

Creating an Atmosphere for Your Bar or Restaurant

By Rieva Lesonsky



What makes customers choose one restaurant or bar over another? Sure, the food and drinks are a major factor in their decision; so is the price. But more often than you may realize, it's the atmosphere of your bar or restaurant that convinces customers to come in...or sends them scurrying away.

To create the right atmosphere, start by considering what type of customers you want to attract. Do you want your new bar to be a comfortable, pub-like neighborhood hangout, or a chic destination for trendy singles? Do you want your new

restaurant to be a romantic date spot for couples, a friendly place for families, or the "must-try" destination for hipster foodies? Consider your target customers' age range, income, location and family status, as well as the area where you're opening and the cuisine you serve. Last, but not least, keep in mind that your atmosphere should convey and reinforce your bar or restaurant's brand.

With those factors in mind, it's time to make some decisions:

Colors – Different colors have been shown to affect appetite. Warm colors generally enhance appetite (which is why many fast food establishments use red or orange) while cool colors suppress it. Your color scheme should tie into your brand and marketing materials.

Lighting – Table lamps, candles and fairy lights can set a romantic mood; bright lights are great for hip, casual or trendy locations. Consider dimmer switch options that let you adjust lighting for different times of day. Also consider how window treatments can block unpleasantly bright light from a setting or rising sun.

Music – Should it be loud, soft, classical or trendy? Louder, faster music makes your establishment feel hip and exciting, while unobtrusive music is better for a romantic establishment or one targeting older customers. Live music can be a great way to draw customers to a bar. Faster-paced music makes people eat faster, so if you want to turn tables quickly, speed up the beats per minute!

Menu design – Casual restaurants often feature photos of food and colorful menus with specials called out. Upscale menus are generally clean and simple, in neutral colors. Also consider what kinds of signage and table toppers fit with your overall look, and whether you need a kids' menu.

Seating – Your tables and chairs should be inviting, durable and easy to keep clean so your bar or restaurant doesn't start looking shabby. Restaurateurs, consider how often you want your tables to turn—if your seating is too comfortable, customers may camp out longer than you'd like.

Uniforms – Employees should be clearly recognizable and customers should be able to tell a waiter from a busboy. Your color palette should tie in with your overall décor. In general, upscale locations will use neutral colors such as black or gray, while lower-priced establishments often use primary colors. If your restaurant has an ethnic theme, you might consider incorporating ethnic touches into the uniforms.

Dishware and linens – Plates, glasses, silverware and linens should all tie into your overall theme. For instance, big, chunky, handmade-looking glasses and colorful plates could be great for a Mexican restaurant, while a French café or funky coffeehouse might want mismatched, vintage-looking china.

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