Colors should be kept to a minimum and lettering/fonts should be easy to read."

And if you want your menu to really stand out and make an impression, do something different. Spiegel points to a fine-casual restaurant in New York that focuses on local foods. It features a map on the menu that identifies the location of many of the farms and artisans from which the menu is sourced. ■