

Specials Keep Customer Interest High



Specials and LTOs (Limited Time Offers) are easy ways to keep your menu fresh and inviting to customers. Learn how menu change can spur sales.

Change is good, especially when it comes to menus. And while most successful menus are based on a core selection of house signatures and customer favorites, specials and limited-time offers (LTOs) can be just as important to the mix. These changing features create buzz, keep customers and staff engaged, and help operators test out new menu items, pricing, services, and more.

From both a marketing and operational point of view, specials and LTOs:

- Give customers another reason to visit
- Keep the menu fresh and on-trend
- Take advantage of seasonality
- Promote cross-utilization and product efficiency
- Create a social media marketing opportunity
- Serve as a customer engagement tool and an R&D platform

In addition, using specials and limited-time offers allows the core menu to stay intact, making things easier on both front- and back-of-house operations, without alienating customers who may have grown fond of particular menu items. As Technomic puts it, specials and LTOs allow for change without disruption¹. Special menu additions can reflect changing consumer demographics and demands without having to rewrite the entire menu.

Not surprisingly, according to Technomic, specials, LTOs, and other add-ons have seen a lot of action recently, clocking five-year growth of 63.9% across the appetizer and entrée menu categories. Hot spots include global cuisine, healthful options, and social media opportunities, including Instagram-friendly items.¹

Most special menu features, including LTOs, are seasonal in nature, highlighting the freshest available ingredients, which are not only at peak flavor and availability, but they're also typically at their best price. Developing a special around summer corn and tomatoes, for instance, is not only more cost-effective, it also speaks to the customer's craving for lighter, fresher foods in the warmer weather versus the hearty stews and roasts that are more appropriate during the winter. It also makes sense to create menu specials and LTOs with an eye to the calendar for holidays, school schedules, tax time, sporting events, and so on.

And it's not just on-trend flavors and ingredients that can infuse a little innovation into an LTO—some operators are using over-the-top presentation, surprising combinations of ingredients, or unusual serving methods that invite an enthusiastic customer response on Instagram, Twitter, and other visually oriented social media.

Technomic suggests a number of ways to position and measure the success of LTOs, as well as specials (which tend to be utilized more by independents and for shorter periods of time).²

According to the company, every successful special menu feature should offer:

- Uniqueness, the ability to differentiate a brand
- Draw, the ability to drive traffic
- Craveability, the ability to drive sales

Within that general framework, however, LTOs typically fall into one of the following categories:

A **Novelty Item**, such as Starbuck's Unicorn Frappuccino, delivers high uniqueness perception and the potential to drive buzz, with low repeat trial and very limited availability.

A **Broad Appeal** LTO, such as Maverik's breakfast-boosting Gravy Breakfast Burrito, will engage core guests by proposing familiar, popular foods highlighting mainstream ingredients to create high purchase intent.

Niche Items, for example MOD Pizza's diet-centric rotating summer salad bowls and Pilot Flying J's flavor-centric Pumpkin Maple Cappuccino, are designed to drive traffic by creating excitement for a new target audience.

Best-in-Class menu features, for example Taco Del Mar's Lobster and Seafood Taco, attract core guests and new customers with items that are both approachable and creative, which leads to both high purchase intent and high levels of excitement.

Sources: 1. Technomic, Menu Forecast: 2020 and Beyond (May 2019). 2 Technomic, The Five Types of LTOs (May 2019).

The information provided is based on a general industry overview, and is not specific to your business operation. Each business is unique and decisions related to your business should be made after consultation with appropriate experts.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Menu specials can help reduce waste, by better utilizing items like overproduction, an abundance of seasonal produce, fruit that's becoming too ripe, or trim from large cuts of protein after the premium portions have been removed.
- Menu a daily juice or smoothie special using imperfect fruits and vegetables
- Turn broken shrimp pieces into a shrimp ceviche appetizer
- Repurpose extra roasted pork into a Cuban sandwich
- For more on preventing kitchen waste, look for the Zero Waste Kitchen report debuting in May.

GET STARTED

- Use items like flatbreads, pasta, and soup as a platform for regular specials, such as a Chef's Nightly Flatbread
- Offering your guests customized menu options within a specials format will give you great insight into their preferences and purchasing patterns. Nestlé Professional Action Stations offer several customizable menu formats
- It's easier than ever to bring distinctive flavors to menu features with *Minor's*® Ready to Flavor™ products, which can be used in both cooked and uncooked applications