

New research demonstrates that consumers will pay up to 20% more for food and drink when dining-out, provided it's served on the right tableware.

Introduction.

Research carried-out by independent research agency 'Zebra Square' has demonstrated how consumers' perceptions of how much they would be willing to pay for a wide range of food and drink when eating-out is directly affected by the type and quality of tableware it is served-on.

In fact the research demonstrated that for some dishes a 20% price uplift could be achieved if exactly the same food was served on more innovative and stylish tableware.

The research was carried-out by Zebra Square during September 2017.

Research methodology.

The Zebra Square research was commissioned by Bunzl Lockhart Catering Equipment as part of their new i360 Innovation programme.

The leading catering equipment supplier provided recommendations on how to present a range of popular food and drink menu choices to their best advantage with the aim of trying to establish whether this would actually have a measurable effect on consumers' perception of price and quality.

15 separate dishes were selected covering starters, main courses, desserts and drinks with all of them being items likely to appear on the menus of typical high street restaurant and pub chains.

The dishes were then prepared, cooked and plated-up using 3 distinct quality levels of tableware. These ranged from Low (basic value for money white crockery, cutlery and glassware) through to Medium (mid-market brands with more style and innovation) and finally High (very stylish product ranges demonstrating the highest levels of innovation).

Crucially exactly the same food and drink was used at all three quality levels and a consistent table-top background was used throughout. The only variable that changed was the tableware the food was actually served on.

All the dishes were then photographed and large images shown to 200 consumers who were selected on the basis that they regularly ate out and had a socio-demographic profile typical of customers of mid-market restaurants and pubs. 100 of the consumers looked at the images online and 100 were interviewed face-to-face.

The consumers were then asked to rank all the dishes on their 3 quality levels of tableware in terms of:

- a)** Which looked the highest quality?
- b)** Which looked the most expensive?
- c)** How much they would expect to pay for the dish? To do this they were given price bands to select from based on typical high-street menu pricing.

Results.

When the results were analysed a number of clear conclusions could be drawn:

1. Consumers consistently ranked the dishes presented on 'High' level tableware (the most stylish and innovative) as looking the highest quality and most expensive when compared to the dishes served on the Low and Medium level tableware.
2. Consumers consistently valued the dishes presented on the 'High' level tableware (the most stylish and innovative) at a higher price than the dishes presented on the Low and Medium level tableware.
3. Overall the consumers valued dishes served on the High level tableware at a price level +12.5% more than the Low level tableware.
4. The price uplift effect varied between the different types of dishes. Main courses showed the biggest uplift at +15.0% with some specific dishes recording an uplift of almost 20%. Desserts showed the smallest uplift at +7.6%. But all 15 dishes showed a clear perceived price uplift.
5. The pricing uplift on 2 specific main courses (Steak & Chips and a Fish dish) was on average over £2.
6. Women consistently valued dishes at all 3 levels higher than men. For example for Steak & Chips the average price uplift was £2.41. But for women exclusively it was £2.99 and for men it was £1.85.

The results of the research were unveiled at The Restaurant Show on Monday October 2nd in a presentation by Nicky Holmes, Managing Director of Zebra Square.

Commenting on the results Nicky said:

'This has been a fascinating project to carry-out. I think we all intuitively believe that presentation of food and drink impacts on quality and price perceptions but this research actually gives a monetary value to those perceptions. This means you can calculate the likely impact of any investment in tableware and glassware. We also saw some interesting differences in the views of older and younger respondents, males and females and north versus south. There is a message in there around knowing your audience and the prices they are willing to go to, but in the main consumers want eating out to feel different and more special than being at home, and the presentation is a great vehicle for this. My favourite example is the soup which just shows how a relatively basic choice can be transformed through presentation'.

Paul Nieduszynski, the Managing Director of Bunzl Lockhart Catering Equipment further commented:

'This research with Zebra Square has proven that better tableware means better value to consumers. We've been working in partnership with major national restaurant and pub chains for many years now when they've wanted to bring some innovation to their tableware offering as part of an overall menu change. So we knew that tableware definitely had an effect on the consumers' overall dining experience but we didn't know that it could have such a direct and measurable effect. For a major operator, the opportunity to charge an extra £2 for every main course served will dwarf the relatively small investment in new tableware required to achieve this'.

If you would like to find out more.

If you would like access to the full presentation, including detailed data on all the 15 dishes featured, please contact Simon Armer, Marketing Director at Bunzl Lockhart Catering Equipment. Bunzl Lockhart will be running a series of business briefings for invited guests at their London Innovation Centre, just off Oxford Street, over the course of the next few months. These will provide in-depth analysis of all the results and will also offer the opportunity to actually see all the tableware products used in the research.

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