

8 ways to sell more appetizers

If your appetizer sales are starting to slip, try these tactics to turn things around.

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Guests may skip over your appetizer menu for any number of reasons ranging from cost to lack of enticing options. However, turning a “no” into a “yes” could be as easy as switching up your plating or the way your staff approaches the subject. Here are eight ways you can immediately increase the number of

appetizers you sell this week.

1. Make them sharable. “We like guests to feel like they’re in our home, so we make our appetizers sharable,” says Steve DiFillippo, owner and chef of Davio’s Northern Italian Steakhouse, with eight locations in the northeast and Atlanta. “A table of four can share our spring roll sampler, meatballs or fried oysters.”

“Sometimes people may not want to purchase apps because they feel they will spoil their meal or add more than they want to spend to their bill,” says Andre Neyrey, president of Blackwood Hospitality in New York City. “Sharing apps allows customer to share the cost.”

2. Throw out labels. To reinforce the sharing suggestion above, Billy Giordano, owner of Room 38 Restaurant & Lounge in Columbia, Missouri, has removed the label of ‘appetizers’ altogether, seeing it as a deterrent to ordering. “We don’t label anything on our menu ‘appetizers,’” he says. “We have flatbreads, small plates, and sharing plates, all of which are great for sharing.”

3. Train servers on suggestive selling. “Let your servers try the food so they know it and can talk about it,” says DiFillippo. “Don’t be an order taker; tell guests what you have and why it’s special.”

Giordano agrees, adding, “Give staff the information they need to be confident at their tables and encourage appetizer ordering and sharing. If they sell the guest with a smile and excitement about items they love, it's a win-win for everybody.”

4. Offer a happy hour. If you aren't already running happy hour specials, this is one of the easiest ways to boost appetizer sales, increase word-of-mouth and help with reorders. At Room 38, in addition to drink specials, sharing plates are half off Monday through Friday from 3:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.

5. Create a pairing menu. Wine, cocktail and beer pairings are always popular. According to Neyrey, “If you're able to design a custom appetizer menu where the drinks and items complement each other, not only will it encourage customers to purchase appetizers, but also additional drinks.”

6. Put a creative spin on old favorites. Sometimes a boost in appetizer sales just requires a little creativity in the kitchen. Giordano says that Room 38 has found success by adding creative twists on classics and pairing dipping sauces with otherwise simple items (think Thai chili spare ribs, duck sushi, and chicken wings with spiced honey).

7. Monitor trends. Do your due diligence to uncover what types of appetizers are trending and selling elsewhere. Research industry trend reports, visit trade shows and dine at a variety of restaurants. Are you finding healthier options or unique spice combinations? “Explore other restaurants to see what's selling,” advises DiFillippo.

8. Test your market. “Even though we're an Italian restaurant, we tested our idea for spring rolls through sampling,” says DiFillippo. “An Italian restaurant with spring rolls!” The spring rolls at Davio's are now a top seller.

A little research, a dash of creativity and some smart marketing can sell more apps and boost your bottom line.