



The When, Why, and How of Menu Upgrades



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Menu Upgrade Questions Answered

Your menu is so much more than a food list — it's an in-house and online sales tool, brand identity reinforcement, and an opportunity to distinguish your pizzeria from the competition with a profitable mix of classic and signature pies.

Upgrading your menu is a great way to capitalize on its versatility. Sound complicated? It's not if you follow the when-, why-, and how-to-do's in this handy guide.

WHEN SHOULD I UPGRADE MY MENU?

General consensus among industry experts is that **operators need to upgrade their menus at least once every 12 months.**

On the flipside, if you choose to wait longer than one year, you risk:

- Reducing profit margins or even losing money on your best-selling items
- Alienating patrons, should you need to increase prices across-the-board to remain profitable

Sure, you might make menu tweaks here and there throughout the year, and that's fine. But minor adjustments aren't the same as an annual overhaul that allows you to delve into what's hot—and what's not so hot—about your menu. Why would you want to do that? Read on.

An Exception to the (Unwritten) Rule

Following the yearly menu upgrade “rule” is a good practice, but it's equally important to keep an eye on the marketplace. If new pizzerias are opening locally or demographics shift in your area, you may want to consider a more aggressive timeline to keep pace with the competition.



WHY SHOULD I UPGRADE MY MENU?

Reinventing your menu could increase business by as much as 10%, due in part to simply adding new items to keep patrons interested and removing infrequently ordered dishes.

Ten percent is a nice uptick, but *you may be leaving money on the table if you don't leverage trends or anticipate reasonable price adjustments.*

Acquire a Taste for Food Trends

If you buy into the media hype, there's a fine line between food fads and food trends. In reality the two are quite far apart:

- Food fads are temporary taste “crazes” that enjoy rapid but brief public popularity. Think of ill-fated one hit wonders like bacon-flavored desserts
- Food trends reflect where foods are heading and where they'll stay for the long haul. Good examples are locally sourced ingredients and artisan cheeses

Knowing the difference will spare you from a menu chockfull of here-today-gone-tomorrow items in favor of profitable mainstays.

Fad or trend, the beauty is that you're not left to determine which is which. Food research professionals vet food products and culinary techniques, then compile their data-driven insights into easily digestible reference reports like the National Restaurant Association's annual [*“What's Hot” Culinary Forecast*](#).

Don't be Misled by False Profits

Guesstimating menu price points may sound good in theory, but *number crunching is a necessity when it comes to striking a balance between pricing and profitability.*

The logical place to start is with food cost. Reaching the standard food cost of 30% and maintaining a comfortable profit margin requires you to accurately calculate a number of factors, including:

- The quality and type of raw materials used in pie preparation
- Exact amounts of each ingredient used per pie
- Portion sizes

When upgrading, keep in mind that prep time and the mix of high- and low-cost foods on your menu also impact profits. *Offer quality items that are easy to prepare at a range of price points to maximize margins.*



5 Signs You Need A New Menu

1. **It doesn't fit your restaurant.** Everything in your restaurant needs to be on brand or it will confuse patrons. Casual menus look out of place in an upscale establishment, and vice versa.
2. **The sections are out of order.** Don't move things around on your menu or patrons won't be able to find them. There is an expected order—appetizers at the front, and desserts at the end.
3. **It includes clipart or bad food photos.** Clipart only clutters the menu and doesn't influence purchases. Bad food photos are even more damaging—why would patrons order dishes that look unappetizing?
4. **Typos abound.** If patrons are bringing typographical errors or other menu mistakes to your attention, you're sending a message that they shouldn't expect attention to detail in your pizzeria.
5. **It's laminated.** Professional laminating costs can soar with routine menu reprints. Instead, use paper menus in clear-sleeved plastic jackets for fast and economical upgrades.



HOW DO I UPGRADE MY MENU?

You can complete a practical and profitable menu upgrade by following a few key steps.

Perform Due Diligence

Changing your menu will impact all areas of your business. Logistics is an important first consideration:

- Run the numbers. Then run them again. Have data to support salability and profitability of any menu items you want to add, change, or remove
- For new or specialty pies and other dishes, contact vendors to verify ingredient availability and ease of accessibility
- Make sure your kitchen and your staff are equipped to handle the demands of added menu items including increased food inventories, prep times, storage, and cooking needs

Incorporate Smart Menu Design

Profitable menu design is as much a science as it is an art. Decades of research into consumer psychology has produced specific menu engineering guidelines that resonate with patrons and persuade them to spend more:

- **Visual placement:** Patrons scan menus in a predictable way, making areas like the top of the right page and callout boxes ideal for your highest priced and most profitable items
- **Price anchoring:** List expensive items along with lower cost offerings. When patrons compare prices, the less expensive items appear to be even more of a value. You'll sell more of the cheaper, more profitable dishes
- **Dollar signs:** Your menu shouldn't read like a price list. Don't use dollar signs
- **High-quality photography:** Patrons eat with their eyes. Incorporate professional photographs to highlight certain dishes, but do so sparingly. Too many photos crowd a menu instead of enhance it
- **Item descriptions:** Use words that entice but also inform (See "Choose Your Words Carefully" on last page). Include main ingredients, but skip the culinary jargon
- **Fonts and menu size:** Choose a font that's easily readable in dimly lit environments, and avoid multi-page menus. An 11" x 17" one- or two-sided menu is optimal
- **Proofread:** Don't let careless errors cause patrons to question your attention to detail. Proof menu content carefully, and be consistent with capitalization, bolding, colors, and word choice



House Specials

With the growing popularity of online ordering, making your menu accessible is as crucial as making it profitable. Even if you're not yet ready to accommodate online ordering, think ahead. ***Optimize your website for mobile so customers can view and use your menu online from any device.***

Leverage Merchandising and Promotions

Expand your menu's visibility — and value — beyond the walls of your pizzeria. Use it in conjunction with in-house, online, and local touch points to build your brand and your profits.

Merchandising

Special offers suggest value. In fact, ***when an item is singled out or positioned as somehow exclusive, sales jump by as much as 15%.***

Boost margins on your already profitable signature pies or on any special dish you offer with merchandising that supplements conventional menu mentions, like:

- **Signage:** Post attention-getting messages on your marquee and throughout heavily trafficked areas in your pizzeria
- **Table tents:** Use these quick-read table toppers to influence ordering
- **Menu inserts:** Showcase deals every day with these easily swapped clip-ins
- **Waitstaff upsell:** Servers should suggest specials early and often to sway patrons' choices
- **Contests and surveys:** Crowdsource for patrons' input on food, service, or other pizzeria-related topics

Promotions

Online and local marketing channels provide cost-effective ways to increase your reach. Here are a few proven methods of engaging current and potential patrons:

- Optimize your website for mobile and upload your menu; also post it on trusted business pages like Trip Advisor, Yelp, and Google+
- Social media posts with photos are a great way to share weekly and seasonal specials
- Cross-promote special offers with local businesses. The movie theatre around the corner may be willing to offer your coupon with a ticket purchase if you'll include their flyer with takeout deliveries
- Use direct mail or door hangers to distribute takeout menus and coupons in your area



Choose Your Words Carefully

The average person makes about 200 food-related decisions a day, some of which may be in your pizzeria. Entice patrons into ordering more profitable pies by artfully describing the different sensations associated with food—namely appearance, texture, and taste.

- **Appearance:** When it comes to making a sale, how food looks is almost as important as how it tastes. Use words that evoke images, which could be as simple as a color or playful phrases like “loaded with cheese”
- **Texture:** The proper texture can make or break a dish, so matching the right texture words to the right dishes is critical. “Succulent” and “tender” are ideal for savory dishes, while “creamy” or “fluffy” are great for desserts
- **Taste:** It’s the basic premise of the food service industry—taste is king. The possibilities for describing a flavor are nearly endless, so think “big picture” taste first (sweet, sour, savory, salty, or bitter) then focus on item-specific qualities

CONCLUSION

Your menu entices patrons to order, but your pies provide the delicious dining experience that will have them coming back for more. It all starts with the crust. As the pizza crust experts, we’re eager to help you make remarkable pies that give you a bigger slice of profits.

*Want to know more about how Alive & Kickin’ can help grow your business?
Reach out in the way that’s most convenient for you!*

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