

Food in the news

The News Café franchise has announced that in a return to its brand name, the menus have been redesigned as colourful and vibrant newspapers, replaced on a daily basis with a new front cover page every two months. After a soft launch period of three weeks, the brand new menu has officially been introduced across 40 stores countrywide from mid-May 2010.



[click to enlarge](#)

"Our strategy was to implement a design platform and mechanism for the menu that would bring the brand back to its roots," says Nick Eleftheriadis, News Cafe marketing director. "This way, the menus will remain current, newsworthy, as well as being a talking point amongst our regular clientele. We are planning seven editions within this current newspaper format."

Menu design

Evan Sotiropoulos, MD of appointed creative agency, five0six, expounds, "The design strategy was to bring the newspaper concept to life in a contemporary way; reflecting the attraction the brand holds for customers while simultaneously injecting an emotive feeling into it.

"Our aim was to encourage customers to spend more time interacting with the menu, finding new items and rediscovering old favourites to order. Once patrons realise that the menu cover page changes relatively frequently; we believe that curiosity and anticipation will be fostered amongst regulars of what the next cover will be."

Just as newspaper articles are separated according to columns and news groupings, so each food category on the inside menu is separated by colour, as well as font style. This ensures ease of reading, while creating an entertainment factor.

"In addition, the double page layout is both manageable and easy to read, allowing customers to scan the entire menu at a glance, without having to turn numerous pages to view what's on offer. Ultimately, we hope that the new menu will complement the lifestyle of the brand, and create yet another element that customers will relate to," concludes Sotiropoulos.

Menu research

"The thinking behind the new menu was to develop food items that were fresh, contemporary and simple, whilst still encompassing the cafe style offering. The overriding idea was to remove items that were proven to be poor sellers and consider novel menu items that created a point-of-difference," explains Alan van de Westhuizen, News Cafe GM - Restaurant Division.

The 12-week development began with suggestions from franchisees, an assessment of the sales stats, as well as research into the latest international and local dining trends. Once the old items had been removed and new menu items proposed, the methodology continued through to the cooking, plating and costing of the latest menu items. Through this, some of the innovative menu items were excluded because of practical application or cost.

Throughout the development process, the company asked the following question: "Is the item appropriate for all stores within the brand and is the dish relevant to the News Cafe menu?" As the chain caters to various dining occasions throughout the day, the group also had to rationalise the final menu selection in order to cut out the deadwood and develop a new signature item.

According to Van der Westhuizen, the group updates its menu every six months. "The frequency of repeat business throughout our sites prompts us to update our menu with major content and design changes on an annual basis. Smaller content and price changes are effected every six months. This allows us to consider innovative dining trends and fresh flavours available, as well as eliminate food items that are no longer relevant to the menu."

News attractions

The newspaper-style menu has added 16 new items including beef, chicken and fish to satisfy a wide variety of demand and ensure a substantial dinner offering. Adding to the launch is the introduction of a fresh cocktail menu, which also involved some rationalisation through the introduction of more classics and original flavour adaptations. The cocktail menu now has 15 new liquid concoctions.

"There is always the element of risk when introducing new menu items," adds Van der Westhuizen. "Much consideration is given to the skill base of the kitchen staff and the availability of local ingredients nationally. If the item were perceived as too risky, we would rather try it out on a specialist or signature menu before including it on the main menu. Naturally we expect the new menu to be successful but that largely depends on the buy-in from our franchisees, whose enthusiasm will ultimately translate the culinary concepts into sales."

Future trends are always difficult to predict. However, Van der Westhuizen foresees healthier menu items continue to creep onto the menu. "We anticipate fresh quality ingredients, smaller portions, more exotic flavours and also the demand for simple comfort foods," he concludes.