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Serving Food

Aims and learning outcomes

This chapter introduces the key elements for creating good food experiences in the bar or restaurant area, and food service procedures. On completion the learner should be able to:

- Respond to consumer decision making in relation to the food experience.
- Identify the significant factors involved in the configuration, presentation and description of food menus, menu items and accompaniments.
- Demonstrate a knowledge of food costing and the benefits of using standardized recipes.
- Explain the importance of customer satisfaction.
- Apply cover settings, service sequences, plate and service tray carrying and clearing techniques to suit the menu type offered.

5.1 Introduction

The bar and catering industry has changed out of all recognition in recent times. Large numbers of consumers are choosing a bar for their food experience in the morning, lunchtime, evening and weekend periods. Creating a good food experience in a bar can be very challenging because of the high emotional value which consumers attribute to food. This experience contains both tangible and intangible elements that are not always easy to define. We can however state that the food experience definitely starts with the feelings of the customer, individually or in group, from the moment they arrive outside your establishment until they leave. Service includes an entire series of procedures that must be performed before the customers arrive and after they have left the premises. These procedures, and the staff, are the crucial link between the establishment's products and services and its customers. The technical knowledge, product knowledge, interpersonal and specialized skills involved in food and beverage service procedures are crucial to achieving customer satisfaction and maintaining a sustainable business.

5.2 Food service in bars

Food is now a crucial component of the bar business and the majority of bars are offering a widening choice in their food products. These increases in food sales in bars have brought about a demand for quality meals and snacks, which are professionally configured, prepared and served with attractive prices. Consumers choose to have their food experience in bars for a number of reasons which include:

- **Social:** the most common reason, social occasions can include events like birthdays, special anniversaries, festive occasions. Bars can offer different styles of dining, pre theatre, cabaret menus, and Sunday specials.
- **Business:** the image and expectation of the bar's food offerings depends on level of business being conducted for business lunches, evening dinners, early working breakfasts and teas. The breakfast period is often a sadly neglected area of the food offering in most bars.
- **Convenience, time, location and access:** the bar's location is crucial, as will be its speed of service for food products, if it is competing for customers with pizzeria, fast food restaurants, take aways, or order and delivery services. Access issues car parks, public transport, passing trade, and good foot flow.
- **Atmosphere and service:** the atmosphere, cleanliness, hygiene and social skills of staff members can be an important factor for certain groups of customers. If a bar's prices are considered dear, the customers will expect a high level of service, which incorporates additional services.
- **Price and perceived value for money:** if customers consider that a bar's food is cheaper, tastier and of great quality, then they are less likely to want to cook for themselves regularly.
- **The menu:** a bar's menus should be adventurous and interesting, creating different food experiences, e.g. tasting menus, food and beer or wine pairings. It should include healthy choices, vegetarian and a good variety of ethnic choices, to cover recent emerging trends in consumer tastes.
- **Quality of the food and beverages:** freshly prepared and homemade have great appeal, but consistency in quality is crucial.
- **Sensory experiences:** there should be a range of tastes, textures, aromas and colours offered by a food dish or drink.
- **Presentation and recommendation of the food and beverages:** the visual presentation and knowledgeable recommendations in relation to menu choices are significant in increasing the appeal.
- **Expectation and identification:** Some customers need to be able to identify and associate themselves with a particular bar and restaurant for a particular meal occasion. They may not always identify with the same restaurant, as their needs and expectations may vary from one food experience to the next. These alternating needs of customers should be identified by a bar owner and catered for appropriately.

- **Interior and exterior design:** A successful bar will have a design that enhances the food experience and creates the environment that will encourage customers to return.

5.3 Food menus

Menu configuration

The menu is the single most important element of your food offering. Its primary goal is to encourage your customers to purchase your food. It is the first contact that your customers have with your food, it is a major sales tool for your business, and it must therefore receive careful consideration. The food choices which you make for your menu are crucial, as they must deliver your customers' expectations and needs at a fair and reasonable price.

Before you plan and print your bar's food menu, you must take into account your marketplace. Consider this in relation to its location (rural, urban, small village), the local clientele (students, mixed, business type, family orientated), the foot flow and access by transport, and trading hours of other local businesses. The size and atmosphere of your dining areas, and the storage and preparation areas for your products must also be considered. Your staff members' skills and knowledge, your furnishings and your ability to secure good quality products for sale will also form a significant part of your menu's configuration.

Menu design

- Food groupings should be clearly separate and the overall menu design should be pleasing
- The food groupings should reflect the bar's character (e.g. Tex Mex, traditional, old world charm, rustic)
- Cold and warm dishes should be presented separately
- Light dishes should be proposed first, followed by the more substantial items on the menu.

Menu engineering: the food and profit matrix

In general, the menu should be designed to encourage sales. Kasavana & Smith (1982) argue that menu engineering concepts can help you to use a scientific approach for your food products based on customer demand, sales mix, and their contribution to the bar business. We must consider the way items appear on our menus and their relevant prices.

The positioning of items on a menu can increase their popularity. Guests' eyes usually move first to the upper centre of the menu space. Here is where specialties and high profit items should be listed.