

“There can be a real disconnect if you are being charged Waitrose prices for Iceland products”



THE MARKETEEER
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THE PARADOX OF CHOICE

**The Marketeer asks if some operators
try and offer too much choice**

Earlier this year I was charged with finding a suitable venue for a family lunch. Nine of us in total, with an age range of 10 through to 80. On previous occasions when faced with the same task, I have usually tended to go very mainstream, looking out for a place which had a comprehensive menu. By adopting this approach I ensure there is something on offer that everyone would like. These family get-togethers have always been great, but the food experience has usually been a bit underwhelming. So, this time I decided to break from the norm and go a different route.

This time I chose a local independent restaurant not far from where I live, rather than a pub or national chain. The other big difference was that I specifically went for the fixed price menu. The result was that from a choice of three to four dishes per course, everyone was able to find something they liked or at least fancied and no one complained about the lack of choice. Once again we all had a great time, but for the first time I can remember everyone also commented on how good the food was.

JACK OF ALL TRADES

A big hurdle many operators consistently put in front of themselves is their desire to be all things to all people. Think about your own experiences on sitting down and being handed a menu that has more in common with a library book than it does a menu. On such occasions there is often the danger that you lose the will to actually order anything due to the sheer volume of choices in front of you. There is also the nagging doubt as to how any venue can be equally good at serving up Tex-Mex, Italian, Indian and seafood all out of the same kitchen.

The other reality is that anyone with a shred of insight into how kitchens work will also know that with so many different options being offered, the chances on any of it being fresh, rather than frozen, diminishes very quickly. As a customer, while it depends what you are looking for on any given occasion, there can also be a real disconnect if you are being charged Waitrose prices for Iceland products.

Now, don't get me wrong, I am all for choice, and if as an operator you feel it's something you need to do then all I would say is try and find more subtle



IS YOUR MENU TOO COMPLEX?

and clever ways of providing it. One of the things I sometimes suggest to clients is once you have decided on the main star on the plate, mixing and matching the supporting cast should be less of an issue. Offering alternative side orders and sauces is a great way of offering choice and individuality without diluting the main offer. Ethnic restaurant operators are extremely skilled at this, offering a number of different variations on the same basic theme. The aim must be to make the customer's decision-making process as easy as possible so that it is a choice and not a chore.

YOU'RE NOT A SUPERMARKET

Food aside, the other trap casual dining outlets and pubs are increasingly falling into when it comes to providing choice is around their drinks offer.

Unless you are positioning your venue as the must-go place for a specific type of drink be that wine, gin, rum or craft beer, then my advice is to think carefully about how many brands you need to stock. In most cases, your two or three best sellers in any category will probably account for at least 70% of all sales. That means

that the other brands are more likely to be window dressing rather than revenue generators. If that's the case, then choose these products wisely. Look for brands which either re-inforce your outlet's tone and theme, or better still enhance it. Where some operators go wrong is they can be seduced by the latest trends and offerings and, in an attempt not to miss out, they stock brands which aren't really in keeping with their overall offer. While customers will always want a good range of drinks, most also recognise that you aren't there to offer every brand under the sun. Even the likes of Tesco and Asda are recognising that fact these days.

WHY LESS CAN BE MORE

Back in 2004, Barry Schwartz gave us the book 'The Paradox of Choice: Why More Is Less', which concluded that having too many things to choose from often leads people to feel bewildered and less satisfied, even after taking a decision. The book also popularised the terms Maximiser and Satisficer, by way of explaining how people go about making decisions.

Simply put, a Maximiser is a perfectionist who exhaustively explores

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every possible angle before making a choice. A Satisficer (satisfy + suffice) makes an acceptable choice and does it quickly. In other words, very good is good enough most of the time.

Based on this set of thinking, one can conclude that by offering a more concise and manageable menu you will not only meet the needs of the Satisficers among your customer base, but you will also be doing the Maximisers a great service by minimising the stress and anxiety they would otherwise go through, should you offer them too much choice. ☺