

Making the Grade

By John Miko

Summer school is now in session.
It's time to pay attention and earn some
high marks for your bottom line.



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The foodservice industry is more competitive than ever, and succeeding means staying one step ahead of the competition. To strengthen your establishment during the coming months, it's important to learn—and apply—the following lessons.



Operations: Be True to Your School

Recruit and retain good employees. They are ambassadors for your organization and your customer contact team. By instituting state-of-the-art technology within your establishment, you can increase your employees' efficiency and job satisfaction. Servers can wear pagers, transmit their food and drink orders, and track the customer experience at a closer level than ever. Leveraging technology also allows you to manage your operations at a higher level and with greater ease than ever before.

Don't overlook your supplier relationship. It is vital to maintain and strengthen this bond, while utilizing your supplier's resources and industry knowledge.

Move forward continually. Stay fresh by investing in your concept. Customers expect consistency in your quality and the atmosphere, so it is critical to keep your operation's décor updated. Simple touches can transform a stale dining area into one that is fresh and inviting.

Marketing: Earn Your Varsity Letter

Understand what motivates your customer. Knowing your core customers' wants and needs is key to running a targeted marketing promotion. A targeted promotion offers a greater return on your investment than traditional marketing programs (coupons, local advertising, etc.). Your marketing efforts need to reinforce what you do well and keep your operation in the forefront of your customers' minds. It also needs to influence them to spend their disposable income with you.

Get high tech with your Web site. Your Web site is a virtual window to your business. Customers want to look inside your operation and view menu offerings online. If they can see what you offer and understand your value proposition, you will draw greater traffic to your doors.



The Menu: Go to the Head of the Class

Serve meals customers can't make at home. Anytime you can offer a premium variation on an everyday favorite (think angus meatloaf or prime rib steak sandwiches), your customer will pay more for the perceived value. Your menu should offer a balance of proven favorites, signature dishes and specials. Embrace your local flavor by featuring seasonal produce, local wines and regional specialties. Highlight the origin of your offerings to show you support local agriculture.

Place both healthy and indulgent choices on your menu. While there will always be a high demand for comfort foods, today's consumers are on the lookout for healthier menu choices. Customers equate the terms "fresh," "natural" and "locally grown" with being good-for-you. Try moving your salads from the side to the center of the plate to appeal to a larger audience. Consider offering smaller portions or appetizer-sized meal options.

Make your establishment's menu work for you. Tantalizing descriptions, clear graphics and a fair price point are tantamount to a menu's success. Be aware of the portion cost and gross profit generated for each offering, and make your menu nimble enough to allow you to upgrade and change prices quickly. Your wait staff should also promote items that bring you higher gross profits, like beverages, appetizers and desserts.



Graduation Day

There is no way to be all things to everybody. The key to your success is to understand what you're good at and build upon that. You can never sit still or your competition will pass you by. You need to promote what's great about your operation to your customers in a targeted manner. That message needs to reinforce what's important to them. Ultimately they are looking for convenience, value—and a reason to return.

