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The Menu Be 'Tween'

Big Kids = Big Opportunity

Kids' menus have been a staple offering for restaurant operators for many years. Operators from QSR to Casual Dining typically have offered kid-friendly items to appeal to the 12-and-younger crowd and draw families to their establishment. Surprisingly, kids' menus virtually have stayed the same over time – the exception being that over the last three years there have been more healthy sides added. Eighty-one percent of kids under age six are the largest users of traditional kids' menus.

However, among the patrons under 12, there is a subgroup that has very different needs and demands than their younger counterparts. It is likely no surprise to anyone who has children 8 to 12 years old in their home that "tweens" have very strong opinions and wield considerable veto power when it comes to dining out. According to Technomic, most often families decide together which restaurant to patronize, and 77% of the time kids influence that restaurant decision.

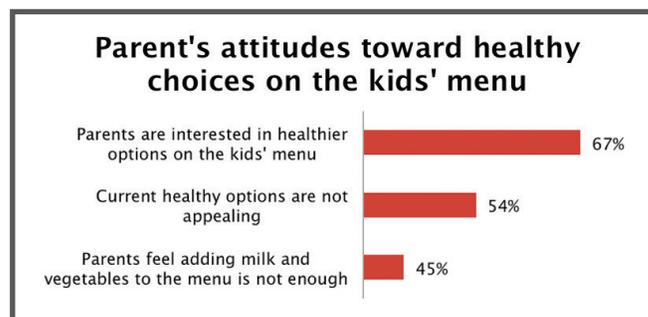
The decision-making power of tweens represents a prime opportunity for operators. The U.S. Census estimates there are approximately 20 million tweens in the United States. This segment represents \$141.6 million in potential restaurant revenue across QSR, Family Casual and Casual Dining. Although parents still have influence on meal choice, 99% of kids have some sort of say in what they order from the menu.

"I would like..."

Tweens can, however, prove particularly challenging. The 8- to 12-year-old age range wants to be treated like a teen but still has childlike qualities. For example, their palates are more grown-up than the classic kids menu, but not quite as sophisticated as the adult menu – they appreciate bolder, spicier foods. Portion size is another area where tweens differ; they are looking for **larger portions** than what is typically found on traditional kids' menus but not as large as what you find on adult menus. This group is more likely to enjoy dishes and trends from the adult menu that have been scaled down to a size that is just right for them.

Tweens are also nutrition-conscious and are more likely to choose **better-for-you** options such as fruit and vegetables – so descriptors such as natural and fresh resonate with this group. These young people are impressionable and they have had the influence of nutrition education in schools, the media and even among their peers.

Parents' perceptions also play a role into the food choices for the under-12 crowd. Parents want to teach their kids how to eat balanced meals when dining out. They also believe that there is room for improvement with the healthy options that restaurants are placing on their menus as indicated on the following chart.



Source: Mintel American Families Dining Out, February 2011

Forty percent of parents say they are more likely to order off the adult menus for their tweens because of the **variety** available. This is problematic in that the portion size and caloric values are often too much for kids and much more expensive thus frustrating parents.



Key P.A.T.R.O.N.® Segments

Fun Parents

- Age: 21-44
- Married
- Place a big emphasis on showing the family a good time
- Reward themselves and family with special treats and a way to show family love and make memories
- Restaurants with shareable, family-friendly menus
- They may eat as late as midnight and are not confined to early dinners with the kids

Fretful Parents

- Age: 35-44
- Married, skews female
- View dining out as a functional way to feed the family
- They look for cheaper, speedy, kid-friendly restaurants to minimize stress
- Healthy and low-mess options are important to them

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Patron Key Issues

The prime opportunity for operators is to define options for this important age group either by adding items to the kids' menu or creating separate menus. Not only are these youngsters key to the family restaurant decision-making process, but they are brand-conscious and brand-loyal at an early age. This loyalty applies not only to consumer brands but extends to restaurant choices. Capturing their attention early can lead to continued loyalty as they mature. Appealing to the palates and desires of these diners while satisfying their parents' needs will create a winning combination and opportunities for repeat visits.

Source: ConAgra Foodservice
Proprietary Food Away
From Home Study, 2009

For more targeted recommendations to grow your business, ask your ConAgra Foodservice representative for a customized P.A.T.R.O.N. profile report.



Top 5 Actions

1. Add a number of choices to the kids' menu that are smaller portions of popular adult menu items that have more adventurous flavor profiles or ethnic ingredients.
2. Include better-for-you selections on the kids' menu featuring fresh choices such as vegetables, fruits and whole-grain options. Some of the top-growing sides to consider include broccoli, steamed vegetables, salad and rice.
3. Provide options for meal customization such as choosing protein and side dishes. Also consider a twist on classic comfort food; for example, allow for customizing a classic such as macaroni and cheese with a variety of add-in options for more sophisticated tastes.
4. Create a specific menu for the tween patron with less of a small "kiddie" feel and more upscale options with smaller portions and price points than the adult menu.
5. Don't forget the atmosphere. Appeal to families with older children by offering iPad ordering or game counsels to borrow. Encourage family interaction by providing question-and-answer-based games, such as trivia, to encourage interaction.



to go...

Sources: Mintel American Families Dining Out, February 2011
Mintel Healthy Dining Trends, May 2012
Datassential Proprietary Kids Menu Study, June 2012
Restaurant Hospitality, Feeding Kids: The New Rules, March 2012

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