



WHAT VENUES CAN LEARN FROM CUSTOMER PLATE WASTE

WITH FOOD WASTE A SIGNIFICANT FINANCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN, **AMANDA KANE** URGES FOODSERVICE AND HOSPITALITY OPERATORS TO TAKE A STAND AGAINST PLATE WASTE.



The latest research shows that in Australia, 46 per cent of the food that ends up being thrown away in the foodservice and hospitality industries is food that's left on customers' plates.

Plate waste is not only inefficient in terms of business operations, it's also an annoyance to both the restaurant owner and customers. Data from the NSW Environment Protection Authority's Love Food Hate Waste program shows the number one reason that people leave food on their plates while eating out is that the portion size is too big. That's followed closely by customers ordering too much or the meal including things they don't like.

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Almost all of this plate waste is easily avoided by practising good customer service, resulting in increased profits and happy customers.

PORTION SIZE IS TOO BIG

When the portion size you offer to customers is bigger than what they can consume or expect, it has a twofold effect. Customers are too full to order other dishes, like dessert, and you get less profit per serve and the customer is actually put off.

In the past, a big portion was seen as 'value for money' when you went out to eat. But for today's customer, who eats out often (53 per cent of NSW customers claimed they eat out weekly), is conscious of their weight and concerned about food waste, and find big portion sizes 'off-putting'.

This is especially the case in Australia, with the research showing 49 per cent are put off by large portion sizes.

Canada Bay restaurant Angelo's on the Bay did a three bin food waste audit and discovered that a whopping 59 per cent of their food waste was plate waste. They tackled this problem by offering different portion size options, introducing a lunch menu with small portions and offering mini desserts to suit different customers' appetites.

CUSTOMERS ORDER TOO MUCH FOOD

When customers are attracted to a menu and want to try various dishes, it's a sign of your success. No foodservice provider would want to stop customers ordering more food.

Offering takeaway containers is the simple solution to the over-ordering problem. It will also make 71 per cent of your customers like you even more. It removes the guilt factor from leaving food on the plate or the table and customers get to be reminded of the good meal out they had when they reheat it.

The Love Food Hate Waste Your Business is Food program includes kits with takeaway container stickers to advise customers on how to keep their food cool and safe before they get to eat it. It also includes advice on engaging customers on your food waste avoidance strategies, to make everyone feel good about it.

Like, for example, how being offered a takeaway container is positive thing, but having to ask for one is not. One in three people are embarrassed about asking for a takeaway container, but two in three like being offered one.

Offering takeaway containers and encouraging customers to ask for one helped the Rose & Crown

Hotel in Parramatta reduce food waste by 52 per cent and be on the receiving end of lots of positive feedback from customers.

THINGS PEOPLE DON'T LIKE

The common practice of automatically serving main courses with salad, chips or bread is another practice that's increasingly less popular. The most common leftovers on plates after a meal are carbohydrates, especially chips, followed by vegetables and salad. It's a practice that often leads to food waste and worth reevaluating for your venue if you find it's being left on the plate.

The simple act of asking diners if there's anything they don't like to be left out of a meal will usually illicit at least one ingredient that you can save from the bin to be served to someone else. Offering to put those ingredients on the side, or for entrée or main size portions for sides, is another way of avoiding food waste while meeting customer expectations.

WORKING OUT YOUR PLATE WASTE

The easiest way of working out how a big a problem food waste is for your business is to conduct a three-bin waste audit. Over seven days, separate your food waste into three buckets in the kitchen, one for preparation waste, one for storage, one for plate. Weigh the buckets each day and make a note of how many covers you served. At the end of the week, add it all up and if plate waste is your biggest food waste area these are the top three thing you can do:

- Start offering a range of portion size options
- Ask customers what they want and offer side dishes as option or on request
- Offer takeaway containers (f)



Businesses that participate in the NSW EPA's Love Food Hate Waste Your Business is Food program cut waste by an average of 21 per cent. Visit lovefoodhatewaste.nsw.gov.au for details.