To attract more male diners, Noodles & Company added a "Noodle-Less" section with such protein-driven entrées as sautéed curried shrimp, above.

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most completely from top to bottom, and the dead zone, where people are least likely to gaze, is the upper-right-hand corner, according to Bates.

Bates says customers' eyes also are drawn to "anything in boxes." Placing a box in the middle of a section — breaking up the entrées, for example — can result in customers ordering a wider variety of items, according to both Bates and Pavesic. That is because they will see the first item in the list, the one above the box, the one below the box and the last item on the list as well as what's in the box.

"If you want to be really effective, put a box in the center of the category," Bates explains. By doing that, "you've doubled the number of items they'll look at, because you've basically divided the section into two categories."

Colors and icons also get people's attention. Bold colors that are easy to read work best, compared with intermediate colors, such as pink, or those that are hard to see, like yellow, Bates says.

"Red is probably the most dominant color because people associate it with a place to stop or a place where you have to take action," he says.

We're also trained to notice green because of stoplights, he says. Blue is probably the third most effective color, according to Bates.

But every restaurant concept has a different objective that the menu needs to help fulfill. Quick-service restaurants want to focus on speed. At higher-end restaurants dayparts determine whether guests rush or linger, with lunch a time to get in and out and dinner a time to relax.

"I've learned a lot of different opinions and philosophies about how to create menus," says Steve Batta, director of food and beverage operations at the Marriott Marquis in New York. But, he observes, basically menus vary with the restaurant.

At The View, the rotating restaurant that reopened on the hotel's 47th floor at the end of September, the menu had to cater to pretheater guests in a hurry as

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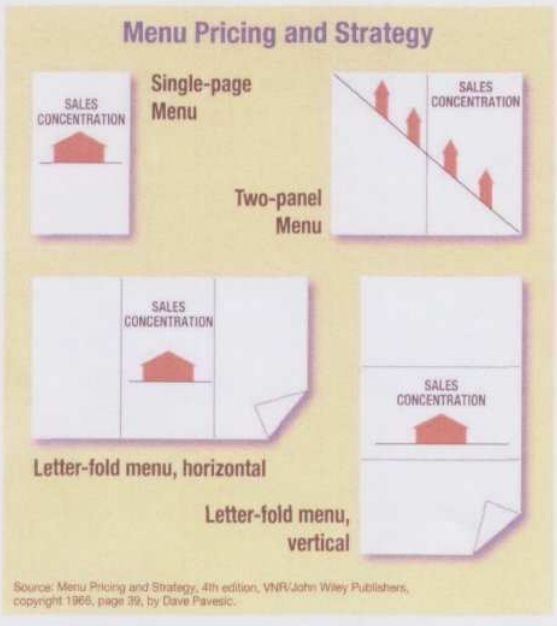

Source: Menu Pricing and Strategy, 4th edition, VNR/John Wiley Publishers, copyright 1966, page 39, by Dave Pavesic.

It's pay-what-you-wish at One World Cafe in Utah

Dealing with customers' tendencies toward frugality can be an emotional issue for restaurant operators when it comes to setting menu prices.

And diners' own emotional distaste for high prices is a factor with which operators must reckon.

But Denise Cerreta does not have to decide at her One World Cafe in Salt Lake City what prices to charge for her food. She lets the customers do that.

At One World, which serves freshly made organic food, patrons determine the portion size they want of whatever meals are available on a particular day and then pay what they wish.

"Some customers say, 'Gosh, I don't know what to pay.' We say, 'Well, pay what you would pay for that amount of food in a place where you're used to eating,' " Cerreta explains.

The challenge operators face in deciding how high they should set prices to make money without alienating their customers can be particularly vexing, especially in recent times when the cost of many commodities has skyrocketed. While operators may pass some or all of their increased costs on to customers, caution is the watchword for operators big and small because there is no foolproof technique for setting prices.

"There is no exact formula for us," says Howard Gordon, senior vice president of business development and marketing for the Calabasas Hills, Calif.-based Cheesecake Factory chain, which operates 82 namesake restaurants nationwide. "We struggle with this issue all the time, as we do not want to negatively affect our guests."

Most guests at One World Cafe, which has been open for a year and a half, already know through word-of-mouth about the restaurant's pricing policy when they walk in the door, according to Cerreta. For those who are surprised, "once they get it, they really love it because there is no incentive to overeat, which is unhealthful, and there's no incentive to take more than you need and waste food," she asserts.

At One World the staff serves the food to the customers at a buffet-style setup. "We'll serve them any size portion, from a teaspoon to a whole dish," Cerreta states. "People really appreciate being able to not waste food, choose the amount they want and pay appropriately," she says. "We almost have zero waste in the front end of our house and the back end."

If a customer can't afford to pay for his food with money, he can pay in the form of labor.

"I think they like that they can pay a price that they feel is fair and reasonable for their food," Cerreta says. "So far, it's working. I think people appreciate that we're not trying to take advantage of them. Then they reflect, and they don't take advantage of us."

—Susan Spielberg