

Making the most of your menu



Guides



Making the most of your menu

Understanding what you do and what you sell is of prime importance not only to you but to the customers you are looking to attract. And, the best way of doing this, is by having a menu that tells the story of your business.

What should be on your menu?

You should be passionate about anything that goes on to your menu, customers won't return if reality does not live up to the description.

Always make sure your menu is well branded and tells a story of what you make. Are you making wholesome food that sends the workforce of Britain on its way for the day ahead? Are you passionate about vegetarian or vegan food? You need to make sure you have a distinct identity and theme so your customers understand, from one look at your menu, what it is you do and what they can expect.

Outline the meals that you sell, in an easy to understand format and include all the main ingredients.

Make sure that the cost of your meals is easy to understand as this can prevent after purchase discussions.

As the saying goes, a picture paints a thousand words, so make the most of your theme with images. Use a distinctive logo or character that represents the business so customers understand your brand and can easily relay it when speaking to other potential customers.

Include the best pictures possible of the food you serve. Customers may not always understand the name of a meal or how it looks, especially with daily/weekly specials, but having an image of it will get interest. Images can always help with selling up to a bigger purchase.

The menu isn't just about what food you serve it is about who you are and how they can contact you and place orders. Your mobile number is a must, customers can place orders over the phone which helps you to prepare the food during any quiet time and saves the customer from queueing when they arrive. Social media is very important so include facebook/twitter/Instagram information – this is a great way for satisfied customers to share your details with their friends, family and colleagues. You could even include a small map with 'we are here' on printed menus and on social media to enable your new customers to find you.

Include your trading times and days that you are open. If you trade from more than one site include the other sites as well.

Include any other meals and information that builds the story, is it a vegan option, use of local produce, gluten free or how it has been prepared, halal, etc.

What format should your menu be?

Ensure your menu is on your unit and can be read easily by customers. Include the likes of chalk boards with any specials of the day that are in addition to your main menu.

Include the menu on your social media activity as this format lends itself to advertising specials of the day.

Have printed copies available for customers to pass on to colleagues, friends and family and encourage factory or office workers to pin a copy on the noticeboard at work. By including contact details they can place 'shipping orders' that you can prepare ready for picking up at a specific time.

Using your menu to target customers

Understand who your target customers are and make sure your menu is what those target customers require. If you are looking to target lorry/van drivers or builders and you are based on a DIY site it is unlikely that your customers will have time to wait for gourmet food. All day breakfasts, hot food in barmos (rolls), burgers and chips are most likely to be best sellers to match their busy schedule.

Shoppers in retail parks or shopping centres may be more likely to buy coffee and a sandwich and there may be restrictions on cooking hot food so ensure that the menu reflects what the passing custom is likely to buy.

If you are going down the route of trading at festivals or specialist food/street food events the golden rule is to concentrate on a small handful of dishes that share a lot of the same ingredients and make them to the very best of your ability. Your menu is an invaluable tool at these events as you can let many first time customers know how to contact you in future.

Specials and Meal Deals

Specials are important if you are in a location on a long term contract. You will be looking to have regular customers who use your unit for lunch on a daily basis. Having different specials each day can ensure your customers have variety when they come to the unit. This can make you stand out from the crowd and stop them visiting various other caterers to introduce variety to their diet.

Specials are also a great source of information to advertise your business, it can give you something new to talk about on a daily basis, particularly on social media.

Create meal deals to help your customer's budget go further such as buy a meal and side and get a drink at half price. Customers will always appreciate caterers who help them save money. The Meal Deals can also help you push specific items and allow you to get better pricing on them.

Also remember with specials to advertise anything that conforms to dietary or religious requirements such as gluten free for coeliacs or Halal.

Wrapping

Consider investing in your own branded wrapping and packaging. Getting your packaging branded adds a touch of quality and provenance. Major brands spend millions getting this right, it is important. If your packaging is recyclable make sure it is labelled accordingly.

The old adage of “your first taste is with your eyes” is true - make your food look attractive.

Loyalty Cards

Loyalty Cards are a very good way to keep regular customers returning to the unit and are easy to produce using business card sized giveaways and a rubber stamp. There are a number of ways it can be used but most popular is along the lines of buy 4 get the 5th free. This could be a great way of optimising repeat business.