



## Blog

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### Changing seasons, changing menus

**By John Pinder, managing director, Lynx Purchasing**

“According to a recent survey by guest experience experts Hospitality GEM, 86% of diners want to see more frequent menu changes, with two-thirds expecting pubs and restaurants to introduce new dishes at least once a quarter, in line with the change from one season to the next.

“Change for the sake of making change is never a good idea, but if it’s what customers are asking for, no food operator can afford to ignore their wishes by offering the same, unchanging menu year-round.

“What’s interesting about the survey, though, is that while customers say they want to see change on the menu, 70% of them choose where they’re going to dine on the basis of a particular dish they’ve enjoyed there before. So for hospitality businesses, it’s a question of balancing customers’ loyalty to existing menu items with the need to refresh the offer with new dishes.

“How frequent is frequent when it comes to changing menus? This of course depends on the nature of the pub or restaurant and its customers’ expectations, so very different rules apply to a hipster East London craft-beer-and-artisan-foods eatery than for a hotel restaurant in a genteel seaside resort, for example. According to the same survey, diners have higher expectations of independent outlets, where they would like to see menu changes every month.

“For most operators, seasonal, quarterly menu updates are a more achievable ambition. And even this frequency means that, after factoring in all the stages from researching potential new dishes through sourcing ingredients, tasting, preparing the kitchen spec to printing new menus, the process of updating your food offer will be taking up some of your resources, all the time.

“Managing the proportion of dishes that you change every season is therefore crucial to the success of your menu refresh: too many and it becomes a logistical burden for the kitchen and front of house teams, too few and it won’t have the newness to excite your customers.

“Most of the successful pub and restaurant operators Lynx Purchasing works with have hit upon an ‘ideal’ ratio of dishes that stay on the menu year round to ones that change, usually through trial and error and learning from mistakes. The exact number of starters, mains and desserts you add, and which you remove, is something each business has to decide by analysing sales and margin data, but what’s important is that any new dish has to ‘pull its weight’, ideally by tempting customers to try something different and therefore spend more than they would otherwise have done.

“With the need to plan any changes to your menu well in advance, it’s important to understand the market conditions around any dishes you’re planning to introduce. What is the availability of the constituent ingredients, and is this likely to change? Is the cost going to rise and, if so, can you ‘proof’ your menu against it? The recent surge in popularity of pulled pork, for example, has increased demand for what were once cheaper cuts, and meant that the traditional, seasonal highs and lows in pork prices have all but disappeared.

“Keeping on top of the fluctuating availability and costs of hundreds of foods is a full-time job, which is why many pub and restaurant operators entrust the task to Lynx. We make it our job to know what’s going on across all the product areas a hospitality business might need, from meat to fruit and veg, coffee to cleaning products. We have also developed a free GP Calculator App, endorsed by the Craft Guild of Chefs, which helps chefs and others to monitor margins, particularly specials, using their smartphone or tablet in a busy kitchen.

“Our expertise means that when our customers want to change their menus, we can work with them, finding top quality products from leading suppliers, negotiating the best possible price on them and suggesting alternatives if we know of issues on availability or price. And while we look after the ingredients, you can concentrate on all the other aspects of refreshing the menu in a busy pub or restaurant.

