



August | 10

# Driving Profitability through Menu Board Design

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## BACKGROUND

**A** dizzying array of choices on restaurant menu boards can be overwhelming to customers, causing a missed opportunity to invite engagement with the core principles of the brand experience. Worse yet, this disconnection results in marginalized revenues.

When guests can't intuitively understand the menu offering in the pressured moments prior to ordering, they retreat to the same, safe standard they've ordered before. At this point, the restaurant has failed to invite guests to delight in new, innovative offerings, and it has missed the opportunity to build loyalty and up-sell. There are several key drivers toward this outcome.

## KEY DRIVERS

### Mass Customization

As customers increasingly demand, "I want it *my way*," companies respond by expanding their offerings, adding more variety, and allowing "made-for-me" customized products. Although this activity is intended to improve guest satisfaction, it can actually have the opposite effect when the menu board doesn't adequately convey an organized, intuitive expression of the offering. With restaurants trying to offer more and more flavor profiles across a number of offerings, the menu often becomes confusing and lacks an appreciation of the knowledge and interest level of the guest. In some cases, for example, the restaurant uses language and word choices that are understood within the company, but not within the general population.

## **New Product Development**

Weak menu board design can be an unfortunate hiccup at the end of a lengthy new product development process. New products are typically added on to existing menu designs, with no consideration for the overall appearance and cohesion of intuitive categories of products. As a result, the board begins to grow in size and inevitably becomes more obtuse.

## **Nutritional Labeling**

As the industry faces greater pressure to include nutritional information for its menu offerings, companies will need new strategies for how to best include calorie counts without busying the menu and confusing customers. Under the halo of the health-care overhaul enacted in March, the FDA has recently expanded the scope of the law beyond restaurant chains to airlines, trains, movie theaters, convenience stores and grocery retailer food courts, perhaps at the deli and seafood counters, as well. In many of these venues, where menu boards aren't traditionally employed, they will need to develop new modes of communication.

## **FUTURE STATE**

Customers should feel not only satisfied with their order, but also with the ordering process. The act of ordering should make them feel smart, having been well-informed about the options and the process.

This sense of intuitive understanding comes through the use of communications hierarchy. A hierarchy of messages tells guest what they need to know exactly when they need to know it.

The approach to realizing this new state entails three distinct phases, Discovery Cycle, Opportunity Prioritization, and Design & Test, designed to quantify and deliver compelling financial results.

## APPROACH

Menu board design is a science, requiring systems thinking that comprises an understanding of communications hierarchy and development of a financial strategy that's defined by an analysis of SKU-level sales and profitability. Design objectives should simply be to improve the customer experience and improve profitability at the same time. The process of developing designs to support the objectives is heavily inclusive of customers, listening to those who have the most intimate experience with the brand, across all customer profiles. If customer profiles don't exist, research should be conducted to build them, gathering an understanding of how guests make decisions and how they feel in doing so. The financial strategy entails an assessment of current financials, and defines a future goal state considering the most profitable and differentiated products: these become the core of the menu board design strategy.

*Founded in 1989, The Moseley Group is a consulting firm to the food & beverage industry. Moseley's offices and Innovation Lab are in Franklin, MA.  
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