

Menu Planning

A MENU or “bill of fare” is a means of communication, informing what the caterer has to offer. The compiling of a menu is one of the caterer’s most important jobs – whether for establishments such as restaurants aiming to make a profit, or for those working to a budget, such as hospitals and schools.

Function of MENU:

- a) It is like a price list or a list of wares to the customers in order that he purchases or orders the dishes of his choice.
- b) It helps as a tool for the kitchen in order to prepare the mise-en-place and equipment, staff required for its production.
- c) It gives a variety to choose from and alternatives in each type of dishes.
- d) It sometimes gives the description of each dish in brief, so that the customer knows the contents of the dish and what to expect while ordering a dish.
- e) It is a record of cost and control purposes to regulate portion size and food cost of each item.

Factors Effecting Menu Planning

- 1) **Type of Establishment:** There will be considerable variation, for example, in menu of five star hotels and restaurants, school meals, heavy manual worker’s canteen or hospitals.
- 2) **Type of Customer and Age Group:** especially for private parties for a birthday, senior citizens conference, football player after a match, visiting overseas students on a mayor’s banquet; all need personal consideration.
- 3) **Location:** Study the area in which your establishment is situated and the potential target market of customers.
- 4) **Religious rules** if applicable (kosher catering or a Muslim occasion) – Lack of knowledge or understanding can easily lead to innocently giving offence.
- 5) **Meat or Non-Meat preferences:** The number of non-meat eater is steadily increasing, so this becomes more important.
- 6) **Time of the Year:** a) the prevailing temperature should be considered as certain dishes suitable for cold weather may not be acceptable in mid-summer. b) Foods in season are usually in good supply and more reasonable in price. c) Special dishes on certain days.
- 7) **Time of Day:** Breakfast, brunch, lunch, tea, high-tea, dinner, supper, snack or special function.
- 8) **Price Range:** Unless fair prices are charged (so that customers are satisfied) repeat business may not occur and the caterer may go out of business.
- 9) **Competition:** It is wiser to produce a menu quite different to those of nearby establishment both in terms of price and quality.
- 10) **Space and Equipment:** The menu writer must be aware of any shortcomings or deficiencies in equipment and may be wary of offering dishes that are difficult to produce.
- 11) **The availability and capacity of both the Production and Service staff** labour must be considered.
- 12) **Availability of Supplies** and schedule from the suppliers.
- 13) **Number of Courses:** Varies according to all prior consideration.
- 14) **Correct Sequence of courses:** Important if the menu is to achieve a good balance.
- 15) **Appropriate Language:** Always use a language that customers can understand.

- 16) **Sensible Nutritional Balance:** If a selection of dishes with varying nutritional contents are offered then customers can make their own choices.
- 17) No repetition of **Commodities:** Never repeat basic ingredients such as mushrooms, tomatoes, peas, bacon on the menu.
- 18) No repetition of **Flavour:** If using strong seasoning like onion, garlic or herbs such as thyme, sage or bay leaf, do not repeat in more than one course. Example: a) do not serve a tomato flavoured sauce on main course if the soup was cream of tomato. b) do not or avoid, serving lets say a garlic flavoured noodles with prawn in garlic sauce. c) try to differ taste in meat itself by providing a choice between beef, Pork, lamb,
- 19) No repetition of **Colours:** Colour of food is important to give appetite appeal, but avoid repetition of colour.
- 20) **Texture** of Course: Ensure variation is given (food should not be all soft or all crisp, but balanced).
- 21) **Sauces:** If different sauces are served on one menu, the foundation ingredient of each sauce should vary.

Cyclical Menus

These are menus which are compiled to cover a given period of time: one month, three months, etc. They consists of a number of set menus for a particular establishment, such as an industrial catering restaurant, cafeteria restaurant, canteen, hospital or college refractory. These menus must be monitored carefully to take account of changes in customer requirements and any variations in weather conditions which are likely to affect demand for certain dishes.

Things to consider when planning a cycle menu:

- Food characteristics and combinations: Visualize how the food will look on the plate.
- Color - at least one or two colorful foods should be included on the menu.
- Texture - refers to the structure of foods and can be best detected by the feel of the foods in the mouth. A variety of textures should be included in the meal.
- Consistency - is the ways foods adhere together - their degree of firmness, density, or viscosity - may be described as firm, thin, thick, or gelatinous.
- Shape - of food plays a big part in eye appeal, and interest can be created through variety in the form in which foods are presented. One way to add interest is to vary the way in which vegetables are cut. Variation in height of food also aids in eye appeal for the customer.
- Flavor combinations - in addition to the basic flavors of sweet, sour, bitter, and salty, vegetables may be thought of as strong and mild flavored, while chili or other foods may be thought of as spicy or highly seasoned. A variety of flavors in the meal are more enjoyable than duplication of any one flavor. Foods with the same basic flavors, such as spaghetti with tomato sauce and sliced tomato salad, should be avoided in the same meal.

What are the primary benefits of using a cycle menu.....

Advantages include reducing the total time required for menu planning, improving student acceptability, controlling cost, and improving foodservice operations. Examples include:

- One set of menus allows the operator to feature items rated as highly acceptable by the students within daily choices consistent with the standards.
- Repeated exposures to foods, including fruits and vegetables, improve children's preferences for those foods. Cycle menus offering less-well accepted foods, in addition to preferred foods, provide students with the opportunity to learn to like new or less-well accepted items.
- A 2- or 3-week-cycle menu aids optimizing food procurement, inventory turnover, and daily production quantities, thereby improving foodservice operations and helping control costs. Having a consistent inventory uses less storage space.
- Accurate usage projections can be established, enabling vendors and manufacturers to project their production schedules and needs and often resulting in better pricing.
- Delivery schedules can be easily set up and managed.

Disadvantages of Cyclical Menu

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

Preplanned and Predesigned Menus

Advantages

- a) Preplanned or predesigned menus enable the caterer to ensure that good menu planning is practiced.
- b) Before selecting dishes that he or she prefers, the caterer should consider what the customer likes, and the effect of these dishes upon the meal as a whole.
- c) Menus which are planned and costed in advance allow banqueting managers to quote prices instantly to customer.
- d) Menus can be planned taking into account the availability of kitchen and service equipment, without placing unnecessary strain upon the equipment.
- e) The quality of food is likely to be higher if kitchen staff are preparing dishes that they are familiar with and have prepared a number of times before.

Disadvantages

- a) Preplanned and predesigned menus may be too limited to appeal to a wide range of customers.
- b) They may reduce job satisfaction for staff who have to prepare same menus repetitively.
- c) They may limit the chef's creativity and originality.

