

## **WRITING THE MENU**

Writing the menu is one of the most exciting parts of opening your own restaurant. Like choosing a restaurant name, creating a menu is another where you can be creative and add your personal style to your business. However, before you sit down and begin writing out your favorite recipes, consider the following tips to help your restaurant menu be functional as well as fun.

### **Kitchen Size and the Restaurant Menu**

Generally, the size of your restaurant will dictate how large your menu is. The bigger the kitchen, the more menu items you can offer. If you try to offer a large and complex menu out of a tiny commercial kitchen (which can be done, though it isn't easy) you may run into serious problems during busy times. Your restaurant kitchen should be between 15-25 % of the total space in your restaurant. Any smaller and you run the risk of severely limiting what you can serve during a lunch or dinner rush. Any larger and you are wasting precious space that could be used for tables and chairs. Creating a kitchen layout with a good flow will also make it more efficient and easier to work in.

### **Prep Time and the Restaurant Menu**

Cooking is only about half of what goes on in a restaurant kitchen. Prep time (usually just called prep) is an integral part of getting ready for breakfast, lunch or dinner in a restaurant. When drafting your restaurant menu, consider how much prep time is needed for each menu item. For example, roasted portabella mushroom Alfredo requires that the portabella mushrooms be washed, sliced and roasted much earlier in the day, in order to be ready for the dinner shift. Prep will also dictate the types of kitchen stations you need (see below).

### **Kitchen Stations and the Restaurant Menu**

The stations in your commercial kitchen will also dictate what is on your regular menu. If you forgo the deep fat fryer, then French fries, onion rings and chicken fingers should not be a mainstay of your menu. On the other hand, if you have a mammoth 12 burner gas range, then you can offer plenty of sautéed dishes, like pasta primavera or seafood Alfredo. If you want salads to play a prominent role on your menu, be sure you have enough room for a salad station. Ditto for pizzas, grilled items and desserts. Stations are particularly important as a way to prevent cross-contamination between foods.

For more on effective commercial kitchen layout, I recommend you pick up a copy of *Running a Restaurant for Dummies* by Garvey, Dinsmore and Dinsmore. It also gives a lot of advice for stocking your restaurant kitchen.

Wendy Alberts  
CEO  
Restaurant Association of SA  
011 705 2054  
083 661 9000  
[www.restaurant.org.za](http://www.restaurant.org.za)