



Restaurateur Roadblocks

Mouthwatering Menu Design

Miriam Marcus, 07.20.09, 7:36 PM ET

People shouldn't judge a book by its cover, but they do, of course. Which is why, healthy economy or not, restaurateurs better have an eye for strategy when it comes to their menus.

"Quality menu design isn't a switch that can be turned on and off," says Kevin Moll, president of [National Restaurant Consultants](#), a Denver-based consultancy. "Menu creation should be an evolutionary process, with constant fine-tuning."

Moll charges clients between \$500 and \$1,000 for menu-consulting services, but he was willing to share a few fundamentals for free. (As for pricing strategy, we will address that in greater detail in later articles.)

First, think about layout. If the menu is just one page, readers typically start at the top, then look at the bottom, and end up somewhere in the middle of the page. On two-page menus, diners start at the top right, and then go to the top left, then to the bottom right, and land in the middle. Don't argue with human instinct--put your best stuff where customers are likely to find it.

The second element to great menu design: writing. Hying hard the benefits of an item's appeal goes a long way with hungry diners. If you charge a whopping \$8.95 for a BLT sandwich, the words better linger on the naturally raised pork and the certified organic tomatoes. At Stuart Anderson's Black Angus Steakhouse, a 51-location chain that trades on the allure of beef from black-haired cows, the menu doesn't just say "steak"; it waxes on about how the beef is aged a minimum of 21 days and goes heavy on superlatives like "center-cut" and "full-flavored."

Moll's third tip: The menu should complement a restaurant's brand image. Take the menu at The Palm, a high-end steakhouse with locations in just about every major U.S. city. The menu design is clean, classy and consistent with the Palm's buttoned-up atmosphere. At Organixx, an environmentally conscious "fast-casual" outpost in Denver, the menu is printed on recycled paper with soy-based ink. Homaro Cantu, executive chef at Chicago-based Moto and famed evangelist of experiential dining, went so far as to offer edible menus. (Cantu's minions sign confidentiality agreements so as not to let the actual recipe slip.)

Bottom line, says Moll: "Don't be cheap with your commitment to a well-engineered menu. It will generate profit, lock in your brand and make your restaurant worth more."