The best restaurant menus are planned and deliberate. It’s about more than just words and photos. Master these data-backed secrets and you’ll serve up a menu sure to impress all of your guests.

Your menu is the only communication with your guests that 100 percent of them will see, but you have 109 seconds to say all you need to say, so focus on clear messaging.
The best restaurant menus account for the paradox of choice theory: The more options we have, the more anxiety we feel.

Upserve analyzed millions of transactions from restaurants around the country, ranging from quick service to full service. Our research shows that many restaurants have way too many items on their menus.

Specifically: 80 percent of a restaurant’s food sales come from only 16 percent of menu items.

What’s the ideal number? The maximum should be seven options per food category, so seven appetizers, seven entrees and seven desserts.
2. Use this Golden Menu Ratio to Increase Margins

Upserve research uncovered a common ratio of food types and drink types.

Overall, we discovered that food accounts for 66 percent of most restaurants’ menu sales. In the beverage department, which contributes to 34 percent of sales, alcoholic beverages, such as mixed drinks, account for almost half of all alcoholic sales.

**MENU RATIO FINDINGS:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food</th>
<th>Beverages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>66%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Non-alcoholic Beverages:**
- Beer: 23%
- Wine: 13%
- Mixed Drinks: 23%

**Alcoholic Beverages:**
- Wine: 53%
- Beer: 11%
- Mixed Drinks: 13%

How can you use this ratio to your advantage?

According to the National Restaurant Association, it’s not how high or low food costs are, but rather how many gross profit dollars your menu items generate. That’s why menu items should be promoted based on their gross profit contribution (dollars) rather than having a low food cost (percentage).

Start strong, end strong.

Nearly half of food sales are from the main course options. If you make sure your entrees are the items with the highest margins (or gross profit contribution), you can take it on the chin with those crowd-pleasing appetizers that bring back guests, but don’t give you great returns.

Along the same vein, since desserts (while historically a typical course restaurants use to make higher margins) don’t necessarily make up the bulk of your revenue, you can use them to end the customer experience strong.

**Show your cocktail menu (and mixologists) some love**

As everyone knows, drinks, both alcoholic and not, are great places to improve the bottom line.

Wine and beer pours by the glass often have lower labor cost than mixed drinks unless you have a sommelier on staff. But cocktails account for nearly half of alcoholic beverage sales, so if you’re looking to find areas to significantly increase revenue, look at the pricing on your cocktail list first.
3. Don’t (Over)Use Photos

One photo next to a menu item increases sales by 30%.

*With that in mind, there is no reason NOT to use photos for as many menu items as design and space allows, as long as you are being thoughtful about it.*

*A good rule of thumb? One photo per page.*
4. Ditch The Dollar Signs

The Center for Hospitality Research found that people spend significantly more at restaurants where menus do not include dollar signs.

Getting rid of dollar signs removes the “pain point” of the cost of a menu item. Instead of $15.00 for that pasta dish, you’re better off listing it as 15.00, or even just 15.

The best way to associate price? DON’T add dotted lines from the item to the price. Instead, “nest” the price discretely after the description in a way that guests glide right over it. Adding it to a column like often done with dotted lines draws attention to it regardless of the dollar sign.
5. List the most expensive items first

People read from the top of the list.

Viewing the most expensive items first provides an anchor to compare the other, less expensive items, against, making them look like a better value in comparison.

Use boxes to highlight items that you want to sell more of, like your default options.
6 - Use Complex Descriptions and Evocative Labels

Use labels that are geographic, affective, sensory, and branded. Evocative, suggestive dish names can increase sales by as much as 25%. And, creative labels generate more positive comments after people consume the food — indicating that the label impacts not only the likelihood someone might choose an item, but also their enjoyment in consuming the item.

Make your menu items with the highest profit margin or repeat guest count stand out with longer descriptions to capture attention faster.

Detailed menu item descriptions draw the guests’ attention away from price, and improve the perception of value.

Use words that have a mouth-watering effect. Like “tender”, “golden”, and “natural”, which can positively affect guests choice of menu items.

Here’s the bottom line: Longer menu descriptions sell more food – 30% more food. The more you describe it a guest, the less they have to think about it – yes, I want that because it sounds amazing.

Use labels that are geographic, affective, sensory, and branded.
7. White Space

When a menu is jam packed with a ton of lengthy descriptions, your guests’ eyes are drawn to the white spaces. This is a good thing for you.

Items with the largest profit margins deserve their own space based on this psychology.

Create your own white space: Put a box around high profit items and create white space for them. This draws guests’ eyes right to the items you are looking to get them to pay attention to.

High Profit Item
8. Wandering Eyes

Use of white space brings us right to... where your guests eyes wander.

Supermarkets and retail stores are great at putting their most profitable items at eye level, and the same can be done with your restaurant menu.

Where are your guests’ eyes wandering?
The upper right corner.
9. Color The Imagination

The colors on your menu have an impact on what your guests order.

Have you ever wondered why so many restaurant menus utilize red and yellow? Red stimulates appetite and yellow draws our attention.

Blue icons or images can be helpful in selling seafood. Green can be helpful in selling vegetables.
10. Decoy Dishes

Did you know guests subconsciously order the top 2 menu items more than any other item? Perspective is everything.

If guests are paying attention to the top, one trick is to include a really expensive menu item there so that everything else feels reasonable. That $75 steak seems more reasonably priced when the first item you saw was a $300 lobster dinner.
If you drew a heat map on any restaurant menu you would find similar eye movements. Guests move from the middle of the page to the top right corner and end on the top left... like a triangle.

With that in mind, these areas, your triangle tips, need to have the dishes with the highest profit margin.
In a 2017 online survey of over 500 diners across the U.S. conducted by Upserve, asking what respondents most cared about in a menu, **42%** said sourcing from local products was an important consideration when choosing a restaurant.
Don’t Make These Mistakes...

They’re commonly made, but you’re a pro now.

“I can’t read the text.” — Poor readability happens from font too small, too light or a page that doesn’t display the text best. You don’t want your guests feeling like they need to use the camera on their iPhones to magnify the menu.

“This menu is as big as this table.” — Your menu size should take into account table size and table settings - it’s best not to overwhelm your guests.

“Did you see how much that steak costs?” — When you overemphasize price and make it the center of attention, your guests miss out on those awesome descriptions that make their mouths water.
Do You Know if Your Menu Brings Guests Back?

Upserve is the only restaurant management platform built for restaurateurs by restaurateurs to help you exceed guest expectations.

LEARN MORE
upserve.com/demo