2405 Know Your Guests Before You Price

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Here's the question most operators never ask before they price their menu: who is sitting at my tables, and what do they actually value?

Not who you hope is sitting there. Not who your concept was designed for on paper. Who is actually walking in, night after night, and what is driving their decision to come back — or not come back.

Pricing without that knowledge is guessing. And guessing produces a menu that is either overpriced for the market it's actually serving, or underpriced for the market it could be capturing.

Your price is not a cost calculation. It is a positioning statement made to a specific Guest about the value of a specific experience. The Guest doesn't evaluate your price against your food cost. They evaluate it against the totality of what they felt, ate, experienced, and will remember. That totality is what you are pricing — not the protein on the plate.

The operators who get pricing right understand the difference between a price-sensitive Guest and a value-sensitive one. The price-sensitive Guest makes their decision based on the number. The value-sensitive Guest makes their decision based on whether the experience justified the number. These are not the same Guest — and the menu built for one will alienate the other.

Know which Guest you have. Know what they value. Then price to that value — not to your cost, not to your competitor, not to what you think is fair. To what your Guest will pay when the experience delivers what they came for.

If your price is constantly being questioned, you do not have a pricing problem. You have a value delivery problem. Close that gap, and the price conversation disappears.