

Concept Development

Successful concepts are fresh, crisp and understandable. And they don't just happen. They are strategically planned and then supported with appropriate tactics to bring them to life. The complexity of an integrated concept is often underestimated. Consider all of the elements, for example, that must be in alignment for a compatible restaurant or retail experience to exist:

- Menu composition and presentation
- Service style and attire
- Price point logic
- Decor
- Service ware
- Music selection

Likewise, if you are currently manufacturing a product(s), or considering doing so, the same principles hold true: the products must have a positioning within the marketplace, they must taste good, they must be affordable, they must be taken from bench top to the manufacturing facility and the product line must make sense. Line extensions must be considered with the same scrutiny.

So, whether you are just beginning to develop an idea that is not yet a full-blown concept; or you have a clear, tight concept but don't know how to bring it to life; or you have an existing concept that you want to alter, Culinary Options can help.

Ideation and Visioning Sessions

Many think that attacking the task of creating a concept is just a simple matter of brainstorming with a few friends. In fact, this is a strategic, disciplined process that, if held in the initial phases of thinking about an

emerging concept, success - or a decision to not go forward for correct reasons - increases exponentially. Far too many enthusiastic owners/operators engage in lease negotiations, equipment selection, design professionals (decor and kitchen - and even architectural firms - before they have fully fleshed out their concepts. This can lead to disastrous results. By engaging in a formal Ideation session with Culinary options, you begin to form the backbone of your entire concept, and thus your Business Plan. Market studies must be undertaken, competitive analysis executed, numbers crunched and ultimate determination of start-up costs before ever engaging in the activities previously noted! For the cost of a day or two in serious Ideation, thousands and thousands of dollars can be saved in the long-run - to say nothing of an integrated concept occurring.

Menu Development

Menus need to make sense in a number of ways. They must be:

- Congruent with and supportive of the restaurant or retail concept;
- Organized, written and printed in a user-friendly manner, e.g. type font, type size, categories (hard copy or digital)
- Profitable, that is, critically analyzed for item costs, cross utilization of inventory and dollar contribution;
- Tailored to fit the kitchen lay-out and skill levels of the kitchen employees; and
- Created to support the targeted or existing customer base.

Culinary Options can provide an array of menu development services, from critiquing the current menu to designing an ideal menu that supports appropriate item selection, selling points and concept relativity.

Product Development

This rigorous process is often misunderstood. Once you have the overall concept and ideal menu established, it is time to go to the kitchen and actually develop the food. Whether in a restaurant or foodservice

environment, retail shop or a manufacturing facility, the same principles hold true. To do this properly requires:

- Making and remaking recipes until the flavor profiles are correct and consistent;
- Executing multiple tastings to assure consensus on flavors;
- Designing products that match the concept and the abilities of the line or manufacturing facility to execute;
- Establishing ingredient brands/standards to assure consistency in execution;
- Focusing on cross-utilization of ingredients;
- Costing all production and presentation recipes; and
- Documenting and formatting all recipes for accuracy, inclusion in the restaurant's or operation's historical library, and usability in the kitchen;

Many restaurants, non-commercial concepts and retail locations open without having done a large portion of the above; they often fail. Exacting development is critical to financial success.

Food Tastings and Critiques

Restaurateurs, manufacturers and specialty food producers get random feedback on their food or products all the time. But more often than not, the source of the complaint is vague. Sometimes they get no feedback and think everything is OK. Neither of these contribute to the essential fine tuning that must go on for a restaurant or business to be a living, thriving entity. Culinary Options can provide a tasting format that will bring discipline to the assessment process. Some of the concerns that will be addressed are:

- Flavor profiles: what is missing? what is too dominant? how can balance be created?
- Textural evaluation: too thin or thick? too crunchy or mushy? pleasantly varied or too uniform?

- Ingredient quality: up to standard? not quite fresh? consistent throughout the dish?
- Plate presentation/composition: does it look inviting? balanced?
- Price-value ratios: does it look like too much or too little for the money?

Periodic tastings are critical to on-going success. Products must remain vibrant and fresh. Upon completion of the tastings, Karen can also provide hands-on product changes, working in tandem with the chef, kitchen manager or production facility.

Staff Training

In all cases when a new or revised menu is put in place, the service staff needs to be thoroughly trained. This means staff tastings with organized, descriptive reference sheets and verbal delivery must be held. Without this, the servers or retail employees, who are key to selling the items, do not feel part of the process. Proper training allows the employees to extend their ownership and enthusiasm to their customers and be true ambassadors for the operation.

Likewise, kitchen staff must be trained in the new procedures, techniques and ingredients. We can train the chef or key kitchen manager (train the trainer) or provide hands-on instruction herself. In either case, successful results depend on this thorough education.

Quality Quadrant Analysis

Let us assume you have established the concept, created an ideal menu, developed the menu items, and, perhaps, have even done critical tastings. Your service staff seems friendly and knowledgeable. But something isn't working. You are not seeing repeat customer business at the level you had hoped nor are you enjoying increased customer counts. What is wrong?

The answer to this is often Diner Dissonance. The decor, menu, food and service create an integrated dining experience. Each needs to be in harmony with the others. When one or more seems out of balance, not bad or wrong, simply not in keeping with the others, then diners perceive a dissonance in the experience and they will be subliminally uncomfortable.

Through the application of a tool developed by Karen called The Quality Quadrant, we can analyze which of the four major elements is causing the Diner Dissonance. Customers can't always put their finger on why they are not motivated to return. We can.

Food and Beverage Industry Speaking

Whether as a keynote speaker, panel member or workshop/seminar leader, Karen's in-depth knowledge of so many arenas of the business brings value and entertainment to any show, industry gathering, professional organization meeting or in-house educational program.

She has been a key presenter for various functions and events over the years on such topics as:

- Understanding the Product Development Process,
- How to Evaluate the Effectiveness of Your Concept
- What It Means to Develop a Menu
- Making Menus Profitable
- So You Want to Open a Restaurant?
- Steps to Developing an Integrated Concept
- Explaining the Ideation Process: Creating the Vision