



At Starbucks, bakery and packaged goods are merchandised to provide visual cues that reinforce the menu positioning.

The Writing on the Wall

A FOODSERVICE PRO OFFERS MENU BOARD STRATEGIES. **By Kathy Hayden**

When it comes to communicating menu offerings, grocerants are up against many more challenges than traditional restaurants. Drive-throughs have their bright, photo-heavy menu boards; full-service settings provide printed menus that diners can read in relative leisure; fast-casual settings devote entire walls to conveying their menus and missions. By

contrast, grocerants have to fight space restrictions, visual clutter and evolving menus to get their messages across.

What are You Selling?

Despite these differences, menu design expert Howland Blackiston, principal of Westport, Conn.-based King-Casey, sees one common denominator in how restaurants and grocerants need to strategize their menus.

Key Takeaways

- ▶ Grocerants must decide how each of the items they're selling contributes to their strategy, and prioritize their menus accordingly.
- ▶ Whatever those priorities are, grocerants must make sure that they're conveyed in ways that are easy to navigate, help reinforce their brand and are distinct.
- ▶ Menu strategy is intrinsically linked to all concept strategy, including the amount of kitchen space, how focused the offerings will be, and even the seating arrangements.
- ▶ Grocerants can also create visual cues that demarcate various merchandising zones.

"Whether you have a chalk easel or an entire wall of whiteboard, it's not about the board itself, but the items you are selling," advises Blackiston. "You need to decide how each of the items you are selling contributes to your strategy — whether that's price, popularity, what you have most of — and you need to prioritize your menu accordingly."

Presenting a menu is not just about words or even pictures, it's also a tool that guides purchase behavior and changes decisions. Whatever your priorities are, make sure that they're conveyed in ways that are easy to navigate, help reinforce your brand and are distinct.

"There's a McDonald's example I use all the time," says Blackiston. "At one point, McDonald's wanted to shift their brand reputation away from 'junk food' and convey better health. So the drive-thru menus had salads front and center. No one expected salads to become their top sellers, but that wasn't the goal. The move was about prioritizing the image of healthier salads at McDonald's."

Menu strategy is intrinsically linked to all concept strategy, notes Blackiston. "Your menu display decisions relate to how much kitchen space you have, how focused your offerings will be, and even what your seating arrangements are," he notes. "I see too many small operations take up space with four-top tables that are used by solo diners."

If your grocerant concept focuses on grab-and-go pulled-pork sandwiches, for instance, narrow, communal bars or two-tops, are a better use of space.

What are You Known for?

"Ask yourself, what is your grocerant's claim to fame? What is your Frappuccino or your Whopper?" says Blackiston, who points out that being known for something and doing that one thing really well are important in terms of branding and also in terms of helping to prioritize your menu displays.

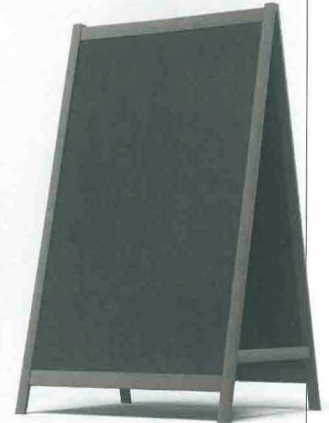
"Think of how a Starbucks is set up," posits Blackiston. "No matter where you are, you know how the Starbucks is going to look. You know where to line up, and you know where to look for special drinks. It's a branded look, and you recognize it, even within other retail settings.

"We've worked with a fast-casual sandwich concept within c-stores," he adds. "They are competing with Subway, and use their spaces accordingly. Different zones are designed to meet the individual needs of different customers. Bars and counter seating are for quick bites or grab-and-go. Traditional tabletop seating — two-tops and four-tops — are available for those taking a longer sandwich break."

With help from King-Casey, Popeye's Chicken streamlined its menu board to make different portion sizes and bundles easy to order.

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—Howland Blackiston, King-Casey



In the Zone

"Another strategy is to think in terms of merchandising zones and creating visual cues that convey those zones," says Blackiston, who notes that Austin, Texas-based Whole Foods Market does this well. "You see a pizza oven, and you know to grab a slice at the counter in front of it. You see a sushi chef with a white jacket, and you know you can grab a few rolls there."

Zone menus have to include simple staged messaging to correspond with customers moving through zones. Blackiston describes how fast-casual restaurants are often set up in zones supported by suggestive selling through branded messages and photos. Merchandising is designed to support menu cues. Pre-sale zones put purchasing ideas in customers' heads. Purchasing zones convey add-on messages, like ready-to-drink options and packaged cookies or candy. Customers line up and see photos of seasonal specials on sign stands. They see what's available in the pastry case. They grab packaged snacks and sandwiches. By the time they cash out, they may have added a bag of gourmet nuts to their purchase.

"Grocerants are competing with limited-service restaurants, and the best ones have menu strategies down to a science," asserts Blackiston. "Don't try to reinvent the wheel because you're in a different setting. Follow their best practices." **PG**

<p>NEW! Boneless Chicken</p> <p>Hot Fried Boneless, Double Seasoned or New Seasoned Ranch Sauce</p> <p>\$3.99</p> <hr/> <p>LOUISIANA LEANX</p> <p>Naked Chicken Wrap \$7.99</p> <p>Naked Po Boy Chicken Po Boy \$2.99</p> <p>Naked Tenderloin \$3.99</p>	<p>CHICKEN</p> <p>Choose Mild or Spicy</p> <p>Combo includes: egg, chips, roll & sauce/dress</p> <p>1 2PC COMBO \$5.49</p> <p>2 3PC COMBO \$6.49</p> <p>3 4PC COMBO \$5.99</p> <p>4 5PC COMBO \$6.99</p> <p>Add a large side for \$1.49</p>	<p>BONELESS CHICKEN</p> <p>Choose Mild or Spicy or Naked</p> <p>Combo includes: ranch sauce, potato & small drink</p> <p>1 2PC TENDERS \$6.49 \$5.49</p> <p>2 3PC TENDERS \$7.49 \$6.49</p> <p>3 4PC TENDERS \$8.49 \$7.49</p> <p>Add a tender for \$1.49</p> <p>Add a large side for \$1.49</p> <p>4 5PC TENDERS \$9.49 \$8.49</p> <p>5 6PC TENDERS \$10.49 \$9.49</p>	<p>SEAFOOD</p> <p>Combo includes: ranch sauce, potato & small drink</p> <p>1 8 CALUM FISH & CHIPS \$5.99</p> <p>2 COMBO \$6.99</p> <p>3 9 BUTTERFLY SPRINK \$5.99</p> <p>4 COMBO \$6.99</p> <p>5 10 CALUM SHRIMP \$5.99</p> <p>6 COMBO \$6.99</p>	<p>FAMILY MEALS</p> <p>Choose Mild or Spicy</p> <p>CHICKEN</p> <p>8pc \$13.99</p> <p>12pc \$21.99</p> <p>16pc \$28.99</p> <p>TENDERS</p> <p>8pc \$13.99</p> <p>12pc \$21.99</p> <p>16pc \$28.99</p> <p>FAMILY SIZE</p> <p>GALLON \$3.49</p> <p>QUART \$1.19</p> <p>HALF \$1.19</p> <p>2 LITER \$1.99</p>	<p>SPECIAL YOURSIZES</p> <p>RED BEANS & RICE \$3.99</p> <p>MARSH POTATOES \$2.99</p> <p>CODE SLAW \$1.99</p> <p>CALUM FRIES \$1.99</p> <p>TENDER BUNS \$1.99</p> <p>BEVERAGES \$1.99</p> <p>SMALL \$1.59</p> <p>MEDIUM \$1.79</p> <p>LARGE \$1.99</p>	<p>EVERYDAY VALUES \$2.99</p> <p>Pulled BBQ Chicken Sandwich</p> <p>Chicken Tender Wrap</p> <p>1 Breast & Biscuit</p> <p>2pc Leg & Thigh</p> <p>2 Tenders & biscuit</p> <p>DESSERTS</p> <p>HOT CINNAMON \$3.99</p> <p>APPLE PIE \$3.99</p> <p>PEACH PIE \$3.99</p> <p>MISSISSIPPI MUD PIE \$3.99</p> <p>KIDS MEALS</p> <p>Includes: ranch sauce & small drink</p> <p>TENDER \$3.99</p> <p>1 LEG \$3.99</p> <p>2 NAKED TENDERS \$3.99</p>
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