

A photograph of a man and a woman sitting at a bar, smiling and holding glasses of beer. The woman has long red hair and is wearing a white shirt. The man has a beard and is wearing a blue shirt. They are both looking down at their glasses. The background shows a wooden bar with a stack of firewood.

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**INCREASE YOUR AVERAGE
TABLE SPEND AND PROFITS
THROUGH YOUR MENU DESIGN**

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If there is one simple way that any food business can increase its sales, profits and reduce its costs, it has to be in improving its menu design

Yet 90% of restaurants or pubs do not put any significant thought or attention into how their menu is designed or how it is perceived by diners. This is a huge lost opportunity and improving your menu design can be an instant quick win in improving your business profits.

What should your goals be when designing your menu?

- ▶ To direct the diner towards specific menu items that make you the most profit.
- ▶ To enable diners to make their choice as quickly as possible and avoid 'menu stress'
- ▶ To increase your table spend and profit.

Your menu should be your best sales tool, and best of all, it is almost free!

There have been many studies done on the psychology of menu design, but the basic principles are simple enough to be used by any food business operator. Let's look at these and how they can help your business.



How much choice should I offer on my menu?

Studies have shown that the average length of time diners want to make their choice within is just under two minutes. Diners can feel overwhelmed and even anxious when presented with too many choices.

Make sure your menu is not flustering your diners by being too large. Another factor here is that the less choice that is offered, the more chance that

diners will order starters.

Aim to offer no more than is necessary, no more than 5-7 options per menu category. This way you present your diner with enough choice, but not too much that they are overwhelmed and take longer than necessary to order, which puts them under stress and increases your table turnaround time.

For example, if one of your menu categories is pizza, try to offer no more than 5-7 pizzas.

Direct your diner's eyes to items you want to sell

Understand in detail which of your menu items makes you the most money. If you don't already know this, then conduct a full costing of every menu item and what you are charging for it to see what your highest GP items really are. And don't forget to factor in how easy or difficult each item is to prepare and serve.

You want to sell the most of the menu items that are the highest GP, but also the easiest and quickest to get onto your diner's plate, not only keeping your diners happy but also allowing you to serve as much food as quickly as possible, especially at busy periods.

Once you have identified your star performing menu items, think carefully about how these are presented on your menu and where they are placed. Diner's eyes tend to look at the middle of a page before then drifting up to the top right, the top left and then back to the middle.

You can, however, direct them to certain items on the menu with a few simple design techniques.

▶ **Borders.** Simply putting a border round any specific menu item can double its sales. By guiding your customer's eye to any item that has a border round it, you are increasing its visibility and therefore the chance of it being ordered. Think about also trying different fonts, using bold lettering or even different background colour on specific menu items to increase their prominence on the menu. One restaurant we worked with introduced some of these techniques and their garlic bread sales immediately went up 300%. It also just happens to be their highest gross profit item!

▶ **Grouping menu items.** Increasing the amount of customers who order starters is one of the most effective ways to increase your table spend and profits. Nearly all diners will order mains, but comparatively fewer will order starters or desserts. What can you do to make your starters stand out on your menu? Consider giving more menu space to them than mains (which diners will likely order anyway) and think of your menu positions as 'real estate' so that every item has a hierarchy of where it is positioned. Could your starters be highlighted compared to mains in some way? Or simply just given more space in the middle of the menu, where diners eyes are drawn first?

▶ **Using pictures or illustrations.** Putting a picture of your star performing item (ie your most profitable) next to it on the menu is another technique to ensure it sells more frequently. Human beings are visual creatures and using this technique can be very effective in increasing sales of a particular item.

▶ **Use more appetising and sensory language for your star performers.** Putting more effort in to the descriptions of your star performing dishes sells them far more effectively. For example, phrases such as 'house prepared' or 'chef's speciality' are great ways to make your high profit items stand out. Using sensory language works very effectively too. Words such as 'succulent, mouth-watering, tender, crunchy or melting' are words that appeal to your diner's senses, making these items sound even more appealing and of course more likely to sell. Save your best descriptions for your star performers and watch the sales come in!



How to show pricing on your menu

Some customers are more price sensitive than others, but nobody likes to think about what they are paying for a meal. Paying for a meal is the main 'pain point' for customers so aim to design your menu to show the price of each dish without drawing any more attention to it than is necessary. Some techniques for this are as follows.

▶ **Avoid using columns to show pricing.** If you have menu items listed at the left-hand side of the page and the corresponding pricing shown directly across from it on the other side in a column format, change it so that the price is displayed directly after the item's description. The pricing for different items will then vary in their positioning on the menu according to the length of each item's description rather than being in the same place and therefore more easily read. Showing pricing in a column format draws the diner's eye to the pricing and makes them focus on it more heavily.

▶ **Remove £ signs.** Rather than putting £10, just put 10. This has been proven to reduce the perception of what a diner is paying for a meal. Simple, but true!

▶ **Use smaller size lettering for pricing than for menu item descriptions.** Obviously your diner has to be able to read the pricing, and would get annoyed if they couldn't. But try making your pricing slightly smaller compared to the wording on your menu. The idea is to give the information, but not draw any more attention to it than necessary.

How big should your menu be?

By this, we mean how big should it physically be? Overly large and unwieldy menus have been proven to annoy diners. If they are given a large bulky menu that risks them knocking drinks over or even feeling like they are disconnected from their fellow diners, they will likely order less. Don't allow any sense of anxiety in your diner's experience as it will lower your sales and profits. If your menu is physically large because you have many sections to it (lunch, dinner, starters, children's, mains, desserts etc) then consider producing individual menus for each section. Dessert menus should always be presented as a separate list after mains are finished as it prevents diners from having to remember what was on the main menu or your serving staff having to recite a list for them.



Pay attention to the look and feel of your menu

Does the design of your menu reflect the impression you want to give of your restaurant? Do the colours and images match the quality and ambience you have worked hard to create in your dining area? Is it printed on suitable material? How does it feel to handle? What impression does it give at the first glance? You want your menu to provide as much visual appeal as any other part of your restaurant. Think about designing it sympathetically to make it look and feel like a positive experience for your diner.



Menu design and psychology is a big subject and this article is only a brief idea of what can be done to optimise menu design to improve your sales and profits. But even these simple techniques described here can transform your business if used well. Most food businesses do not put enough (if any) thought into how their menu is designed and laid out, so why not have a think about how you can design your menu for maximum success?

The logo for Sturdy Foods features a large, stylized 'SF' monogram in a gold color at the top. Below it, the words 'STURDY' and 'FOODS' are written in a black, serif font, stacked on two lines. The letters are widely spaced and centered.

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S T U R D Y
F O O D S

To find out how we could potentially help you attract more customers or for any other queries related to this guide, call us on 01765 641 200 or email info@sturdyfoods.co.uk