

M E N U E N G I N E E R I N G

MASTERY

*The psychology, science & strategy
behind **profitable** restaurant menus.*

A complete workbook for restaurant owners and managers ready to turn their menu into their most powerful sales tool. Eight core modules, forty-plus strategies, hands-on exercises, and a full audit framework.

08

CORE MODULES

40+

STRATEGIES

08

EXERCISES

01

AUDIT TOOL

*“A well-engineered menu is worth
more than a second location.”*

P.O.P.

CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Eight modules. One redesign blueprint.

INTRO	Why Menus Are Silent Salespeople	04
	The \$1M menu myth · What menu engineering actually is · How to use this workbook	
M · 01	The Psychology of Perception	06
	Color & the dopamine response · Font psychology · White space · Price anchoring & the decoy effect	
M · 02	Menu Zones & Eye Tracking	09
	The Golden Triangle · F-pattern vs. Z-pattern · Four-quadrant placement · Digital vs. physical	
M · 03	Star · Plowhorse · Puzzle · Dog	11
	Food cost % · Contribution margin · Plotting the matrix · What to do with each quadrant	
M · 04	Copywriting & Item Naming	13
	The 27% rule · Geographic, nostalgic, sensory & brand names · Sensory words that trigger appetite	
M · 05	Pricing Architecture	16
	Price bracketing · Odd vs. even pricing · The anchor dish · Bundle psychology	
M · 06	Digital Menus & QR Codes	18
	How digital changes psychology · UX principles for mobile · A/B testing · Integrating POS data	
M · 07	Photography & Visual Hierarchy	20
	When to use food photos · The 1-photo rule · Hero image strategy · Photo audit	
M · 08	Build Your Optimized Menu	22
	Full redesign checklist · Tracking results · The 90-day optimization cycle	
APX	Tools & Resources	25
	Menu audit worksheet · Contribution margin calculator · 50 high-converting phrases · Glossary	

WHY MENUS ARE SILENT SALESPEOPLE

Your menu is doing math you can't see — make it work for you.

The \$1M Menu Myth

Most restaurant owners pour tens of thousands of dollars into kitchen equipment, interior design, and marketing — then hand guests a menu that was designed in Microsoft Word five years ago. That disconnect is costing real money every single night.

Menu engineering is the discipline of strategically designing your menu — its layout, language, pricing, photography, and psychology — to increase profitability per cover. It is not about tricks or manipulation. It is about understanding how guests naturally read, decide, and perceive value, and then designing a menu that works with those instincts rather than against them.

KEY FACT

Cornell University research found that strategic menu engineering can increase restaurant revenue by **10–15%** without changing a single recipe or raising prices.

What Menu Engineering Actually Is

Menu engineering sits at the intersection of behavioral psychology, data analysis, and graphic design. It was formalized in the 1980s by Cornell professors Michael Kasavana and Donald Smith, who developed the now-standard four-quadrant matrix for classifying menu items by profitability and popularity.

Since then, the field has expanded dramatically. Eye-tracking technology, neuroscience research on color and appetite, and digital menu analytics have added layers of precision Kasavana and Smith could not have imagined. This workbook brings all of those developments together into a practical, actionable system you can apply right now.

How to Use This Workbook

Each module builds on the last. Work through them in order. At the end of each module you will find a hands-on exercise designed to be completed with your actual menu in front of you. By the time you finish Module 8, you will have a complete redesign blueprint for your most profitable menu yet.

- Print this workbook and keep it beside your current menu as you work.
- Complete every exercise — reading without doing produces zero results.
- Involve your front-of-house manager in Modules 3 and 8 for the best outcome.
- Revisit and repeat the 90-day cycle in Module 8 every quarter.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF PERCEPTION

How guests feel before they order.

93%

of purchasing decisions are influenced by visual appearance

3 SEC

average time to form a first impression of a menu

27%

sales lift from strategic color & layout alone

Color & the Dopamine Response

Color is not decoration — it is a neurological trigger. When the human eye registers certain colors, the brain begins releasing neurochemicals that influence mood, appetite, and decision speed. For restaurant menus, four colors do most of the work.

COLOR	NEUROCHEMICAL EFFECT	BEST MENU APPLICATION
Red	Raises adrenaline, signals energy-dense food, triggers urgency.	High-margin items, call-to-action borders, specials.
Yellow / Orange	Triggers serotonin release, reduces guilt around indulgence.	Comfort food sections, dessert headers, happy hour.
Green	Signals freshness, health, and safety.	Salads, vegetable dishes, light menu sections.
Blue / Purple	Evolutionary appetite suppressant — rare in nature as food.	Avoid in food contexts; use only for drinks or water.

Font Psychology

Typography communicates brand personality before guests read a single word. The wrong font erodes trust; the right font primes guests to perceive higher quality and pay more for it.

- **Serif fonts** (Times, Georgia, Garamond) — convey tradition, trust, heritage. Ideal for steakhouses, Italian trattorias, fine dining.
- **Sans-serif fonts** (Helvetica, Futura, Inter) — communicate modernity, cleanliness, efficiency. Ideal for fast-casual and health-focused concepts.
- **Script / handwritten fonts** — suggest artisanal craft and luxury, but must be used sparingly. Illegible script is the single most common menu design mistake.
- **Hierarchy matters.** Section headers should be 2× the size of item descriptions. Prices should never be the largest number on the page.

White Space & Visual Weight

Overcrowded menus produce anxiety. When guests feel overwhelmed they default to familiar, safe choices — usually your lowest-margin items. White space is not wasted space; it is a deliberate tool for directing attention and signaling premium quality. Luxury menus have more white space than budget menus. That relationship is not a coincidence.

DESIGN RULE

Never place more than **7 items** per menu category. Research shows decision fatigue increases sharply beyond 7 options, causing guests to either choose randomly or order what they always order.

Price Anchoring & the Decoy Effect

Guests do not evaluate prices in absolute terms — they evaluate them relative to nearby prices. This is the foundation of price anchoring. Place a \$68 ribeye at the top of your entree section and every item below it instantly feels more reasonable.

The decoy effect takes this further. A middle option positioned between two extremes will be chosen disproportionately often — not because it is the best value, but because it feels like the smart choice. This is why many menus offer a small/medium/large structure where the medium is deliberately priced to make the large seem like a bargain.

Removing dollar signs from prices reduces the perceived pain of payment. Cornell studies found guests spent measurably more on menus with numerals only (**28**) versus dollar-sign formatting (\$28) — the sign activates loss-aversion centers in the brain.

EXERCISE 01

YOUR CURRENT MENU AUDIT

- 01 Identify every color used on your current menu. Does each color serve a psychological purpose?
- 02 List your section headers. What font personality do they project? Does it match your brand?
- 03 Count the items in your largest category. Is it more than 7? Which items could be cut or moved?
- 04 Find your highest-priced item. Is it placed strategically to anchor perception of other prices?
- 05 Write down: what feeling does your menu currently create in a first-time guest?

MENU ZONES & EYE TRACKING

Where eyes go — and what that means for profit.

The Golden Triangle

Eye-tracking studies commissioned by menu consultants and hospitality researchers consistently reveal the same pattern: when a guest opens a two-panel menu, their eyes move to the center of the page first, then travel to the top-right corner, then drift to the top-left. This three-point sequence is called the Golden Triangle.

The practical implication is powerful — your highest-contribution-margin items should be placed at these three coordinates. Not your most popular items. Your most *profitable* items. Popularity takes care of itself; profitability requires intentional placement.

ZONE	POSITION	WHAT TO PLACE HERE
Zone 1 — Primary	Center of the menu spread	Signature dish or highest-margin entree
Zone 2 — Secondary	Top-right panel	Second-highest margin items, premium add-ons
Zone 3 — Tertiary	Top-left panel	High-margin starters or feature cocktails
Zone 4 — Low Attention	Bottom of all panels	Lower-margin staples, kids menu, beverages

F-Pattern vs. Z-Pattern Reading

Single-panel menus (QR codes, one-page menus) follow different reading patterns than multi-panel menus. Single-column layouts are read in an F-pattern: strong attention at the top, a second horizontal sweep in the middle, then vertical scanning down the left edge only. Items at the very top and very bottom of a list get disproportionate attention — this is the serial position effect. Your second-highest margin item belongs at the bottom of a category, not buried in the middle.

Boxing & Visual Isolation

Any item placed inside a box, bordered graphic, or shaded panel receives **30–40% more** visual attention than surrounding items in plain text. This is one of the most cost-effective tools in menu engineering — a simple border around your highest-margin item can meaningfully shift order mix without a single conversation with a server.

QUICK WIN

Pick your single highest-margin dish right now. Add a simple box border around it on your menu. Measure its order frequency over the next 30 days. This one change typically shows measurable impact within two weeks.

Page Count Strategy

- **1-page menus** signal speed and confidence. They communicate that you do a few things exceptionally well. Ideal for fast-casual, food trucks, and focused concepts.
- **2-panel (4-page) menus** are the sweet spot for full-service restaurants. They allow category organization without overwhelming guests.
- **Multi-page menus (5+ pages)** require exceptional organization and font hierarchy. The longer the menu, the more critical eye-zone placement becomes.
- **Separate menus** for drinks, desserts, and specials increase per-cover spend by encouraging guests to re-engage with purchasing decisions.

EXERCISE 02

MAP YOUR MENU HOT ZONES

- 01** Lay your physical menu flat. Draw the Golden Triangle on it with a pen.
- 02** List the 3 items currently sitting in your Golden Triangle zones. Are they your highest-margin items?
- 03** Identify any items currently using a box or visual isolation. Are those the right items to highlight?
- 04** If you use a single-panel or QR menu: identify the first and last item in each category. Are those your best-margin items?
- 05** Draft a revised layout showing where your top 5 margin items would move to.

THE FOUR-QUADRANT FRAMEWORK

Stars · Plowhorses · Puzzles · Dogs.

Developed by Cornell's Kasavana and Smith, the menu matrix is the backbone of all menu engineering. It plots every menu item on two axes — profitability and popularity — creating four distinct quadrants that each require a different strategic response.

Calculating the Two Key Metrics

METRIC	FORMULA	WHAT IT TELLS YOU
Food Cost %	$(\text{Ingredient Cost} \div \text{Menu Price}) \times 100$	How much of each sale goes to food cost.
Contribution Margin	$\text{Menu Price} - \text{Ingredient Cost}$	Actual dollar profit per item sold.
Popularity Index	$(\text{Item Count Sold} \div \text{Total Items Sold}) \times 100$	What percent of orders this item represents.

The Four Quadrants

STARS

HIGH PROFIT • HIGH POPULARITY

Your champion items — guests love them and they make you money. Protect Stars fiercely. Never remove them without data. Promote them in prime menu zones, train servers to suggest them, and feature them in marketing. Stars are what your restaurant is known for.

PLOWHORSES

LOW PROFIT • HIGH POPULARITY

Popular but not making you rich. Guests would notice if they disappeared. Strategy: raise price incrementally (guests are less price-sensitive on favorites), reduce portion slightly, or re-engineer ingredients to lower food cost without changing the dish's identity.

PUZZLES

HIGH PROFIT • LOW POPULARITY

Great margins, low visibility. Guests aren't ordering them — possibly due to poor placement, weak descriptions, or lack of server recommendation. Reposition into a hot zone, rewrite with sensory language, brief servers to suggest them. Many Puzzles become Stars with attention.

DOGS

LOW PROFIT • LOW POPULARITY

Neither profitable nor popular. They consume kitchen labor, take up menu real estate, and confuse guests. Most Dogs should be removed. If a Dog has strategic value (dietary need, brand identity), reprice or rebuild it. Otherwise, cut it without guilt.

EXERCISE 03

PLOT YOUR TOP 20 ITEMS

- 01 Pull your last 30 days of sales data from your POS system.
- 02 For each of your top 20 items, calculate: ingredient cost, menu price, contribution margin, and number sold.
- 03 Calculate each item's popularity index (% of total orders).
- 04 Find your average contribution margin across all items — this is your dividing line between high/low profit.
- 05 Find your average popularity index — this is your dividing line between high/low popularity.
- 06 Plot each item in the correct quadrant: Star, Plowhorse, Puzzle, or Dog.
- 07 Write down your three most surprising findings from this exercise.

Working Notes

Use this space to capture observations as you plot. Note any items you expected to be Stars that turned out to be Plowhorses — these are usually your highest-leverage repricing opportunities.

COPYWRITING & ITEM NAMING

Words that sell — and words that don't.

+27%

sales lift from descriptive menu
language (Cornell)

+23%

perceived quality increase from
nostalgic item names

68%

of guests say description
influenced their choice

The 27% Rule — Descriptive Language Works

A landmark study by Cornell University's Food and Brand Lab found that descriptive menu labels increased sales of targeted items by 27% compared to plain-name counterparts. Guests also rated the food as tasting better and said they would return more frequently — even though the food was identical.

The mechanism is expectation priming. When a description creates a vivid mental image before the food arrives, the brain fills in sensory details that enhance the actual eating experience. You are not misleading guests — you are helping them anticipate and appreciate what they are about to enjoy.

The Four Naming Strategies

STRATEGY	EXAMPLE	BEST FOR
Geographic	"Colorado Lamb Chops"	Premium proteins, artisan cheeses, regional produce.
Nostalgic	"Grandma's Sunday Pot Roast"	Comfort food, family-style dishes, desserts.
Sensory	"Crispy-Edged Saffron Risotto"	Any dish with notable texture, aroma, or visual appeal.
Brand / Farm	"Painted Hills Beef Tenderloin"	Premium ingredients with traceable sourcing.

Writing Descriptions That Sell

A great menu description does three things in 15 to 25 words: names the key ingredients, evokes at least one sensory experience (texture, temperature, aroma, or flavor profile), and communicates the preparation method that adds value.

WEAK

Grilled salmon with vegetables and rice.

Chocolate cake.

Pasta with tomato sauce.

STRONG

Wild Pacific salmon, seared over hardwood, served with charred broccolini and lemon-saffron rice.

Warm double-chocolate lava cake — dark Valrhona chocolate, molten center, sea-salt crust.

Hand-rolled pappardelle tossed in a slow-simmered San Marzano pomodoro with torn basil.

Words That Trigger Appetite

TEXTURE

Crispy
Velvety
Flaky
Silky
Crunchy

TEMPERATURE

Flame-kissed
Stone-cold
Sizzling
Chilled
Warm

PREPARATION

Hand-rolled
Slow-braised
Wood-fired
House-cured
Wild-caught

EMOTION

Nostalgic
Indulgent
Comforting
Celebration
Classic

WHAT NOT TO WRITE

Avoid clinical ingredient lists ("contains gluten, dairy, nuts"), redundant descriptors ("delicious," "tasty," "yummy"), ambiguous preparation ("cooked to order"), and anything that reads like a nutrition label. These reduce perceived quality and create anxiety, not appetite.

EXERCISE 04

REWRITE 5 MENU ITEMS

- 01 Choose your 3 Star items and 2 Puzzle items from Module 3.
- 02 Write their current names and descriptions exactly as they appear on your menu.
- 03 For each item, identify: What is the hero ingredient? What is the key texture or temperature? What is the preparation story?
- 04 Rewrite each description using at least 2 sensory words and a naming strategy (geographic, nostalgic, sensory, or brand).
- 05 Read your rewrites aloud. Does each one make you want to eat it?

WORK SPACE

Use the lines below to draft your new copy. Aim for 15–25 words per description.

PRICING ARCHITECTURE

The psychology of how guests perceive value.

Price Bracketing Strategy

Price bracketing means deliberately setting a price range within each category so that your target price point — the one with the best margin — lands in the middle or upper-middle of that range. Guests rarely choose the cheapest or most expensive option in any category. They gravitate toward what feels like a safe, justifiable choice — typically the second-most-expensive item.

Design your category pricing so that your highest-margin item *is* the second-most-expensive item. Place one premium anchor item above it, and ensure at least two lower-priced items sit below it.

Odd vs. Even Pricing Psychology

Odd pricing (\$14.95, \$28.99) has long been associated with value and deal-seeking — it signals that a business has trimmed margins to the bone to offer the lowest possible price. In casual dining or QSR, this works. In an upscale or premium setting, it undermines perceived quality.

Round number pricing (\$15, \$29) communicates confidence, quality, and premium positioning. Fine dining and craft cocktail menus overwhelmingly use round numbers. The rule is simple: match your pricing style to your brand positioning.

THE DOLLAR SIGN EFFECT

Remove dollar signs from your menu. Cornell studies found guests at upscale restaurants spent significantly more when menus used numerals only versus dollar signs. The “\$” symbol triggers the brain's pain-of-paying response. Remove it.

The Anchor Dish Technique

Every menu category should have one item priced noticeably higher than the rest — not because you expect to sell it in volume, but because its presence reframes everything around it. A \$72 Wagyu ribeye sitting above a \$38 filet makes the \$38 filet feel like a value play. The Wagyu does its job whether it sells or not.

Bundle Psychology & Upsell Architecture

- **Prix fixe menus** increase average check size by making the value of a complete meal feel larger than the sum of its parts.
- **Suggested pairings** (“pairs beautifully with our 2021 Malbec”) increase beverage attach rates by 18–22%.
- **Add-on modules** (“add truffle shaving +\$8”) create low-friction upsell moments at the item level.
- **Sharing-plates framing** encourages ordering more dishes by reducing the commitment of any individual choice.

EXERCISE 05

RESTRUCTURE YOUR PRICING

- 01 For your most important category (likely entrees), list every item and its current price in order.
- 02 Identify which item has the highest contribution margin. Where does it rank in the price range?
- 03 Does your highest-margin item sit in the second-highest price position? If not, redesign the bracket.
- 04 Review your pricing style — odd pricing or round numbers? Does it match your brand?
- 05 Are there dollar signs on your menu? Remove them and note if the visual presentation still reads clearly.
- 06 Identify one upsell add-on opportunity you could add to your top 3 dishes.

DIGITAL MENUS & QR CODES

Engineering the mobile guest experience.

72%

of diners consult a restaurant's menu online before visiting

3.2×

more menu views on mobile vs. desktop

45%

of QR menu users say layout influenced what they ordered

How Digital Changes the Psychology

Digital menus operate under different perceptual rules than physical menus. The Golden Triangle does not apply to a scrolling single-column mobile layout. Eye-tracking on mobile shows a strong top-bias: items in the first scroll view (above the fold) receive 3 to 4 times more attention than anything below. This means your menu's first visible items carry enormous weight in shaping order patterns.

Unlike print menus, digital menus allow for dynamic testing, data collection, and real-time updates. This is a significant advantage — but only if you use it deliberately.

UX Principles for Mobile Menus

- **Category navigation first** — guests should be able to jump to any section in one tap. Sticky headers or a floating category bar dramatically reduce abandonment.
- **Item images are optional but powerful** — use them only for your highest-margin items. Generic or low-quality photos hurt conversion.
- **Limit scrolling depth** — if a guest has to scroll more than 3 screens to find what they want, your menu is too long.
- **Font sizes must be readable at arm's length** — minimum 16px for item names, 14px for descriptions.
- **Color contrast** — light text on dark backgrounds and vice versa. Never place text on a busy food photo without an overlay.
- **One call-to-action per screen** — Add to Cart, Order Now, or a featured-item badge. Multiple CTAs cause paralysis.

A/B Testing Your Digital Menu

Digital menus offer something print never could: the ability to test variations and measure results precisely. Even simple platforms allow you to rotate featured items, test different category orders, or adjust item photography. Start with one variable at a time.

TEST VARIABLE	BASELINE	VARIANT	METRIC TO WATCH
Featured item	No feature badge	Chef's Pick badge	Order frequency %
Category order	Alphabetical	Margin-ordered	Avg check size
Description length	Short (10 words)	Long (25 words)	Conversion rate
Item photo	No photo	Hero photo added	Item order lift %

EXERCISE 06

SCORE YOUR DIGITAL MENU

- 01 Open your QR/digital menu on your own phone right now. Time how long it takes to find your signature dish.
- 02 Count how many items appear above the fold (before first scroll). Are those your highest-margin items?
- 03 Check font sizes — can you read descriptions comfortably without zooming?
- 04 Identify one item you could add a feature badge or photo to this week.
- 05 Look at your analytics (if available): which items have the highest view-to-order conversion? Lowest?

PHOTOGRAPHY & VISUAL HIERARCHY

When images help — and when they hurt.

The Photography Paradox

Food photography on menus is one of the most misunderstood tools in menu design. The conventional wisdom is “more photos = better.” The research says the opposite: too many photos reduce perceived quality and decrease average check size. Guests associate photo-heavy menus with casual, lower-end concepts — think laminated diner menus. A single, beautifully photographed dish on a page of clean typography reads as premium. Twelve mediocre photos on the same page reads as a fast-food chain.

THE 1-PHOTO RULE

Use no more than one food photo per menu section. Make it your highest-margin item in that section. Commission a professional photographer — a single great photo pays for itself within weeks if placed on the right item.

The Hero Image Strategy

A hero image is a single dominant visual that anchors a menu page or section. It is larger than any surrounding elements and immediately draws the eye. On physical menus, the hero image is typically placed in or near the Golden Triangle. On digital menus, it sits at the very top of a category section.

- Shoot on a neutral, textured surface — wood, slate, or linen. Avoid busy backgrounds.
- Natural light or diffused artificial light only. Harsh direct flash flattens food texture.
- Shoot from above (flat lay) for plated dishes and composed salads. Shoot at a 45° angle for tall or layered items.
- Include a subtle prop — a fork, a napkin corner, a sprig of herb — to create scale and human context.
- Edit for warmth and saturation. Food should look vibrant, not cold or desaturated.
- The final image should make the viewer want to eat the dish within 1 second of seeing it. If it doesn't, reshoot.

What Bad Photography Costs You

A blurry, poorly lit, or unappetizing photo of a dish actively suppresses orders of that item — often to a greater degree than having no photo at all. If you cannot commission professional photography for a particular dish, remove the photo entirely and rely on strong descriptive copy. Copy that works is always better than a photo that doesn't.

EXERCISE 07

PHOTO AUDIT

- 01 List every photo currently on your menu (physical and digital).
- 02 Rate each photo 1–5 on: composition, lighting, appetite appeal, and brand alignment.
- 03 Identify any photo scoring below 3 in any category — those should be removed immediately.
- 04 Identify your single highest-margin item in each section. Does it have a photo?
- 05 If budget allows: plan one professional food photography session focusing on your top 5 Star items.

BUILD YOUR OPTIMIZED MENU

From blueprint to launch to measurement.

Everything in this workbook has been building to this module. You now have the knowledge to redesign your menu with intention. This module gives you the complete checklist and 90-day system to make it happen — and keep improving it.

The Pre-Redesign Checklist

DATA

- ☐ 30-day sales mix pulled from POS
- ☐ All items plotted on the four-quadrant matrix
- ☐ Food costs calculated for top 20 items
- ☐ Contribution margins ranked

STRATEGY

- ☐ Star items identified for prime placement
- ☐ Plowhorse repricing or cost reduction plan
- ☐ Puzzle items repositioned and re-described
- ☐ Dog items removed or redesigned

DESIGN

- ☐ Color palette chosen with psychological intent
- ☐ Font hierarchy defined (header / item / description / price)
- ☐ Golden Triangle mapped for print menu
- ☐ Mobile first-scroll zone identified for digital
- ☐ Dollar signs removed
- ☐ Price bracketing reviewed per category

COPY

- ☐ All Star and Puzzle items have new descriptive copy
- ☐ Sensory words incorporated in top 10 items
- ☐ Naming strategy applied (geographic · nostalgic · sensory · brand)
- ☐ All descriptions read aloud — do they create appetite?

PHOTOGRAPHY

- ☐ One hero photo per category (highest-margin item)
- ☐ All low-quality photos removed
- ☐ Image file sizes optimized for digital load speed

The 90-Day Optimization Cycle

PHASE	TIMING	ACTION
Launch	Week 1	Deploy new menu. Brief all servers on changes, new items, and suggestive selling targets.
Early Data	Weeks 2–4	Track order mix daily. Flag any unexpected drops in Star item sales.
First Review	Day 30	Pull full sales mix report. Compare to pre-launch baseline. Identify early wins and surprises.
Optimize	Days 30–60	Adjust copy, placement, or pricing on underperforming items. Test one Puzzle item promotion.
Deep Audit	Day 60	Recalculate contribution margins with updated food costs. Re-plot four-quadrant matrix.
Iterate	Day 90	Begin next cycle. Seasonal menu updates, new photography, pricing review.

What to Measure

- **Average check size per cover** — the single most important metric. Track weekly.
- **Order mix by item** — are Stars selling? Are Puzzles moving after repositioning?
- **Category attach rates** — what percent of guests order a starter? A dessert? A second drink?
- **Server suggestion conversion** — when servers suggest an item, how often is it ordered?
- **Table turn time** — did a simplified menu speed up decision-making?

“Your menu is never finished. It is a living sales document that improves every quarter you pay attention to it.”

END OF MODULE 08

TOOLS & RESOURCES

Worksheets, phrases, and a working glossary.

A • Contribution Margin Calculator

Fill in your top items. Sort by Monthly CM Total to identify your real revenue drivers.

ITEM NAME	MENU PRICE	INGREDIENT COST	CONTRIBUTION MARGIN	MONTHLY UNITS SOLD	MONTHLY CM TOTAL

B • 50 High-Converting Menu Phrases

Lift these. Adapt them. Use them as starting points for your own house voice.

- Slow-roasted over hickory wood
- Hand-pulled from the smoker at dawn
- Stone-ground and hand-rolled in-house
- Wild-caught from Pacific waters
- Sourced from local farms within 50 miles
- Aged 60 days for depth of flavor
- Finished with a 25-year balsamic
- Seared to a golden crust
- Served tableside in a cast-iron skillet
- Braised low and slow for 12 hours
- Glazed twice for a lacquered finish
- Double-smoked for intensity
- Whipped until cloud-light
- Charred at 900 degrees
- Our most requested dish since opening
- A recipe from our chef's grandmother
- Unchanged since our first day
- The dish that started it all
- Warm from the wood-fired oven
- Finished with cold-pressed olive oil
- Topped with hand-shaved Parmigiano
- Drizzled with truffle-infused honey
- Crowned with microgreens from our rooftop garden
- Paired perfectly with our house Malbec
- Best enjoyed shared between two
- Chef's personal favorite
- House-fermented for 14 days
- Cured in-house for 48 hours
- Made fresh every morning
- Seasonal — available while it lasts
- Limited to 12 portions each evening
- A nod to our chef's heritage
- The flavor of Sunday morning
- Comfort in every spoonful
- A dish for celebrating something
- Bold, smoky, and unapologetic
- Delicate enough to make you pause
- Rich without being heavy
- Bright with citrus and fresh herbs
- Complex with every bite
- The kind of dish you talk about after
- Inspired by the markets of Oaxaca
- A tribute to Piedmontese tradition
- As good as it smells
- Served the way it should be
- Nothing added, nothing removed
- Built for sharing — or not
- The one dish our regulars never skip
- Worth every bite
- Some dishes explain themselves

C • Glossary of Key Terms

CONTRIBUTION MARGIN (CM)

The dollar profit per menu item after subtracting ingredient cost from the sale price.

DECOY EFFECT

Pricing psychology in which a middle option is made to appear more attractive by surrounding it with extremes.

DOG

A menu item with both low profitability and low popularity. Candidate for removal.

FOOD COST %

The percentage of a menu item's sale price consumed by its ingredient cost. Lower is generally better.

GOLDEN TRIANGLE

The three high-attention zones on a two-panel menu: center, top-right, and top-left.

MENU ENGINEERING

The strategic design of a menu to maximize profitability per cover through psychology, layout, language, and pricing.

PRICE ANCHORING

Placing a high-priced item near target items to make the target price feel more reasonable by comparison.

PLOWHORSE

A popular item with below-average contribution margin. Target for repricing or cost reduction.

PUZZLE

A high-margin item with below-average popularity. Target for repositioning and stronger description.

SERIAL POSITION EFFECT

The tendency for guests to remember and choose items at the beginning and end of a list disproportionately often.

STAR

A menu item with both high profitability and high popularity. Protect and promote these items.

*Thank you for working through Menu Engineering
Mastery. Implement what you've learned, run the 90-day
cycle, and watch your numbers change.*

P.O.P. · PARADISE OVER POWER PUBLICATION