

INDUSTRY WEEKLY DIGEST

YOUR WEEKLY DIGEST OF CONTEMPORARY INDUSTRY TRENDS



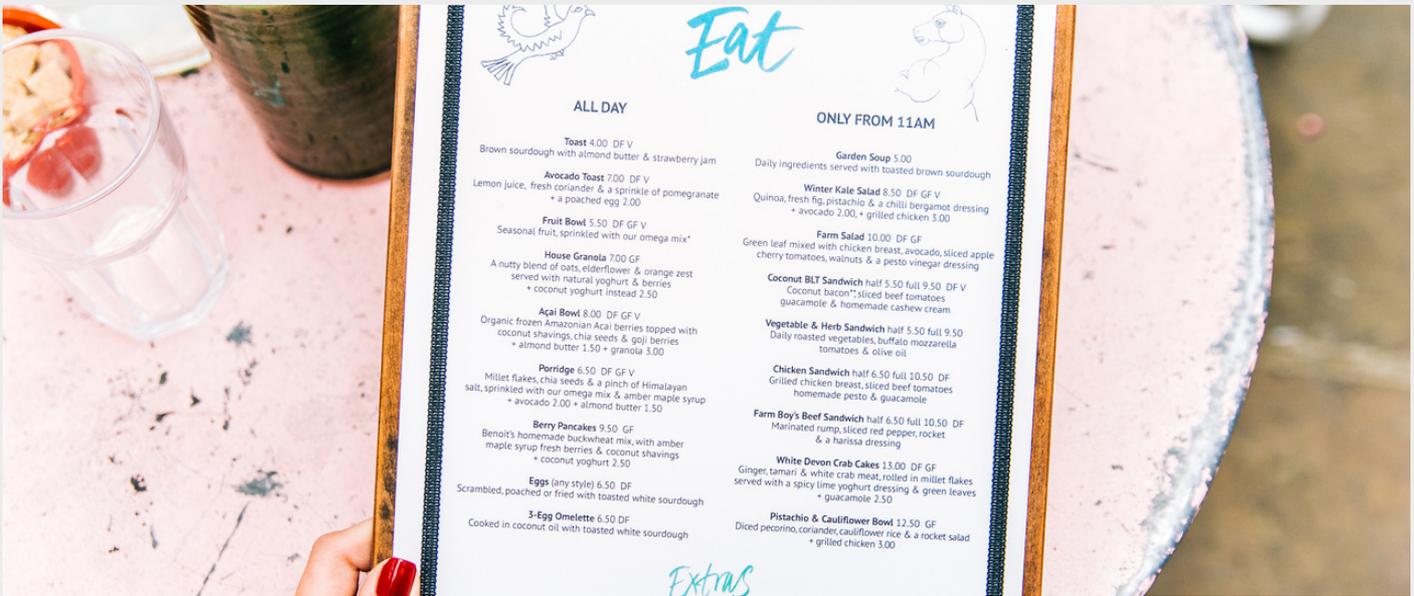
ON THE MENU

Exploring the myriad influences on this seemingly simple selling tool

The menu in any food and beverage establishment is a seemingly simple vehicle that's primary purpose is as a selling tool. Whilst there have always been underpinning catering, marketing and financial drivers behind its format and content, never before in recent history have there been so many influences on the dishes that form the establishments offering.

In this digest, Mark Ashton, Associate Professor at the School of Hospitality and Tourism Management, identifies and considers the combined complexity of these influences and goes on to pose what might be further future considerations for menu design and engineering.

Have a great weekend!



A SEEMINGLY SIMPLE SELLING TOOL COMPLICATED BY MYRIAD CONTEMPORARY INFLUENCES

Mark Ashton

Whilst perhaps more traditional influences on menu content have included cultural and religious customs, fashions and fads have also played a part through the ages. Over time a greater concern for healthy eating and nutrition have influenced some menus, more recently with a need to note calorie values of dishes. Ever evolving ethical considerations also play a part in terms of animal welfare but also with regard to environmental sustainability with some operators now choosing to label carbon footprints on their offerings.

The COVID-19 pandemic turned things on their head with establishments having to pivot their offerings with a contactless approach and migrate their menus into a digital format often using QR codes.

Contemporary influences may also include catering to a wider range of dietary requirements (including vegans and those seeking plant-based options), often each with their own bespoke menu. Authenticity seems to be a buzz word right now, and the trend for local provenance is not slowing, but needs to be balanced with the former. Chefs (and mixologists) may consider how photogenic their products are and how likely they are to be 'Instagramable'. The big players are also encouraging guests to adopt/ order through their apps.

The contemporary challenges the sector is facing also impact on menu content - raging food inflation has led to some operators offering value/cost of living crisis menus and many others to reduce the breadth of their offering. Supply chain/product availability challenges, compounded by Brexit, also add to the challenges operators experience in creating and offering consistent menus.

Going forward, I imagine the desire to customise your dish will become an expectation in most establishments, but this must be carefully balanced by consumers reported 'decision fatigue'. Whilst the challenges of rising costs remain, the temptation to engineer menu prices (and portion sizes) must also be felt keenly - but the appetite for dynamic pricing (in F&B) still doesn't seem to yet be there. Whatever the future holds, I suspect the menu as we once knew it, will no longer be a simple card, but may well be an omni channel tool that requires very carefully balancing of all the aforementioned trends and influences in order that each establishment retains its own identity and unique (hopefully authentic) brand, that it can operate at a profit.

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