

MENU PLANNING

EVOLUTION

Initially menus were lists of food, in seemingly random fashion with the food being raw, prepared or cooked. Individually menus came into use early in the 19th century and courses began to be formulated. For special occasions seven or so courses might be served e.g. hors d'oeuvre, soup, fish, entree, sorbet, roast, sweet, savoury.

With the formulation of menus, artistry and flair began to influence the various ways of cooking and dishes were created after 'the style of e.g. a la francaise or / and given names of important people for whom they had been created e.g. Peach Melba, a simple dish of poached fresh peach, vanilla ice cream and fresh raspberry puree created by Escoffier at the Savoy of Dame Nellie Melba, a famous opera singer.

At the 20th century advanced and more people of the world moved and settled from country to country so began the introduction of styles of food and service from a wide variety of nations resulting in the number of ethnic dishes and ethnic restaurants which abound today.

Eating at work, at school in hospitals and institutions led to a need for healthy, budget conscious food.

Rapid air transport made it possible for foods from all corners of the globe to be available which together with domestic and European produce gives those who compose menus a tremendous range of choice.

ESSENTIAL CONSIDERATIONS PRIOR TO PLANNING THE MENU

1. Competition — be aware of any competition in the locality, including prices and quality. As a result it may be wiser to produce a menu quite different.

2. Location — study the area in which your establishment is situated and the potential target market of customers.

3. Analyse — the type of people you are planning to cater for, e.g. office workers in the city requiring quick service.

4. Outdoor Catering — are there opportunities for outdoor catering or take away food.

5. Estimated Customer Spend Per Head — important when catering, for example for hospital staff and patients, children in schools, workers in industry. Whatever level of catering a golden rule should be 'offer value for money'.

6. Modern Trends in Food Fashion

1. Should be considered alongside popular traditional dishes.

2. Decide the range of dishes to be offered and the pricing structure. Price each dish separately? Or offer to set 2 to 3 course menus? Or a combination of both?

7. Space and Equipment in the Kitchens — will influence the composition of the menu e.g. overloading use of deep frying pan, salamanders and steamers.

8. Number and Capability of Staff — over stretched staff can easily reduce the standard of production envisaged.

9. Availability of Suppliers and Reliability of Suppliers — seasonal foods and storage space.

10. Food Allergies

11. Cost Factors — is crucial if an establishment is to be profitable. Costing is essential for the success of compiling any menu. Modern computer techniques can analyse cost swiftly and daily.

TYPES OF MENU

Table d'hote or Set Price Menu - a menu forming a meal usually of two or three courses at a set price. A choice of dishes may be offered at all courses.

A La Carte - a menu with all dishes individually priced. The customers can therefore compile their own menu, which may be one, two or more courses. A true a la carte dish should be cooked to order and the customer should be prepared to wait.

Special Party or Function Menus - menus for banquets or functions of all kinds.

Ethnic or Speciality Menus - these can be set price or dishes individually priced specialising in the food (or religion) of the country or in a specialised food itself: ethnic – Chinese, Indian, Kosher, African, Caribbean, Greek, speciality – steak, fish, pasta, vegetarian, pancakes.

Hospital Menus - these usually take the form of a menu card given to the patient the day before service so that his or her preferences can be ticked. Both National Health Service and private hospitals cater for vegetarians and also for religious requirements.

Menus for People at Work - menus which are served to people at their place of work. Such menus vary in standard and extent from one employer to another due to company policy on the welfare of their staff and work-force.

* There may also be a call-order a la carte selection charged at a higher price. The food will usually be mainly British with some ethnic dishes and vegetarian dishes. Menus may consist of soup, main course with vegetables, followed by sweets, cheese and yogurts. According to the policy of the management and employee requirements, there will very often be a salad bar and healthy eating dishes included on the menu. When there is a captive clientele who face the same surroundings daily and meet the same people, then no matter how long the menu cycle or how pleasant the people, or how nice the decor, bedroom is bound to set in and staff then long for a change of scene. So, a chef or manager needs to vary the menu constantly to encourage guests to patronise the establishment rather than going off the premises to eat. The decor and layout of the staff restaurant plays a very important part in satisfying the guest's needs. The facilities should be relaxing and comfortable so that he or she feels that the restaurant is not a continuation of the work place. Employees who are happy, well nourished and know that the company has their interests and welfare at heart will tend to be well

motivated and work better.

* Menus for children – in schools there is an emphasis on healthy eating and a balanced diet particularly in boarding schools. Those areas with children of various culture and religious backgrounds have appropriate items available on the menu. Many establishments provide special children's menus which concentrate on favourite foods and offer suitably sized portions.

CYCLICAL MENUS

These are menus which are compiled to cover a given period of time: one month, three months, etc. They consist of a number of set menus for a particular establishment, such as an industrial catering restaurant, cafeteria, canteen, director's dining room, hospital or college refectory. At the end of each period the menus can be used again thus overcoming the need to keep compiling new ones. The length of the cycle is determined by management policy, by the time of the year and by different foods available. These menus must be monitored carefully to take account of changes of guest requirements and any variations in weather conditions which are likely to affect demand for certain dishes. If cyclical menus are designed to remain in operation for long periods of time, then they must be carefully compiled so that they do not have to be changed too drastically during operation.

ADVANTAGES OF CYCLICAL MENU

1. They save time by removing the daily or weekly task of compiling menus, although they may require slight alterations for the next period.
2. When used in association with cook/freezer operations, it is possible to produce the entire number of portions of each item to last the whole cycle, having determined that the standardised recipes are correct.
3. They give greater efficiency in time and labour.
4. They can cut down on the number of commodities held in stock, and can assist in planning storage requirements.

DISADVANTAGES

1. When used in establishments with a captive clientele, then the cycle has to be long enough so that guests do not get bored with the repetition of dishes.
2. The caterer cannot easily take advantage of 'good buys' offered by suppliers on a daily or weekly basis unless such items are required for the cyclical menu.

PREPLANNED AND PREDESIGNED MENUS

ADVANTAGES

1. Pre planned or pre designed menus enable the caterer to ensure that good menu planning is practised.
2. Before selecting dishes that he or she prefers, the caterer should consider what the guest likes, and the effect of these dishes upon the meal as a whole.
3. Menus which are planned and costed in advance allow banqueting managers to quote prices instantly to a guest.
4. Menus can be planned taking into account the availability of kitchen and service equipment, Without placing unnecessary strain upon such equipment.
5. The quality of food is likely to be higher if kitchen staff is preparing dishes that they are familiar with and have prepared a number of times before.

DISADVANTAGES

1. Pre planned and pre designed menus may be too limited to appeal to a wide range of guests.
2. They may reduce job satisfaction for staff that has to prepare the same menus respectively.
3. They may limit chef's creativity and originality.

STRUCTURE OF MENUS

MENU STRUCTURE

LENGTH

The number of dishes on a menu should:

1. Offer the guest an interesting and varied choice.
2. In general, it is better to offer fewer dishes of good standard than a long list of mediocre quality.

DESIGN

Should complement the image of the dining room and be designed to allow for changes (total or partial) which may be daily, weekly, monthly etc. An inset for dishes of the day or of the week gives the guest added interest.

LANGUAGE

- * Accuracy in dish description helps the guest to identify the food they wish to choose.
- * Avoid over-elaboration and flowery choice of words.
- * Wherever possible use English language. If a foreign dish name is used then follow it with a simple, clear English version.

PRESENTATION

Ensure the menu is prepared in a sensible and welcoming way so that the guest is put at ease and relaxed. An off-hand brusque presentation (written or oral) can be off-putting and lower expectations of the meal.

PLANNING

Consider the following:

1. Type and size of establishment: pub, school, hospital, restaurant etc.
2. Guest profile: different kinds of people have differing likes and dislikes.
3. Special requirements: Kosher, Muslim, Vegetarian.
4. Time of the year: certain dishes acceptable in summer may not be so in winter.
5. Foods in season: are usually in good supply and reasonable in price.
6. Special days: Christmas, Hogmanay, Shrove Tuesday etc.
7. Time of day: breakfast, brunch, lunch, tea, high tea, dinner, supper, snack, special function.
8. Price range: charge a fair price and ensure good value for money, guest satisfaction can lead to recommendation and repeat business.
9. Number of courses.
10. Sequence of course.
11. Use menu languages that guest understand.
12. Sensible nutritional balance.
13. No unnecessary repetition of ingredients from dish to dish.
14. No unnecessary repetition of flavours and colours.
15. Be aware of the Trades Description Act 1988 'Any person who in the course of a trade or business: applies a false trade description to any goods or supplies or offers to supply any goods to which a false trade description is applied shall be guilty of an offence'.