



## EATZI'S CEO REVEALS 3 MUST-HAVE MENU STRATEGIES

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BY ADAM ROMO



Adam Romo, CEO of Eatzi's Market & Bakery, a six-unit chain based in Dallas, reveals how to provide a variety of high-quality cuisine at a fair price.

A successful menu strategy is paramount to a restaurant's long-term viability. That's why the first thing I did upon rejoining Eatzi's in 2011 was analyze our menu strategy and R&D process, focusing on quality, variety and price value. Of the five most important aspects of an effectively developed menu, the first three are quality. Too many restaurants become hyper-focused on secondary attributes such as

ambiance, music and decor. While these are important to a brand, it must be about the food.

Constant analysis of your menu must be a critical aspect of your strategy. Because if your menu isn't improving, it's declining. Quality, variety and price value are areas that you must master.

### Quality

Quality must be evaluated constantly, even at Eatzi's where everything is prepared fresh from scratch daily. And while quality was the top reason surveyed customers stated they shopped at Eatzi's, I concluded we had tremendous opportunities to elevate our food.

Our menu hadn't evolved much during the first 15 years and had become somewhat prosaic. I challenged our culinary team to reformulate existing recipes using improved ingredients and to create new, more contemporary recipes. Our mantra became: Our food isn't just good, it's great. Eatzi's Chicken Fried Steak is a prime example of an item we successfully reformulated. It had been prepared traditionally with the commonly used top round beef, which is a cheaper cut of meat. After numerous iterations of the original recipe, we ultimately decided to use Ribeye, a more flavorful, tender cut of beef. We also revamped the breading and gravy recipes, making our Chicken Fried Ribeye finally fantastic. And our customers agree as its sales increased significantly.



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### Variety

We offer approximately 1,600 SKUs, providing our customers an immense selection to choose from. While we strive for balance among our appetizers, proteins, sides, and desserts, we also ensure those categories are tailored to consumer preferences. For example, we offer more poultry-based recipes compared to our other proteins. However, we also require distinct uniqueness among those recipes.

Popular items such as our Three-Cheese Crusted Chicken, Lemon Herb Rotisserie Chicken, and Korean BBQ Chicken are just a few of the many items we offer to ensure ample poultry variety for our customers. Leveraging off our menu initiatives, we also developed a new R&D process, resulting in an explosion of new and improved menu items. We now have a database of over 4,000 proprietary scratch recipes. It has paid off handsomely for us, with 60% of sales in our top venues come from items which didn't exist six years ago. This is a staggering metric.

### Price Value

Setting menu prices is a precarious proposition at best, especially in the hyper-competitive restaurant industry. Our strategy is to offer our menu items at prices which provide a fair value based on the quality of the item. We take a multi-faceted approach contemplating all costs incurred to prepare and sell each item. And we perform competitive market research for comparable items to help ensure our prices provide a good value to our customers.

Ultimately, we set prices where we believe they will generate maximum sales velocity rather than seeking maximum gross profit margins. I like to say we offer 5-star quality food at fast casual prices. This helps build greater brand loyalty and generate higher sales and gross profits. And we clearly achieve this objective as 50% of our customers shop our stores three times a week or more.