

Small Plates and Small Tastes

Last time I spoke to you I addressed the trend of healthy dining and how it is slowly making its way on to menus across all sections of the foodservice industry. This time I will continue with that theme but from a different angle. The motivation may not be from a health standpoint but the trend of smaller portions does, in some measure, bring about the same result - less calories ingested. The growing trend of small plates or small tastes and sharable desserts or appetizers is a newer phenomenon to the United States. The word "tapas" is derived from the Spanish verb tapar, "to cover". Sherry drinkers in taverns used to cover their glasses, between sips, with slices of bread or meat. This was meant to prevent fruit flies from hovering over the sweet sherry.

In the United States, the trends start on the coasts and work themselves inward. Within the last 5-7 years there has been a growing understanding of Spanish cuisine and in the U.S. we take different ethnic cuisines and meld them to suit the American palate.

What we are seeing in the large fast casual section is a trend toward offering the American version of tapas, at times, even merging different cultural cuisines in order to put out a low cost, high margin item that can be menued for a moderate price. This accomplishes quite a few goals with one product as well as being a great way for you to provide variety to your customers without them splurging for an entrée that they may or may not like. There is not much buyer's remorse if you're only on the hook for \$3-\$9 as opposed to \$15-\$25.

I have noticed in the aforementioned dessert and appetizer segments, operators specifically adding items that are meant to be shared. This allows an operator to expand the selections on their menu and boost check average, too. Rather than forgo ordering any type of appetizer, either because of monetary concerns or just self consciousness, people are more likely to share an appetizer with others at the table. The same goes for the dessert area on your menu. People still want to indulge in a sweet after dinner, but are more likely to pass on a large dessert especially if they would be the only diner ordering a dessert. Recent trends show diners are much more likely to order a small 1-2 bite treat or share a larger specifically designed sharable dessert.

All you need to do is take a little time, do some reading and research and you may find that with plating, portion changes, and some price adjustments you may be able to accomplish this with your current inventory. Both options, at the beginning and end of your diner's experience, will accomplish the two important goals to a successful operation:

1. More money in your till
2. More happy and satisfied customers!

Good Luck and Good Food!!

Doug Goettsch

National Account Executive

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